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“Visiting Iniquity of Fathers Against Sons” in Exodus

Thomas Egger
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, eggert@csl.edu

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“VISITING INIQUITY OF FATHERS AGAINST SONS” IN EXODUS

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By
Thomas J. Egger
January 2019

Approved by
Paul R. Raabe
Advisor

Jeffrey A. Gibbs
Reader

Tremper Longman III
Reader
To my parents, Carl and Bonnie;
    to my wife, Tori;
and to my children, Andrew, Stacey, Abram, Bonnie, Ellen, and Mary.

3 John 4
“And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says Yahweh:
My Spirit which is upon you and my words which I have placed in your mouth
will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouth of your offspring, or from the mouth
of your offspring’s offspring, says Yahweh,
from this time forth and forever.”

Isaiah 59:21
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<td>Alter Orient und Altes Testament</td>
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ExpTim  Expository Times
FAT  Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FfSk  Församlingsfakultetens Skriftserie
FOTL  Forms of Old Testament Literature
FRLANT  Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GBS  Guides to Biblical Scholarship
Greg  Gregorianum
GTJ  Grace Theological Journal
GTS  Gettysburg Theological Studies
HAR  Hebrew Annual Review
HBM  Hebrew Bible Monographs
HBT  Horizons in Biblical Theology
HCOT  Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HCS  Hermeneia Commentary Series
HerdBS  Herders Biblische Studien
HeyJ  Heythrop Journal
HOTE  Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis
HS  Hebrew Studies
HSM  Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS  Harvard Semitic Studies
HThKAT  Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HTR  Harvard Theological Review
HUCA  Hebrew Union College Annual
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JTIV  Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute
JTS  Journal of Theological Studies
Jud  Judaism
KatB  Katechetische Blätter
KEL  Kregel Exegetical Library
LBC  Layman’s Bible Commentary
LHBOTS  The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS  The Library of New Testament Studies
LSAWS  Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic
LSPC  Lexington Studies in Political Communication
Maarav  Maarav
MBI  Methods in Biblical Interpretation
MCI  Modern Critical Interpretations
ModTh  Modern Theology
MSU  Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens
NAC  New American Commentary
Nb  New Blackfriars
NCB  New Century Bible
NCBC  New Cambridge Bible Commentary
NCollBC  New Collegeville Bible Commentary
NEchtB  Neue Echter Bibel
NGC  New German Critique
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<td>New International Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament</td>
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<td>Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar, Altes Testament</td>
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<td>PhRh</td>
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<td>PHSC</td>
<td>Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures and Its Contexts</td>
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<td>QD</td>
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<td>RB</td>
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<td>SBAB</td>
<td>Stuttgarter biblische Aufsatzbände</td>
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<td>SBC</td>
<td>Science &amp; Christian Belief</td>
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<td>Studii Biblici Franciscani Liber Annus</td>
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<td>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</td>
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ABSTRACT


In two of the most important passages in Exodus (20:5 and 34:7), Yahweh describes himself as “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons, even against members of the third and fourth generations.” Missing in nearly every treatment of this phrase has been any sustained consideration of the phrase within the context of the Exodus narrative itself. Apart from such interpretive grounding, “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” has shown itself susceptible to widely varied and contradictory readings and, especially, maximally problematizing readings which invest it with a harshness and blindness to individual justice befitting its supposed place far to one end of a developmental scheme, a place purportedly surpassed by other texts of Scripture and by contemporary ethical sensibilities.

This dissertation does not offer an apologia, theodicy, or simplistic harmonization of these challenging passages. Rather, it reads Exod 20:5 and 34:7 with full attention to narrative and rhetorical context. Part One surveys the history of research. Part Two offers a lexical-syntactical exegesis of Exod 20:5–6 and 34:6–7, with a chapter dedicated to the collocation וַיִּפְדֵּה וֶאֱלֹהִים in contexts of iniquity, arguing for the meaning “visit-in-punishment against.” Part Three examines the phrase in relation to major narrative themes, to the Exodus plot trajectory of the revelation of Yahweh’s name and character, and to the persuasive aims of Yahweh within two distinct rhetorical situations within the narrative.

“Visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” does not refer to natural consequences of fathers’ misdeeds upon their children; rather, it threatens Yahweh’s personal advent and active punishment of iniquity, sometimes after a long period of perceived absence or inactivity. The phrase reveals several aspects of Yahweh’s character and persuades the people not to be stubborn and idolatrous like Pharaoh/Egypt (who experienced Yahweh’s visitation of fathers’ iniquity against sons); to teach true worship to their children; not to misinterpret Yahweh’s patience; to repent with urgency before Yahweh; to worship Yahweh and cling to his mercy; and to treasure their enduring inheritance within this still-multiplying covenant community.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introductory Comments

In Exodus, Yahweh twice describes himself as פָּקַד עֹנֵת עֲבֹדֵי אֱלֹהִים עֲבֹדֵי אֱלֹהִים ("visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons, even against members of the third and fourth generations"). This visiting phrase occurs in two of the most important passages in the book: near the beginning of the Decalogue in 20:5b and in Yahweh’s theophany before Moses after the episode of the golden calf in 34:7b. Yet when scholars discuss this phrase in Exod 20:5 and 34:7, the matrix of interpretation is routinely (1) ancient Near Eastern conceptions of transgenerational or collective responsibility, (2) moral, legal, philosophical, anthropological, or sociological reflections, (3) later OT narratives which seem to exhibit transgenerational punishment, or (4) contrasting OT passages which seem to reject transgenerational punishment. Missing in nearly every study is a sustained interpretation of the phrase within the context of the Exodus narrative itself. With remarkable consistency, even the Exodus commentaries neglect the Exodus context when interpreting this phrase, turning instead to the four touchstones above and often offering a fifth: sapiential reflections on the nature of fathers, families, faith, and fortune.¹

With such varied backdrops against which to consider Exod 20:5 and 34:7, and with no interpretive anchor in the immediate context, it comes as no surprise that there is widespread uncertainty and disagreement on the meaning of “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons.” Propp begins his discussion of the phrase by admitting, “The terms’ meaning is unclear,” and “Just

¹ Commentaries on Numbers and Deuteronomy also encounter the visiting phrase, since it is repeated in Num 14:18 (parallels Exod 34:7) and Deut 5:9 (parallels Exod 20:5). These commentaries are open to the same critique.
what Yahweh intends … is uncertain.” Propp’s tone is refreshingly honest and tentative; most commentators ascribe a meaning to the phrase with casual confidence, but with little if any argumentation or acknowledgement of other interpretive possibilities. As a body, the commentary literature exhibits a wide array of interpretations, many of which are mutually contradictory.

In view of the theological and canonical weight of the two Exodus passages in which the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers upon sons” appears, the present study is motivated by and predicated upon the conviction that the significance of this phrase has been too little considered and too easily set aside. The warning of William Placher rings true: “I do not know how to demand that others take the Bible seriously when it challenges their beliefs if I feel I can dismiss the passages that discomfort me.” Although I will argue that Brueggemann presses the following point too far, his approach to both parts of Exod 34:6–7—abundant forgiving mercy and resolute transgenerational punishment—stands as a long-needed corrective: “The substance of Israel’s testimony concerning Yahweh … yields a Character who has a profound disjunction at the core.... The disjunction is a theological datum of substance. It is not a mark of erroneous, primitive religion that later ‘concepts of God’ can leave behind.”

Above all, our phrase warrants a comprehensive re-consideration within its present narrative and rhetorical context. Apart from an interpretive grounding within its present canonical context, the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” has shown itself susceptible to widely varied and contradictory readings and, especially, maximally problematizing readings, which invest it with a harshness and blindness to individual justice

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befitting its supposed place far to one end of a developmental scheme, a place surpassed by other
texts of Scripture and certainly by the ethical sensibility of the interpreter. Such interpretations
merit the same reply which Erasmus gave in 1515 to those who publicly disparaged his *Praise of
Folly*: These critics “choose out a few statements from a long work … take a couple of words out
of their context, sometimes a little altered in the process, leaving out everything that softens and
explains what sounds harsh otherwise.”

The present study does not aim to provide an apologia, theodicy, or simplistic
harmonization of these challenging passages. Rather, it aims to read Exod 20:5b and 34:7b with
full attention to the narrative and rhetorical dimensions of Exodus. Some readers will disagree in
small or large part with the way in which, and the extent to which, its various questions are
addressed. Literary interpretation is an art, and the application of such analysis to the meaning
and function the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” in Exodus is largely uncharted
territory, as the next two chapters will demonstrate. In any case, the analysis offered here opens
the door to a set of overlooked questions, even if the answers constructed here—despite the
length—stand only as an initial foray into resolving these questions. Such a narratively and
rhetorically contextualized reading, it is hoped, will provide a more helpful starting point from
which others may consider the intertextual or inner-canonical relationships and theological
appropriation of these texts.

From the outset, I offer two observations as a kind of fair warning for the reader. First, I
have probably written too much. By its end, this dissertation becomes, in some sense, a study of
the book of Exodus and its implications for understanding a phrase within it—there are few
stones between Exod 1:1 and 40:38 which are left undisturbed. A fundamental assertion of this

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5 Cited in Kathy Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition: Chapters in the Ancient Legacy and Its
project is that the scholarly conversation regarding the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 has given almost no attention to its narrative and narrative-rhetorical contexts. The present study seeks to swing the pendulum in this new direction and does so, in part, by raising a large number of unasked interpretive questions and documenting a robust exploration of these multiple angles from which to “hear” the visiting phrase in its Exodus context. In some sense, the exploration itself is a demonstration of sorts, intended to highlight the thick field of relevant narrative-contextual features which can and should be explored in interpreting a prominent phrase within this narrative, whether or not the reader agrees on every point with the study’s conclusions regarding the interpretive implications of these connections.

A second opening caveat to the reader aims to calibrate expectations regarding the “final answer” and “precise meaning” of the visiting phrase. It would seem a fair demand that after patiently enduring a six-hundred page presentation, the reader be afforded a simple, precise formulation of what the phrase “really means.” At its instigation, this project set out to determine and offer such a precise explanation, which, in the midst of the present confusion evident in Exodus commentaries seemed desirable. The quest for an accurate, definite comprehension of a text is a proper scholarly and exegetical impulse—it is also a pious impulse. One of the turning points in this study, however, was the exploration of the prominent Exodus theme of Yahweh’s freedom and hiddenness, and the implications of this theme for the meaning and function of the visiting phrase as uttered by Yahweh in 20:5 and 34:7. In light of this and other observations, it became increasingly clear that Yahweh’s self-description as visiting iniquity of fathers against sons functions as a broad claim of power and prerogative, and as an inverted warning not to forsake Yahweh’s intended transgenerational blessings for the sons of Israel, but not as a commitment to a particular dynamic of transgenerational punishment. That is not to say that any explanation of Yahweh’s words in these texts is valid; the study which follows argues
extensively against several interpretive proposals which should be excluded. But it also argues against overly precise interpretive proposals which claim that their chosen interpretive matrix reveals precisely how Yahweh “visits iniquity of fathers against sons,” suggesting that overly precise explanations are, in fact, misreadings of this utterance of Yahweh. The present study, then, will advance the following multilayered thesis regarding the meaning and the narrative and rhetorical function of the phrase within Exodus.

1.2. The Thesis of the Dissertation

On a semantic level, the idiom נָסִית בָּאָר, in contexts of iniquity, functions as a set collocation with the meaning, “to visit-in-punishment against.” It does not merely denote “seeing,” “inspecting,” or “taking care of,” but rather indicates an intervention to redress evil and injustice, bringing to an end a period of apparent divine absence or inactivity, a period of apparent impunity. So the transgenerational language in 20:5 and 34:7 is not just Bible-speak for natural cycles of sin or for the natural phenomenon that children are often harmed or disadvantaged by the failings of their parents. Instead, these warnings of divine visitation of fathers’ iniquity against sons recall Yahweh’s great acts of judgment against Egypt, and they threaten the power and prerogative of Yahweh to come near in decisive, divine overturning of evil’s apparent impunity.

The phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 stands within a complex of meaningful relationships with its Exodus narrative context, contributing to and being illuminated in numerous ways by this context. The phrase is richly tied to the Exodus story on the level of narrative themes and also in terms of plot structure and trajectory, and it is employed

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6 My position remains distinct from and opposed to, however, the idea that Yahweh “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” is simply rhetorical hyperbole. I will argue that the phrase functions in a number of important senses that depend upon a genuinely transgenerational sense to the threat, even if the precise dynamic for carrying out that threat remains unexpressed, even intentionally open-ended.
rhetorically by Yahweh within the story to accomplish both revelatory and pragmatic-persuasive goals. The phrase *reveals* him to be offended by iniquity, just, worthy of proper fear, exercising an unending jurisdiction across history (in terms of punishing but also in fulfilling his gracious purposes), of a consistent and reliable character (even as he remains free and partially hidden). The phrase also *persuades* the people not to be stubborn, unbelieving, and idolatrous like Pharaoh/Egypt (who experienced Yahweh’s visitation of fathers’ iniquity against sons); to teach true worship to their children; not to misinterpret Yahweh’s patience; to repent with urgency before Yahweh; to worship Yahweh and cling to his mercy; and to treasure their enduring inheritance and their standing within this still-multiplying covenant community. All this serves Yahweh’s overarching goals in the narrative: that they might know him, that they might be and remain his own holy people, that he might establish and uphold justice, that he might give them good life in a good land, and that he might dwell in their midst throughout their generations.

**1.3. Overview of Chapters**

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 explores the disjunction between the towering importance of the two passages in which the visiting phrase occurs (Exod 20:2–6 and 34:6–7) and the remarkable neglect of the visiting phrase by biblical scholars, theologians, and faith communities. After outlining the importance of these texts within Exodus and the OT and demonstrating the neglect or marginalization of the visiting phrase on a number of fronts, I then discuss possible factors which account for this marginalization or neglect. These include moral aversion to the concept of transgenerational punishment and to divine retributive punishment in general. More fundamentally, I argue, prevailing assumptions that God does not enter into history in “intervening” actions and that God does not reveal himself by actually speaking words to men have direct and significant ramifications for one’s approach to and understanding of Exod 20:2–6 and 34:6–7—and the visiting phrase which they contain.
Chapter 3 then surveys scholarly discussion on the meaning and function of the visiting phrase in Exodus, outlining numerous disputed questions and cataloguing approaches and proposals. While Exodus commentaries tend to skirt the visiting phrase, relevant scholarly engagement has come especially within five areas: lexical studies of the verb פקד, studies in corporate and individual punishment in the OT, studies in inner-biblical exegesis, studies on Exod 34:6–7, and narrative studies of the golden calf episode in Exod 32–34. Prominent voices from these discussions are summarized in terms of their approach to and understanding of the visiting phrase. This survey of scholarship, in addition to raising a number of issues and insights, further documents the need for a narrative-contextual and rhetorical analysis of the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 and 34:7. This chapter concludes the first part of the dissertation on the history of research.

The bulk of Chapter 4 undertakes a careful, independent lexical-syntactical examination of key elements within these passages. Along the way, the chapter assembles and engages numerous lexical-syntactical proposals which touch on the meaning and function of the visiting phrase. Unfortunately most proposals, though erudite and interesting, do not withstand scrutiny, and so to some extent Chapter 4 functions as a sort of clearing of the field, an attempt to unclutter the discussion of the visiting phrase from untenable lexical-syntactical suggestions. The following pair of proposals is illustrative, as just two examples among many. It has been suggested that “the third and the fourth generation” be read as an idiomatic expression for a somewhat indefinite number (thus far a defensible claim) which would then stand as a balanced parallel to the round numerical term “lovingkindness to thousands” (this implication is not defensible). Alternatively it has been suggested that the translation “lovingkindness to thousands (לאלפים)” misconstrues אלפים here as a number and that אלפים should instead be understood in its sense of “family, clan.” Taken in this way, “acting in lovingkindness to families” would stand as
a balanced parallel to “visiting iniquity … against the third and the fourth generation.” Both proposals, from somewhat opposite directions, end up in a similar place, transforming the numerically asymmetrical formula into one of balanced symmetry. As Chapter 4 will argue, however, both readings are unlikely.

The chapter discusses the semantic dimensions of all key elements in the visiting phrase and its contexts, including, among others, the terms used for God (אלוהים, יוהו, and אלהים), the adjective “jealous” (קנא), “iniquity of fathers” (עון אבות), “lovingkindness” (חסד), “for thousands” (אלפים), and the syntax of the qualifying phrases “with respect to those who love/hate me” (לשנאי, לאהבי). Proper only to Exod 34:6–7, the chapter goes on to examine the expression “preserving lovingkindness” (נצר חסד) instead of עשה חסד, argues that נשא עון does mean “forgiving iniquity” (against an array of alternative proposals), and examines the syntax structure of the expression נקח לא ינקח (“he will certainly not neglect punishment”). After analyzing the various elements of the passages, the chapter proposes the following amplified translations for 20:5b–6 and 34:6–7:

Exodus 20:5b–6: For (this reason you shall have no other gods and avoid idolatry:) I am Yahweh, your God, a jealous God (that is, moved by fiery love for my own people and concern for my reputation, intolerant of rivals), who (thus)—with respect to those who hate me (by the coldness of their affection, their disobedient enmity, and their lack of trust and exclusive worship)—visits-in-punishment the iniquity (sinful offense against me, guilt before me) of fathers against sons, (even) against members of the third and fourth generations, but who (also as Yahweh, your God)—with respect to those who love me (by their heartfelt affection, their obedient loyalty, and their dependent trust and exclusive worship) and keep my commandments—acts in (gracious) lovingkindness to thousands (of the progeny of my people).

Exodus 34:6–7: Yahweh, Yahweh, a merciful and gracious God, slow to (act in) anger and abounding in faithful lovingkindness, preserving (protecting and prolonging) (His own) lovingkindness for the thousands (of the progeny of his people), forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin; yet he will certainly not neglect (the) punishment (of sinners), visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons and against sons of sons, against members of the third and the fourth generations.

Chapter 5 then presents a comprehensive semantic examination of the collocation פקד על
when used in contexts of iniquity. One prevalent claim regarding the visiting phrase in 20:5 and 34:7, especially among German exegetes since Josef Scharbert, is that פקד in these texts does not denote punishment but rather close scrutiny or inspection. God examines the ways of the sons to see if they follow in the iniquity of their fathers. It is an ingenious suggestion that makes these passages more reasonable and palatable. Unfortunately, it is a suggestion founded on a proposed core meaning of the root פקד (an etymological fallacy) which ignores biblical patterns of usage, in particular patterns of the usage of פעד הי in combination. The chapter conducts an extensive survey of biblical usage, arguing that “visit-in-punishment against” is a good, if unwieldy, rendering of the expression in English. An examination of the translation of פעד הי in the Septuagint further supports the sense of active punishment, while also suggesting the reason for (and the value of maintaining) the traditional English translation “visit” in rendering פעד הי. Importantly, the usage of פעד הי in the OT also weighs strongly against reading the transgenerational formula in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 as poetic or theological restatements of the everyday observation that “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree” (e.g., cycles of abuse) or that the misdeeds of parents often cause hardship for their children (e.g., poverty for children of addicts). The expression פעד הי is never used to depict such everyday, self-unfolding dynamics, but rather the unusual, intervening arrival of Yahweh to decisively overturn the status quo, to redress evil, and to bring to an end a period of apparent divine absence or inaction, even after generations of delay, often in fulfillment of threats and promises which Yahweh has given in advance.

After covering the history of scholarship and the preliminary exegesis on a lexical-syntactical level, the third part of the dissertation turns to the narrative and rhetorical analysis of the visiting phrase in Exodus. Chapter 6 discusses, in general terms, the methodology of the study for its narrative and rhetorical analysis. Chapters 7–8 then lay out the most significant
narrative-contextual considerations, while Chapter 9 describes Yahweh’s rhetoric and rhetorical purpose in the passages which employ the visiting phrase.

Chapter 7 explores the connection of the visiting phrase with the Exodus story on a thematic level. The relevant themes discussed are Fathers, Sons, and Generations (§7.1); Divine Presence/Absence, Divine Agency, and Divine Visitation (§7.2); Punishment and *Lex Talionis* (§7.3); Punishment as Withdrawal or Reversal of Divine Gift (§7.4); Corporate Characterization, Action, and Guilt (§7.5); Concern for Individual Justice (§7.6); and the Hiddenness and Freedom of Yahweh (§7.7). Each section explores its theme’s development within the Exodus narrative and closes by suggesting ways in which the visiting phrase contributes to the development of this theme, and/or ways in which the theme shapes a particular understanding of the visiting phrase.

Chapter 8 continues the project of situating the visiting phrase within its narrative context. First, this chapter makes a compelling case for a two-part narrative structure divided after Exod 18, which then locates the first utterance of the visiting phrase (20:5) near the beginning of the second narrative arc and the second utterance (34:7) at the climax of the second narrative arc, with implications in both cases for the function of the phrase in its respective settings. The chapter then reflects further on matters of plot by arguing that Yahweh stands as the chief protagonist in Exodus, and that his narrative goal (or quest), which drives the plot, comprises a number of intertwined objectives. Five of these motives are briefly elaborated from the Exodus text.

Yahweh’s chief and overarching motive—making known his name and character—is then traced along a trajectory through the Exodus narrative, stretching from Exod 3:14–15 to its climactic, fullest expression in Exod 34:6–7, and focusing on four other key name-passages in between: Exod 6:2–8; 15:1–18; 20:2–6; and 29:45–46. These summary passages are not independent, equivalent utterances, but rather stand in a sequenced, progressive, cumulative
relationship pressing toward the most complete and sublime self-revelation in 34:6–7. This cumulative flow and the relationship of these passages with one another and with the surrounding narrative in each case is described, with particular attention to the location of the visiting phrase in 20:2–6 and 34:6–7. The visiting phrase plays a significant role in the developing trajectory of Yahweh’s self-revelation, and its meaning and function are illumined by its location within that trajectory. A number of insights arise from this analysis. Additionally, the mere demonstration of this inherent trajectory within the narrative argues strongly for the interpretive value and propriety of examining 34:6–7 as a reformulation of 20:5–6 (versus the common source-critical reconstruction of an original 34:6–7 later modified for use in 20:2–6).

Chapter 9 complements the narrative analysis of Chapters 7 and 8 with a consideration of the rhetorical dimensions of the visiting phrase. Yahweh’s use of the visiting phrase within the name-speeches of Exod 20:2–6 and 34:6–7, and within their respective, concrete narrative situations, serves his expressed goals as the story’s protagonist (the goals elaborated in Chapter 8). The chapter examines the form and rhetorical strategy of these speeches, with particular attention to the visiting phrase. The function of these speeches is considered in both their informative-revelatory as well as their persuasive-pragmatic dimensions: what does Yahweh want the hearers to know, and what does Yahweh want to move the hearers to do?

Chapter 10 then draws together a number of the conclusions of the study.
CHAPTER TWO
THE IMPORTANCE, AND NEGLECT, OF EXODUS 20:5 AND 34:7

God visits the iniquity of fathers against sons and grandsons, against the third and fourth generation. The OT presents this assertion not in the dream of some false prophet or in the meandering pontifications of Job’s friends but rather in speeches of Yahweh himself, uttered at two key moments in Israel’s foundational story of redemption.

Yet for all its canonical prominence, the treatment of this phrase within the biblical scholarship of the last century can be rehearsed as its own tale: one of textual (non-)reception and neglect. While any full recounting of its reception history is beyond the scope of this project, the present chapter seeks to highlight the curious imbalance between the theological and literary prominence of the two passages containing the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” in Exodus (§2.1), on the one hand, and the functional obscurity and contemporary theological irrelevance of the phrase itself (§2.2), on the other. It then closes with a discussion of factors which have contributed to this discrepancy (§2.3).

2.1. The Importance of Exodus 20:2–6 and 34:6–7

The direct speech of Yahweh to the sons of Israel is a momentous scene in the Exodus narrative. In fact, according to Deuteronomy, it was unique in all of human history.1 God’s words thunder from Sinai, his presence manifested—and cloaked—in cloud, darkness, fire, and smoke. Yahweh utters the Decalogue, and he begins with this well-structured oration:

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1 Deut 4:32–33; 5:4.
I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of a house of slaves. You shall not have other gods in my presence. You shall not make for yourself an idol or an image of anything in the heavens above or in the earth beneath or in the waters which are under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or become enslaved to them. For I am Yahweh, your God, a jealous God who, with respect to those who hate me, visits-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons, even against members of the third and fourth generations, but who, with respect to those who love me and keep my commandments, acts in lovingkindness to thousands. (Exod 20:2–6)

Soon these words, inscribed by God on stone tablets, will lie shattered on the ground. The sons of Israel worship a golden calf, and Yahweh, his wrath kindled, announces their destruction. Moses intercedes, and Yahweh relents. The ensuing episode of chastening and intercessory pleading culminates in Yahweh’s renewal of the covenant, prefaced by “the fullest statement about the name and character of God in the whole of the canon,” perhaps even “the fullest revelation of the name and qualities of God that man may bear.” God passes by Moses and proclaims,

Yahweh, Yahweh, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful lovingkindness, preserving lovingkindness for the thousands, forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin; yet he will certainly not neglect punishment, visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons and against sons of sons, against members of the third and the fourth generations. (Exod 34:6–7)

Here is a second profound self-revelation of God at a climactic narrative juncture. That Yahweh repeats and reformulates wording from Exod 20:5–6 (including the visiting phrase) should heighten the reader’s attentiveness to these paired texts, each in its narrative and rhetorical distinctiveness.

James Watts notes that Exod 20:5–6 and 34:6–7 are “the longest explicit descriptions of

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God in the Pentateuch.” While the OT speaks profusely about God’s character and ways, and while the speaking of God himself is variously represented across a variety of genres, texts in which God speaks in direct description of his own person are rare and carry special prominence. The theological weight of such texts is self-evident; we might say it is God’s own theology. A narratival consideration comes into play here, as well. Utterances in God’s mouth are given a “special status” and a degree of reliability in the narrative beyond theological claims made by other characters who “may not tell the truth about God”—a reliability greater even than the narrator’s voice. Ellen van Wolde discusses this dynamic under the language of “marked” and “unmarked” narration. The “direct narrator’s text” is neutral yet reliable, that is, unmarked. At times, however, the narration employs the voice of characters, a marked element in the narrative. In the case of God’s voice, the words become markedly important and markedly reliable.

2.1.1. The Importance of Exodus 20:2–6

With the first of these texts, Exod 20:2–6, a more imposing and memorable incident of God speaking about himself can hardly be found—or even imagined.

2.1.1.a. Uniquely Spoken

The setting is the theophanic meeting of God with the redeemed sons of Israel at the holy

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7 Terence Fretheim and Karl Froehlich, The Bible as the Word of God in a Postmodern Age (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 116. Similarly, Yairah Amit, Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible, trans. Israel Lotan (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 96, “The word of God and of the narrator form the criteria of credibility, while the speech of any other figure must be evaluated, either by comparison or by analysis.”
8 Ellen van Wolde, “Linguistic Motivation and Biblical Exegesis,” in Narrative Syntax and the Hebrew Bible: Papers of the Tilburg Conference 1996, ed. Ellen van Wolde (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 33–34. The reliability of God’s voice in narrative is especially important in religious literature, van Wolde points out, in constructing the credibility of the narrator: the narrator’s implicit relation to God (with God “as the one who passed the word to the narrator”) accounts for “why the reader is … inclined to believe the narrator’s ’unmarked’ position.”
mountain to which he has led them. In Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the people of the supremely unique nature of this occasion⁹ with descriptions which are consonant with the scene narrated in Exod 19 and 20:

For inquire concerning the former days, which were before you, since the day when God created man upon the earth, and inquire from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever occurred or whether the like of it has ever been heard of. Has a people heard the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and lived? (Deut 4:32–33)

In Deut 5:4, just before recounting the Decalogue, Moses reminds the Israelites that these are the words Yahweh spoke to them at Sinai “face to face,” a descriptor normally reserved for God’s speaking with Moses (Deut 34:10). Childs notes that there is some sense in which Yahweh’s “speaking” of the Decalogue is of a different order than his “speaking” the other laws through Moses. He observes, “The narrative framework of Exodus, but particularly of Deuteronomy, stressed the finality of the [ten] commandments: ‘These words Yahweh spoke … and added no more’ (Deut 5:22).”¹⁰ And Dale Patrick observes the power which these words exert over the reader’s encounter with the rest of Scripture:

[These] passages … are by any account among the most prominent and powerful in Scripture. They have the capacity to shape the identity of the interpretive community far beyond their textual magnitude, and to set the terms for reading others. The burning bush and the burning mountain are inscribed deeply on the minds of every reader of the Bible, and what was said there has a power to condition the message of every other passage.¹¹

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⁹ The language in Deut 4 that such a great thing as this has never happened or been heard of “since the day that God created man on the earth” is not merely hyperbolic. Both the OT and NT use such statements in describing events so remarkable that their divine origin and historical significance is unmistakable: the Pharaoh’s dream of ugly, thin cows, interpreted by Joseph (Gen 41:19); the plagues of heavy hail, locusts, and the death of the Egyptian firstborn (Exod 9:18, 24; 10:14; 11:6); the distress of the coming day of Yahweh and the eschatological judgment (Joel 2:2; Ezek 5:9; Dan 12:1; Matt 24:21; Mark 13:19; Rev 16:18); and Jesus’ miracles (Matt 9:33; Mark 2:12; John 9:32).

¹⁰ Brevard S. Childs, The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary, OTL (Louisville: Westminster, 1974), 397. John D. Currid, A Study Commentary on Exodus, Volume 2: Exodus 19–40 (Carlisle, PA: Evangelical, 2001), 34, further emphasizes the finality of the Ten Words: “The number ‘ten’ in Hebrew often symbolizes completeness, meaning that no additions are allowed. Also, the stone tablets were written on both sides covering them completely, leaving no room for additions (Exod 32:15).”

2.1.1.b. Uniquely Inscribed and Uniquely Deposited

The Decalogue (Exod 20:2–17) is unique not only in the circumstances of its utterance, but also in the medium and treatment of its written form: “the two tablets of the testimony (covenant),”

tables of stone, written by the finger of God” (Exod 31:18). The designation “the ten words” (Exod 34:28; Deut 4:13; 10:4) is first used following the golden calf apostasy, when a second set of tablets is inscribed, after Moses shatters the first. The narrative emphasizes, however, that the second “ten words” are “the words that were on the first tablets” (34:1). Moses places these tablets, this “testimony” (Exod 40:20), into the ark, which is, thus, “the ark of the testimony” (Exod 40:21; see also 25:21–22). These “words of the covenant” (Exod 34:28) reside in “the ark of the covenant of Yahweh” (Num 10:33; etc.). Along with the atonement cover of solid gold, then, these ten words comprise a holy epicenter: within the ark, within the holy of holies, within the holy tabernacle, within the camp God’s holy people, Israel. As the Exod 20 Decalogue stands at the head of the divine instructions which follow throughout the Pentateuch, so the stone tablets containing these words are deposited in the ark as the seat of ongoing divine revelation: “I will meet with you there, and I will speak with you from upon the atonement cover, from between the cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, everything which I will command you regarding the sons of Israel” (Exod 25:22).

2.1.1.c. Exodus 20:2–6 as the Opening and Foundation of Pentateuch Law

Of special prominence within the Decalogue are the opening words, Exod 20:2–6, framed

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13 Stephen T. Hague, “ארון,” NIDOTTE 1:502, “What the ark contained may be more important than its shape and construction and may determine what the ark intimates in Israelite worship.”
by the self-introductory declarations אַלּוֹ יְהוָה אלהֵי and forbidding the worship of other gods and idols. The unique nature of these verses within the Decalogue is indicated by their first person references to Yahweh (vv. 7–12 shift to third person), by the verbatim repetition of these verses in Deut 5 (alterations appear only in the following portions of the Decalogue in Deut 5), and by the Masoretic paragraphing and unusual accenting. Some Jewish traditions not only limit Yahweh’s direct address from Sinai to these verses, assigning the other commandments to Moses’ mediation, but they also describe supernatural, physical effects just from hearing 20:2–6!

Although Israel heard only the first two commandments directly from God, still the Divine apparition had an enormous influence upon this generation. Never in the course of their lives was any physical impurity heard of among them, nor did any vermin succeed in infesting their bodies, and when they died, their corpses remained free from worms and insects.

Many have observed that Exod 20:2–6 stands as foundational and innermost in concentric rings of Pentateuch law, moving outward from this first commandment to the whole Decalogue, to the Book of the Covenant, and to Pentateuch law as a body (see Figure 1). Martin Luther designates it as the Hauptgebot, the “first and chief commandment, from which all the others proceed” and which is “to illuminate and impart its splendor to all the others.”

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14 Walther Zimmerli, I Am Yahweh, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 26, “This doubling of the formula of self-introduction so that it frames the initial words of the Decalogue in dual form clearly shows how weighty these elements of Yahweh’s self-introduction apparently are within the framework of the giving of the Commandments. Quite the opposite of being empty decoration, they are rather the underlying foundation for the Commandments themselves.”

15 The delimitation of Exod 20:2–6 as a distinct textual unit, including the issues surrounding the Masoretic accenting and divisions, are discussed further below (§5.1.1).


17 In Jewish reckoning, this section contains the first and second words of the Ten Words. Reformed Christians count the prohibitions against other gods and against making idols (usually taken in this understanding as visible representations of Yahweh, e.g., Heidelberg Catechism, Question 96) as the first and second of the Ten Commandments. Roman Catholics and Lutherans find here a single command, the “first commandment,” whose prohibition of other gods and idolatrous worship is rooted in the unique status of Yahweh outlined in these verses: his redemption of Israel, his character, his ways. I will refer to Exod 20:2–6 under this latter conception as the “first commandment.”

notes that “The first of the divine commands lays the groundwork for the giving of the remaining commands. There is a kind of circular force operative here as the ‘requirement’ that God be the supreme focus is discerned by the divine command, but that requirement, when accepted, serves to validate the obligation to obey the divine commands.”

Dale Patrick regards vv. 2–6 as a single unit which functions as the “hermeneutical key … of the Decalogue.”

“The first commandment protects Yahweh’s sovereignty as well as his religious prerogatives in Israel by establishing a basis for the rest of the commandments.”

Just as Exod 20:2–6 stands as the foundation of the Decalogue, so also the Decalogue stands as the foundation of the Book of the Covenant and the rest of Pentateuch law. Scott

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20 Patrick, Rhetoric of Revelation, 74.


Langston references Bonaventure, the medieval theologian, who taught not only that the first commandment “provides a foundation for the remaining nine” but also that “the Ten Commandments as a whole form the basis of all other divine laws.”

Alan Cole takes up this theme directly: “Around the ‘ten words’ it is possible to group most of the provisions of the ‘book of the covenant’ in chs. 21–23, and around the book of the covenant in turn to group the rest of the Torah.” The Decalogue is prominently reiterated in Deuteronomy, bracketing Israel’s journey through the wilderness—from Sinai (Exod 20) to Moab (Deut 5)—and thereby highlighting the commandments’ centrality in the Pentateuch.

Also here in Deuteronomy, John Walton and Georg Braulik discern the Decalogue behind the pattern of the other laws. Braulik concludes, “In the intention of the final redaction, the system of the whole body of laws is to be interpreted on the basis of the order of the Ten Commandments. The individual laws thus appear


24 Alan R. Cole, _Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary_, TOTC 2 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 149. John H. Sailhamer, _The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary_ (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 46, interacts with Eissfeldt’s view that older laws such as those of the Book of the Covenant were “replaced” by the laws of Deuteronomy, but that they were already “so rooted in the popular mind” that they had to be left in the text, to be interpreted in light of the new or simply ignored. Otto Eissfeldt, _The Old Testament: An Introduction_, trans. Peter R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 223, refers to this dynamic as “neutralization” and as a process which is unavoidable and natural. Sailhamer responds, “On the contrary, its position [the Book of the Covenant] alongside the Decalogue and within the Sinai narrative itself suggests that the author intends to give it some prominence in the overall structure of his work.”


as concretizations of the Decalogue.”27 Dean McBride adds that while the Decalogue stands as a “synopsis of Israel’s covenant obligations to its divine sovereign” and thus bears “a solemn and supremely important status,”28 still

in neither the Deuteronomic nor the Sinaitic presentation of the covenant does the Decalogue function to diminish the need for or the full authority or significance of the other legislative corpora and individual provisions communicated to Israel through the agency of Moses…. In short, the Decalogue’s stipulations prioritize but do not displace the rest of the Yahwistic-Mosaic Torah.29

Even beyond the Pentateuch, elements of the Decalogue shape the admonitions of prophets and psalmists.30

Rabbinic tradition similarly observes, “All God’s laws were considered ultimately to be expressions of the Ten Commandments, and violating these subsequent laws was placed at the same level as abrogating the Decalogue.”31 Exodus Rabbah 30 describes the ordinances of the Book of the Covenant as an armed bodyguard protecting a distinguished lady: the Decalogue.32

30 Texts often cited in this regard include Hos 4:1–2; Jer 7:9–10; Pss 50; 81. Block, “Reading the Decalogue,” 21–55, affirms that the Decalogue is “the foundation of all the other documents that came to make up Israel’s constitutional tradition: the book of the covenant, the Holiness Code, and the Deuteronomic Torah,” but Block also critiques the view that the Decalogue exerted significant direct influence on the rhetoric of OT, noting the absence of any unequivocal citations and the paucity of allusions to the Decalogue in the Prophets, suggesting that the Decalogue is “refracted through the Deuteronomic Torah through the rest of the Old Testament.” Even in this view, however, the Decalogue plays a seminal role, as evidenced by Block’s conclusion: “Herein lies the profound significance of the Decalogue…. In Deuteronomy the seed planted by Yahweh in the Decalogue has come to full flower.” Similarly, Frank Crüsemann, The Torah: Theology and Social History of Old Testament Law, trans. Allan W. Mahnke (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 351–57, argues that the Decalogue “cannot be regarded as a kind of summary, or the essence of Torah, nor was it ever intended to be such.” He disputes the view that the Decalogue “is able to summarize everything else, or that it is more important, or that everything else is just an unfolding” (my emphasis). Note, however, that Crüsemann’s discussion is framed explicitly in opposition to “aggressive attempts to lift the Decalogue out of everything else, making it alone the basis for Christian ethics,” that is, approaches which retain the Decalogue as timeless, yet discard the remainder of the Torah. So long as the Decalogue and Torah are held together, Crüsemann is quick to affirm that “the Decalogue … plays a role in the composition of the Pentateuch that cannot be overemphasized” and that “the introduction to a collection of laws states something especially important for the document,” a principle “illustrated especially well by the Decalogue.”
31 Langston, Exodus Through the Centuries, 194.
32 Exodus Rabbah 30.3, quoted in Langston, Exodus Through the Centuries, 194.
The ancient commentator Rashi explained that all 613 commandments are contained in the Decalogue.\textsuperscript{33} Evidence from the Mishnah and from phylacteries discovered at Qumran indicate that the Decalogue was recited daily by both priests and people, a practice discontinued only to guard against the elevation of the Decalogue \textit{to the exclusion} of the rest of the Torah by sectarian Jews and early Christians.\textsuperscript{34} Thus, it is broadly accepted that the Decalogue, and especially the opening words of the Decalogue in Exod 20:2–6, stand at the heart of the Torah.

\textbf{2.1.1.d. Exodus 20:2–6 and the Pentateuch’s Rhetoric of Motivation}

The \textit{foundational relation of Exod 20:2–6 to the Pentateuch’s rhetoric of motivation} bears particular relevance to this study. The prohibitions in Exod 20:3–5a are prefaced with the words, “I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of a house of slaves,” and are further grounded with the motive clause of vv. 5b–6: “for (כ) I am Yahweh, your God, a jealous God who, with respect to those who hate me, visits-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons, even against members of the third and fourth generations, but who, with respect to those who love me and keep my commandments, acts in lovingkindness to thousands.” Because the commandment against other gods undergirds the other commandments, and in light of Yahweh’s reference to keeping his commandments (plural) in v. 6, the rhetoric of v.2 and vv. 5–6 serves to motivate obedience to the entire Decalogue.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{33} Chumash with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi’s Commentary: Shemoth, trans. A. M. Silbermann (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1934), 130.


\textsuperscript{35} Martin Luther, \textit{Small Catechism}, in Book of Concord (Kolb and Wengert), 354 [SC I:21–22], recognizing this, treats these words not after the first but after the tenth commandment, in answer to the boldly phrased question, “What does God say \textit{about all these commandments}?” His catechetical explanation of each commandment begins with the words, “We should fear and love God so that we…,” a motivational pairing which Luther takes directly from the threat and promise in Exod 20:5–6. Luther, \textit{Large Catechism}, in Book of Concord (Kolb and Wengert), 390 [LC I:31], explains: “These words apply to all [ten] commandments…, yet they are attached precisely to this one.
Even beyond the Decalogue, however, the Pentateuch as a whole bears the impress of Exod 20:2–6 (and esp. vv. 5–6) in its rhetoric of motivation in at least six ways. First, these verses ground Israel’s obedience in the refrain, “I am Yahweh, your God.” With the utterance of “I am Yahweh, your God” in v. 2 and v. 5b, a transition occurs in the use of this phrase within the Pentateuchal narrative. Prior to Exod 20, this phrase most commonly undergirds the motivation of Yahweh’s actions. For example, in Exod 8:22, Yahweh will make a distinction in the land of Goshen, allowing no swarms of flies there, “in order that you may know that I am Yahweh” (למען תדע כי אני יהוה). After Exod 20, the expression “I am Yahweh” functions largely to ground and motivate Israel’s obedience to Yahweh’s commands. For example, Lev 11:44–45 urges the people not to defile themselves with unclean food “for (כי) I am Yahweh, your God.” More often,

which stands at the head of the list because it is of the utmost importance for a man to have the right head.”

Here I am arguing for the canonical priority of Exod 20:2–6, as it stands as a decisive “first word” from Yahweh within the final form of the Pentateuch which is then unfolded in the remainder of the Pentateuch. However, Rifat Sonsino, Motive Clauses in Hebrew Law: Biblical Forms and Near Eastern Parallels, SBLDS 45 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980), 198–99, argues on comparative literary grounds against the common assumption that motive clauses in general, and Exod 20:5b–6 in particular, are editorial expansions of originally shorter laws. Exod 20:5b–6 is often assigned to a Deuteronomic redactor. Sonsino concludes, “Therefore, in applying the criterion of literary affinity, the probability should also be considered that the motive clauses, especially those in the earlier law collections, were subsequently adapted by late writers who in turn made extensive use of them.” The number of levels on which Exod 20:5–6 proves to be seminal for the motivational rhetoric of the remainder of the Pentateuch, delineated here in the following pages, adds credence to Sonsino’s suggestion.

Catrin H. Williams, I Am He: The Interpretation of ‘anî hû’ in Early Christian Literature, WUNT 2/113 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 6–7, summarizes the investigation of the “I am Yahweh” statements in the OT by H. Zimmermann, “Das absolute ‘Ich bin’ als biblische Offenbarungsformel” (PhD diss., University of Bonn, 1951), 51–109, as falling into four categories of usage: (i) the revelatory formula in its strictest sense (e.g., Gen 28:13; Exod 3:14)...; (ii) to establish and secure God’s word, particularly in relation to his commandments (e.g., Exod 20:2; Lev 21:8; Isa 44:24); (iii) to serve as the content of the knowledge acquired as a result of divine acts in history (e.g., Exod 29:46; Ezek 6:7); (iv) to highlight the uniqueness and exclusiveness of Yahweh (e.g., Isa 45:5, 6, 18; 46:9).” These categories are useful, yet such a form-critical approach masks the narrative sequence and development of these uses along with their narratively anchored rationale. The point I am emphasizing above is that the founding use of the “I am Yahweh” formula in the Pentateuch’s rhetoric of legal motivation (Zimmermann’s category ii) occurs at a particular point in the narrative. All three of his other categories of use have preceded this within the narrative, so that such use as legal motivation is logically and narratively predicated on the other three uses of the expression. Yahweh has revealed himself to Moses and Israel (category i: Exod 3:14 (as Z. notes), 6:2, 20:2); his historical acts against Egypt have further revealed his character and power (category iii: Exod 6:7–8; 7:5; 8:10; 10:1–2, etc.); and the latter plagues and Red Sea victory have occasioned the recognition of Yahweh’s incomparable dignity and his right to the claims of exclusive worship (category iv: Exod 8:22; 9:14; 12:12; 15:3, 11; 18:10–11). It is in front of this narrative backdrop that Yahweh forbids the worship of other gods and enumerates his other commandments, grounding these commands with the motive clause, “for I am Yahweh, your God, a jealous God, visiting iniquity.”

Helmer Ringgren, “אֶהֱוָו hû,” TDOT 3:349, sees its repeated use in the Holiness Code as a development of its use in the Decalogue, where it serves as the basis of the commandments.
the יָה is simply implied: “You shall perform my ordinances and keep my statutes, by walking in them. I am Yahweh, your God” (Lev 18:4). This is the dominant rhetoric motivating obedience throughout Lev 18–26 and appears again in Num 3, 10, and 15. Karl Elliger suggests that the expression “I am Yahweh, your God” is consistently associated with Exod 20:5, resonating with “der ganze Komplex von religiösen Gefühlen und Vorstellungen” which is found there.39

A second way in which the Pentateuch bears the impress of Exod 20:2–6 is the relational covenant language of “Yahweh, your God”—an expression which emerges prominently in the book of Exodus here in Exod 20. Previous to this, God had twice declared that by his acts of redemption and provision, “you will know that I am Yahweh, your God” (Exod 6:7; 16:12). More often, it was Pharaoh who had grudgingly uttered the phrase: “I myself will let you go so that you may sacrifice to Yahweh, your God, in the wilderness” (Exod 8:28); “Pray to Yahweh, your God, so that he will just remove this death from me” (Exod 10:17; cf. 10:8, 16). But at Sinai, the giving of the Law and Israel’s expected obedience is closely tied to this covenant relationship, and the phrase “Yahweh, your God” saturates the opening portions of the Decalogue (20:2, 5, 7, 10, 12) and then appears twice again in the closing admonitions of the Book of the Covenant (23:19, 25). John Kessler notes that the expression “Yahweh, your God” implicitly “contains the most central concept in Sinai Covenant Theology: that Israel and Yahweh are in exclusive relationship.”40 As the rhetoric of motivation unfolds through the rest of the Pentateuch’s laws and admonitions, it is seasoned liberally throughout with the phrase “Yahweh, your God”—24x in Leviticus, 4x in Numbers, and 281x in Deuteronomy (and “Yahweh our God” another 23x in Deuteronomy). In this respect as well, the Pentateuch’s


rhetoric of motivation seems to be rooted in the seminal law-giving encounter of Exod 20, esp. vv. 2–6.

Third, the specific description of God as “jealous” (Exod 20:5) is deployed again in Exod 34:14 and in Deut 4:24; 5:9; and 6:15 to deter the worship of idols and other gods. Toward the close of Deuteronomy, the Song of Moses contains Piel and Hiphil verbal forms of קנא (make jealous, provoke to jealousy) in recounting Israel’s desert rebellion as an indirect appeal to avoid or forsake idolatry (Deut 32:16, 21). The fiery, smoking theophany (Exod 19:18; 20:18) as the context in which Yahweh reveals himself as “a jealous God” is also significant here, and fire imagery continues to be used narratively and rhetorically throughout the Pentateuch to deter disobedience, often in explicit connection with language of jealousy.41 On the one hand, such a linking of jealousy with fire may be based in semantic complementarity: “The use of שָׁא [‘fire’] indicates the intense, consuming dimension so characteristic of Yahweh’s קנא.”42 On the other hand, Ortlund suggests: “It may be relevant to remember here that one of the critical divine self-revelations in all the Old Testament, that of Yahweh to Moses in Exodus 3, in which Yahweh discloses his very name to Moses (v. 14), occurs in the context of fire: a burning bush.”43 Perhaps more relevant in explaining the use of fire-and-jealousy language in the motivational rhetoric of

41 In Leviticus and Numbers, those turning away from Yahweh and his commands are, on certain occasions, literally consumed by fire coming out from the presence of Yahweh: Nadab and Abihu in Lev 10:1–2, the outskirts of the camp in Num 11:1–3, and 250 men associated with Korah’s rebellion in Num 16:35. These narrative incidents function as warnings alongside the direct motive statements of the Pentateuch, and thereby play a part in the overall rhetoric of motivation. Direct motive statements also evoke the Exod 20 theophany. “Be on your guard, lest you should forget the covenant of Yahweh your God which he made with you, and you should make for yourselves an idol, an image of anything that the LORD your God has forbidden you. For Yahweh your God—he is a consuming fire, a jealous God” (Deut 4:23–24). “Beware lest there should be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from Yahweh our God to go and serve the gods of those nations … for then the anger of Yahweh and his jealousy will smoke against that man” (Deut 29:17, 19 [Eng 18, 20]). In these examples, fire or smoke is linked with Yahweh’s jealousy, evoking both the setting and the speech of Exod 20. For a broader correlation of divine jealousy with fire and volcanic imagery in the OT, see Nissim Amzallag, “Furnace Remelting as the Expression of YHWH’s Holiness: Evidence from the Meaning of qannā’ (קנא) in the Divine Context,” JBL 134 (2015): 238–39.


43 Ortlund, Zeal Without Knowledge, 49.
the Pentateuch is the recollection of God’s explicit self-ascription as “a jealous God” in Exod 20:5, spoken from a mountain wrapped in smoke “because Yahweh had descended on it in fire” (Exod 19:18; cf. 24:17).

A fourth respect in which Exod 20:2–6 stands as foundational for the Pentateuch’s rhetoric of motivation is the way in which vv. 5–6 equate idolatry and disobedience with “hating” Yahweh, and keeping his commandments with “loving” Yahweh. Such rhetoric personalizes the keeping of the Torah and calls for the exclusive worship of Yahweh to extend beyond external obedience and to penetrate the heart and affections of the people. Kürle observes the way in which the language of “those who love me and keep my commandments” in Exod 20:6 “widens and includes the commandments that follow in the remainder of the Decalogue and the book of the covenant. The effect is that the reader perceives the entire legislation in Exod 20–23 as an expression of a life which befits a ‘God lover’.44 Especially in Deuteronomy, Moses appeals to Israel to “love Yahweh, your God” and regularly parallels this with such actions as “keeping/doing/obeying his commandments,” “walking in his ways,” and “serving him.”45 In Exod 20:5–6, obedient love for Yahweh reciprocates Yahweh’s zealous regard for his people; in the same way, in Deuteronomy, Yahweh’s love (אהבה) and longing (חשק) for Israel46 should lead them to love (אהבה) and to cleave (דבק) to him.”47 The strong affection connoted by these verbs is well-illustrated by the use of האהבה and חשׁק in Gen 2:24 and Gen 34:8, respectively, both dealing


45 William L. Moran, “The Ancient Near Eastern Background for the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” CBQ 25 (1963): 85–87, lays out the basis for his claim that Deut 6:4–18 “is by way of commentary a series of citations and allusions to the beginning of the Decalogue [Exod 20:2–6].” While some scholars regard the phrases “for those who hate/love me” in Exod 20:5–6 as Deuteronomic insertions, Moran asserts, “If … [Deut] 6:5 and 6:17 allude to the Decalogue, then it is clear that l’törha’at utšōm’re miswōtai was in the Decalogue at the time of the composition of [Deut] 6:4ff. No one would suggest that it was added by the author of 6:4ff. so that it could be subsequently alluded to.”


with marital intimacy and longing. Further strength of devotion is exhorted with the expression “with all your heart and with all your soul,” which is to characterize Israel’s love for God (Deut 6:5; 13:4 (Eng. 13:3); 30:6) and their service of him (Deut 10:12; 11:13). Twice, Deuteronomy speaks of God repaying (שלם) those who hate him (שׂנא), as an exhortation to “keep the commandment, the statute, and the ordinances” given by Moses (Deut 7:10–11; cf. 32:41–43).

Fifth, there is a polarity established in Exod 20:5–6 which carries throughout the motivational rhetoric of the Pentateuch: God visits the iniquity of those who hate him, but he acts in steadfast love for those who love him and keep his commandments. Subtly but effectively, Exod 20:2 introduces this same polarity in the treatment shown you by Yahweh, your God over against the harsh treatment of Egypt alluded to by “out of the land of Egypt, out of a house of slaves” (cf. 19:4). There are only two paths: curse or blessing, death or life, God’s enemies or God’s people: “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: the blessing, when you hearken to the commandments of Yahweh your God, which I am commanding you today, and the curse, if you do not hearken to the commandments of Yahweh your God, and turn aside … to go after other gods which you have not known” (Deut 11:26–28). This black-and-white, all-or-nothing dichotomy is fundamental to the motivational rhetoric of the Pentateuch. Kürle highlights the way in which this “two-way strategy of provoking law obedience” functions in the altar laws of Exod 20:22–26 and the forntelling of the conquest of Canaan in 23:20–33, thus bracketing the Book of the Covenant. This binary motivation is employed most vividly and extensively in the blessings and curses of Lev 26 and Deut 28. While glimpsed previously in texts such as Gen 2:16–17, Gen 18:22–33, and even Exod 15:6–7, 12–13, it is here in Exod

48 From another perspective, the correspondence Exod 20’s language of love and hate with the rhetoric of Deuteronomy evidences the secondary character of the phrases “for those who hate me” and “for those who love me and keep my commandments” in Exod 20:5–6. These phrases are widely considered “Deuteronomic additions” or “glosses” within Exod 20:5–6. Chapters 3 and 4 will interact with this view.

49 Kürle, Appeal of Exodus, 97.
20:5–6 that this polarity is inscribed in the rhetoric of Sinai covenant obedience.  

This motivational rhetoric of polarity is two-fold, yet asymmetrical: Yahweh’s lovingkindness is not merely the inverse parallel of his punishing visitation. The latter is a just retribution prompted by human disobedience. The former is grace, deeply rooted in God’s benevolent character and not just the due reward for covenant compliance. 

There is polarity, but there is also what Raabe terms “asymmetry.” Those who hate me and those who love me and keep my commandments are, on their face, symmetrical statements. Yet Exod 20:5–6, with its quantitative contrast between “third and fourth” and “thousands” as well as its qualitative contrast between “visiting iniquity against” and “acting in loving kindness toward,” plants seeds of asymmetry which fully blossom in Exod 34:6–7 and which grow throughout the Pentateuch.

Sixth and finally, Exod 20:2–6 sets its motivational rhetoric within a redemptive-historical, corporate-Israel, multi-generational framework by identifying Yahweh as the redeemer of Israel out of slavery in the land of Egypt, as the visitor of iniquity across three or four generations, and as the performer of steadfast love for thousands. This perspective is echoed and reinforced throughout the Pentateuch beginning already in the motive clause to the command to honor

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50 Block, “Reading the Decalogue,” 34, in discussing the similarities between the Pentateuch covenant formulations and Hittite and Neo-Assyrian treaties, locates the covenant sanctions of the Decalogue in 20:5–6, as well as vv. 7 and 12, speaking of the “fragments of curses” in Exod 20:5, 7 and the “fragments of blessings” in 20:6, 12.

51 For example, Kürle, Appeal of Exodus, 95, 97–98, stresses that the legal material in Exod 20:22–23:33, read in the context of the preceding narrative, rejects the notion that God’s presence and blessing can be manipulated or coerced, but rather that “the reader meets a god who is willing to be present among the בני ישראל, the covenant people, and he is assured that the divine presence means blessing…. The element of hope is added to the persuasive force of the passage. This element is, of course, only rhetorically effective because of the support of Yhwh’s character which has implicitly been described throughout the book of the covenant as benevolent and reliable.”

52 Paul R. Raabe, “The Wicked and the Righteous in the Psalms: An Asymmetrical Anthropology,” in Fri och bunden: En bok om teologisk antropologi, ed. Johannes Hellberg, Rune Imberg, and Torbjörn Johansson, Fisk 13 (Gothenburg: Församlingsförlaget, 2013), 90, 92, emphasizes that while the Psalms speak of the wicked in terms of their evil acts and enmity toward God and pray that God would foil their plans and exact retribution on them for their deeds, “the Psalms generally do not portray the righteous as active doers of righteous works, as the symmetrical opposite of the wicked. Rather, they speak of the righteous as the helpless and needy who take refuge in Yahweh, who trust in the God of Israel, who pray to him and seek his protection and intervention, who sing praises to him…. The psalmists … do not pray that their own good deeds would return to them to their benefit. Rather, they pray that God would put into action his steadfast love and righteousness.”
parents: “so that your days may be long in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you” (Exod 20:12). Moses’ opening oration in Deut 1–4 broadens the application: “Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time” (Deut 4:40). Space precludes cataloging the many texts in which the rhetoric of motivation throughout the remainder of the Pentateuch is patterned in this way.53 “Throughout your generations” becomes a refrain in ordinances for priestly service (Exod 30), for the Sabbath (Exod 30–31), for offerings (Lev 3), for feasts (Lev 23), etc. Israel’s observance of the commandments will result in the fruitfulness of the land, the multiplication of offspring, and continuing freedom from the yoke of Egypt (Lev 26:3–13). But if the people do not listen and do all the commandments, wild beasts will bereave them of their children, and after continued rebellion they shall eat the flesh of their own children. The cities and sanctuaries of the land will be destroyed, and the land itself become a desolation. “And those of you who are left shall rot away in your enemies’ lands because of their iniquity and also because of the iniquities of their fathers they shall rot away like them” (Lev 26:21–22). The blessings and curses of Deut 28 follow similar patterns, though worked out in more graphic detail, and the curses culminate with the threat that the deliverance from Egypt will be reversed: “And Yahweh will take you back to Egypt in ships, along a way of which I had said, you will never see it again, and you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as slaves and as

53 Edesio Sánchez, “Family in the Non-narrative Sections of the Pentateuch,” in Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context, ed. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll R. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 43, speaks of a “generational factor” closely akin to Exod 20:5 in Pentateuchal law and especially Deuteronomy: “It is noteworthy how Deuteronomy weaves into its narration constant references to the people of ‘yesterday,’ ‘today,’ and ‘tomorrow,’ and ‘your ancestors,’ ‘you,’ and ‘your children’…. Deuteronomy has a different attitude toward each generation. ‘Yesterday’s’ generation is on trial (1:39; 4:1–9, 15–20). The people of ‘tomorrow,’ depending on the teaching they receive ‘today,’ could either be unfaithful (4:25–28) or faithful and obedient (4:29–31, 39–40; 5:32–33)…. The Lord expects obedience and faithfulness. According to Deuteronomy, the quality of life for future generations will depend to a great degree on the lifestyle of the present generation (6:1–3).”
concubines, but there will be no buyer” (Deut 28:68).

These six aspects of the motivational rhetoric in Exod 20:2–6 find extensive re-use and elaboration within the rest of the Pentateuch (summarized in Figure 2). The foundation of the Pentateuch’s rhetoric of motivation is thus laid here in these opening verses of Exod 20, a testament to the enormous legal, literary, canonical, and theological weight of Exod 20:2–6, the passage containing the first occurrence of the visiting phrase.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Exodus 20:2–6</strong></th>
<th><strong>Pentateuch Rhetoric of Motivation</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(for) I am Yahweh</td>
<td>“I am Yahweh” refrain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yahweh, your God</td>
<td>pervasive appeals to fear, serve, worship, love, cling to, obey, and keep the commands of Yahweh, (y)our God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a jealous God (speaking from the fire)</td>
<td>Yahweh’s jealousy in Exod 34, Deut 4–6, and Moses’ Song in Deut 32; scenes of divine judgment by fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stark polarity: visiting iniquity or showing steadfast love</td>
<td>blessings or curses life or death long days in the land or exile in another, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for those who hate me— for those who love me and keep my commandments</td>
<td>love Yahweh your God with all your heart and soul, keeping his commandments— keep the command, statute, and ordinance, for Yahweh repays those who hate him but shows steadfast love to those who love him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>visiting iniquity … against sons, against the third and fourth generation—steadfast love to thousands</td>
<td>“throughout your generations”— for then Yahweh will bring on you and on your offspring extraordinary afflictions; you who are left shall rot away in your enemies’ lands because of their iniquity and also because of the iniquity of their fathers— that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land; that it may go well with you and with your children forever</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2

2.1.1.e. The Narrative Placement and Role of Exodus 20:2–6.

In addition to its foundational status in relation to Pentateuch law and the Pentateuch’s rhetoric of motivation, Exod 20:2–6 plays a crucial narrative role. Literarily and thematically, Dale Patrick has illustrated ways in which the first commandment stands as a lynchpin in the
structuring of the entire Pentateuch. Before this commandment is given, false gods are scarcely noticed or confronted, but afterwards the theme of idolatry and false worship is a dominant motif in the Pentateuch (and beyond).  

Within the narrative flow of the book of Exodus itself, Exod 20:2–6 emerges as a momentous episode. The preceding narrative, in a number of respects, has been leading directly to the divine-human encounter here related. It was at the “mountain of God” that God first appeared to set the redemptive drama in motion (Exod 3:1) and, already then, the people’s arrival and encounter with God at this mountain was an express goal and destination of the redemptive program (3:12). Moses confronts Pharaoh not merely to demand respite and release for the people, but to demand the opportunity to journey into the wilderness for a festal meeting with Yahweh (5:1; etc.). Delivered through the sea, Moses and the people sing of Egypt’s defeat not so much in terms of the fully severed bonds of their past slavery, but rather looking ahead, in terms of the triumphant and steadfast God who will lead this rescued people to his “holy abode,” to his “own mountain, the place, O Yahweh, which you have made for your abode” (15:13, 17).

55 Cornelis den Hertog, “The Sign of Sinai: Exodus 3:12b as Part of a Call Narrative and Beyond,” in The Other Face of God: ‘I Am That I Am’ Reconsidered, HBM (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2012), describes the “canon-building” role of the sign, as it functions to orient both Moses and the reader to God’s overarching purposes which are realized and revealed only later in the narrative.  
56 Identifying the referent(s) intended by Exod 15:13 and 17 involves a host of issues. Thomas B. Dozeman, Exodus, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 326, asks regarding the sanctuary referenced in v. 17: “Is the pastoral imagery the most prominent feature, suggesting the desert sanctuary at Sinai, or does the language point to Zion or to Gilgal?” Propp, Exodus 1–18, 562–71, provides an extensive historical and comparative discussion. Propp also notes that the verb “planted” in this context “fits especially well the identification of Yahweh’s mountain with Canaan or the norther highlands.” However, within the Exodus narrative, the most immediate association with the holy abode (cf. 3:5), with Yahweh’s own mountain (cf. 3:1), and with the sanctuary established by Yahweh (cf. 29:43–46) toward which he is leading Israel is Mount Sinai and the tabernacle which will be erected there. Peter Enns, Exodus, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 300, identifies three options for the identity of the “abode” in these texts: Sinai, Canaan, or the Temple. He concludes, however, that “in the final analysis ... it poses a false dilemma to have to choose among these three options, as if they are mutually exclusive. In a manner of speaking, they all meld together... Mount Sinai is God’s holy dwelling, but he will choose to move his holy presence to live among the Israelites, first in the moveable tabernacle and then in the temple... God’s self-revelation at Sinai is, although itself a frighteningly powerful reality, a prelude to the permanence of his presence in the land and the temple.”
Their arrival at the mountain corresponds temporally (and thus narratively and theologically) with the departure from Egypt (19:1), and Yahweh’s first words there to Moses express the goal of his accomplished acts against Egypt: “I have brought you to myself” (19:4). Israel’s long-anticipated meeting with Yahweh is then dramatically delayed, as barricades and consecrating measures are put in place (19:10–15). Finally it comes, heralded with heavenly trumpeting on the third day (19:16–17).

Yahweh’s self-revelation in Exod 20:2–6 is narratively pivotal. Looking backward in the story, it culminates and summarizes the characterization of Yahweh which has unfolded in the plague and exodus episodes: Yahweh’s might, Yahweh’s incomparability, Yahweh’s demonstrations against Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt, Yahweh’s zeal for his reputation and his people, Yahweh’s deliverance of Israel from servitude in Egypt to the exclusive worship/service of Yahweh. Pointing forward, it sets the agenda for all the laws which follow (as previously discussed), including the Book of the Covenant in chs. 21–23; it is realized in the instructions for Israel’s new labor, service, worship”) in the priesthood and the tabernacle instructions of chs. 25–31; it sets up the poignant catastrophe of Israel’s “other gods” in the golden calf episode of ch. 32; it stands as a “provisional” articulation of Yahweh’s name providing a formulation which will be echoed yet meaningfully rearranged and rearticulated in the climactic speech of 34:6–7; and it sets forth the ideal of a people who love God and keep his commandments which will be realized, on the heels of Yahweh’s mercy and covenant renewal, in the people’s willing and obedient construction of the tabernacle in chs. 35–40 (see Exod 35:4, 29; 39:42–43).

From a broader angle, the Sinai covenant tradition as a whole, headed by 20:2–6 and culminating in ch. 34, stands in the crucial position among the various OT covenant accounts, preeminently defining the relationship between God and Israel. “The patriarchal covenants point forward to it as a climax, and subsequent covenant making [Josh 23; 1 Sam 12; 1 Kgs 18; 2 Kgs
11:17ff; 23:1ff] renews it.”\(^5\) Even the prophetic promise of a “new covenant” in Jer 31 is in some sense anchored in the dynamic of covenant and new covenant played out from Exod 20:2–6 to the renewal of the covenant in Exod 34 “on a new footing … undeserved divine forgiveness of an apostate people.”\(^6\)


Patrick Miller and Gerald Janzen have argued persuasively that the \textit{Shema} of Deut 6:4–5 is a deliberate application of Exod 20:2–6, so that these texts are mutually interpretive. Janzen writes: “Miller … takes the Decalogue, in particular its Prologue and first two Stipulations, as the most important co-text for the interpretation of the Shema. He goes so far as to say that ‘the \textit{Shema} is a mirror image of the first part of the Decalogue.’”\(^7\) Richard Bauckham has noted the fundamental standing of Exod 20:2–6; 34:6–7; and Deut 6:4–6 in a full-orbed understanding of Jewish monotheism:

For Jewish monotheism, the one God has a unique name, \textit{YHWH}, and a unique relationship with his chosen people Israel, to whom he has revealed not only the supreme power he exercises in mighty acts of salvation and judgement in relation to Israel, but also the moral dispositions (in the classic characterization of Ex. 34:6–7) that characterize his dealings with Israel. All these elements of \textit{YHWH}’s particular identity as the God of Israel are essential to Jewish monotheism, as are the requirements on Israel summed up in the first commandment of the Decalogue and in the \textit{Shema}, which make Israel’s monotheism no mere matter of intellectual belief but


\(^{6}\) Terence E. Fretheim, \textit{Exodus}, IBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 308, does not draw this specific connection with Jer 31, but does emphasize the newness of the re-made covenant in Exod 34:10–28: “In contrast to chapter 24, this covenant is not characterized by any formal response from Israel. The new covenant is in place simply because God has determined that it be so. Hence the nature of the covenant has changed…. No conditions have been attached. Entirely at the divine initiative, at a moment in Israel’s life when it is most vulnerable and can call on no goodness of its own or any other human resource, God acts on Israel’s behalf: its sins are forgiven. \textit{This is an entirely new reality for Israel, indeed for the world}” (author’s emphasis).

a matter of distinctive cultic practice and loving obedience that encompasses the whole of life.  

2.1.2. The Importance of Exodus 34:6–7

Francis Andersen judges that one “cannot possibly exaggerate the importance of Exod 34:6–7 as the Lord’s self-disclosure.”  Walter Brueggemann remarks that 34:6–7 reveals to Moses “the fullness of God’s character and intentionality. Nowhere before this speech has anyone been privileged to hear directly a disclosure of what is most powerful and definitional for God’s own life.”  And Michael Widmer says plainly that Exod 34:6–7 contains “the most comprehensive account of YHWH’s nature in the entire Bible.”  Not every text in the OT bears equal weight, and, as with Exod 20:2–6, the central importance of Exod 34:6–7 can be recognized from a number of standpoints.

2.1.2.a. Interpretive Touchstone

In his book on hermeneutics, James Voelz stresses that “the meaning of the whole is not the sum of the meaning of the individual parts but the meaning of the parts as a whole,” and he notes that it is only with such a total orientation and understanding that one can be confronted with the question which is often central to comprehensive interpretation of the whole and which may well be difficult to determine: “What is the key element in

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62 Walter Brueggemann, “The Book of Exodus: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in General and Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus, NIB 1, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 946. The ultimate or climactic nature of this self-revelation should not obscure the fact, however, that God has spoken in direct, self-revelatory fashion previously in the Exodus narrative, in Exod 20:5–6. J. Carl Laney, “God’s Self-Revelation in Exodus 34:6–8,” BSac 158 (2001): 36, ignores this when he writes, regarding Exod 34:6–7, “This passage is one of the most important theological texts in Scripture, because it is the only place where God actually described Himself, listing His own glorious attributes” (my emphasis).

determining the existence of a semantic matrix and/or to provide a touchstone, an anchor, as it were, for its interpretation?"64

Within the Exodus narrative and within the theology of the OT as a whole, Exod 34:6–7 is often suggested as providing such an interpretive touchstone. For Abraham Heschel, the words of God’s self-revelation here “are of fundamental importance for the understanding of all biblical words.”65 Graham Cole describes Exod 34:6–7 as

integral to the knowledge of God and not incidental to the canonical plot line. This is who God is, which his prior and subsequent acts illustrate, and which Biblical Theology as a method displays. Doing is predicated on being. This is his name proclaimed…. It is echoed in every part of the Hebrew Bible…. It is the basis for biblical prayer.66

2.1.2.b. Canonical Influence and Re-Use

Allusions to Exod 34:6–7 are spread throughout the Hebrew Bible and often identified within the Apocrypha, Qumran literature, and NT as well.67 Besides Exod 20:5–6 (and its quotation in Deut 5:9–10), the most significant parallels to 34:6–7 are Num 14:18; Jer 32:18; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nah 1:3: Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; and Neh 9:17. Other texts echo the description of Yahweh as a “gracious and merciful God”68 or other brief elements from the

67 Nathan C. Lane, The Compassionate but Punishing God: A Canonical Analysis of Exodus 34:6–7 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 1, mentions Sir 2:11; 2 Esd 7:132–40; Damascus Document 2:2–13; Luke 1:50, 58, 72, 78; 10:37; Rom 9:15–16. In discussing the OT occurrences, Lane proposes a canonical theological progression in the use of the phrase: “The appearances of the credo in the Torah fixated on the intimate relationship between God and ancient Israel. In the Twelve, the lens widens to include the impact of YHWH’s dealings with ancient Israel on the other nations and the ways in which God’s workings with the other nations relate to ancient Israel…. The Psalter’s vision [moves to] YHWH as king over the entire earth” (68). For a study of OT parallels of Exod 34:6–7 alongside similar themes in other ANE religious texts, see Matthias Franz, Der barmherzige und gnädige Gott: Die Gnadenrede vom Sinai (Ex 34,6–7) und ihre Parallelen im Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt, BWANT 160 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003).
68 Pss 111:4; 112:4; 116:5; Neh 9:31; 2 Chr 30:9.
passage.\textsuperscript{69} Such broad canonical distribution may evidence longstanding liturgical use of this text in ancient Israel.\textsuperscript{70} (Certainly by the rabbinical period these verses had gained, and still have today, a prominent place in Jewish worship as the Thirteen Attributes, or middoth.\textsuperscript{71}) Thomas Raitt assess this broad distribution as establishing the fundamental theological value of this text:

When we look 1) at the total impact of Exod 34:7 on subsequent Israelite thought and worship; 2) at the diversity of wording in the repeated parts; 3) at the time span across which the 23 echoes appear; 4) and at the implied diversity of the sources, I conclude that we are looking at the most important statement of forgiveness in the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{72}

Scholars have also drawn attention to the relation of 34:6–7 to specific parts of the canon. Van Leeuwen, Scoralick, Bosman, Seitz, and Barker all emphasize the imprint of this passage in the Prophets, especially in the Book of the Twelve.\textsuperscript{73} Seitz proposes that “the use of the self-designation formula from Exodus 34 across the disparate witnesses of Joel, Jonah, Micah, and Nahum is one of the strongest signs of a comprehensive editing of the Twelve.”\textsuperscript{74} Scoralick labels Exod 34:6–7 a Schlüsseltext for grasping the unity and ordering of the Book of the

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\textsuperscript{70} Nahum M. Sarna, Exodus, JPSTC (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 216.

\textsuperscript{71} b. Roš Haš. 17b; Midr. Pss 93:8; Göran Larsson, Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 259n14, accounts for the number thirteen as “the sum of the two different names of God in 34:6, YHWH … and El—representing different aspects of God (mercy/judgment)—plus the different attributes applied to God, plus the three different terms for sin (since God takes these away in different ways).”


\textsuperscript{74} Seitz, Prophecy and Hermeneutics, 216.
Twelve.\textsuperscript{75}

The inner-biblical reapplication of these verses is extensive in the Psalter, where “the key terms of the attribute formulary [Exod 34:6–7] recur as the organizing principle in a host of psalms.”\textsuperscript{76} An especially strong tie here is posited by Gordon Wenham:

Steadfast love (hesed) would well be described as the key word in the Psalter…. It often occurs paired with faithfulness (ěmet) in the psalms, just as in Exodus 34:6, inviting the surmise that the psalm is alluding to the Golden Calf episode. When the whole formula [Exod 34:6–7] is quoted [in Pss 86, 103, 145], the surmise becomes a strong probability, if not a certainty…. These attributes of God are … very influential in their thinking.\textsuperscript{77}

In a recent dissertation, Hilary Clair Kapfer discusses themes of collective accountability in the wisdom traditions of the OT, complementing the individual retribution which has usually been associated with these writings. In particular, she traces the influence of the formula from Exod 34:6–7 within the books of Proverbs, Job, Ben Sira, and Wisdom of Solomon.\textsuperscript{78}

Exod 20:5–6 and 34:6–7 also seem to have shaped the recounting of history in the OT. Sara Japhet has argued that the canonical historians frame their presentation of Israelite history in response to the transgenerational dynamics expressed in these passages: the editor of Chronicles rejects the notion of delayed, transgenerational punishment (Exodus 20:5 and 34:7b), in contrast to the author/editor of Kings, who often portrays the punishments due one generation falling upon a later generation.\textsuperscript{79} Baruch Halpern rejects this dichotomy, but argues persuasively for a more nuanced position in which the final form of both Kings and Chronicles, as well as

\textsuperscript{75} Scoralick, \textit{Gottes Güte und Gottes Zorn}, 204.


\textsuperscript{78} Hilary Claire Kapfer, “Collective Accountability among the Sages of Ancient Israel” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2013), 208–19.

\textsuperscript{79} Sara Japhet, \textit{The Ideology of the Book of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought} (Frankfurt: Lang, 1989).
Jeremiah, hold “the ancestors, and not just the present generation … responsible for Judah’s straits…. Josiah’s reform did not really ‘take’, so that the ancestral sins continued in the period after his death.”

2.1.2.c. Key Narrative Role in Exodus and the Pentateuch

Pulling back from these far-reaching canonical influences, the key role of Exod 34:6–7 within the Pentateuch and especially within the Exodus narrative itself is also clear—although earlier diachronic approaches did not always yield this conclusion. Note the following five points. First, 34:6–7 is a crucial text within Exodus because it expresses the fullest and climactic revelation of Yahweh’s name, a major theme within the Exodus narrative. Moses’ request to know God’s name, and God’s explicit will to make his name known, move from איה אשׁר איה (“I will be whom I will be”) in Exod 3:14 on through the narrative of redemption, covenant, and apostasy until Yahweh passes before Moses in this text, uttering “the fullest statement about the name and character of God in the whole of the canon.” Jerry Harmon observes that “Exodus 34:6–7 is the complete picture of what God wanted Israel and the world to see. That is, the self-revelations of the name of Yahweh reach their climax in Exodus 34:6–7.”

Second, as such a revelation of God’s character, these verses stand in a precise summative

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81 S. R. Driver, The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 364–65, for example, reckons Exod 34:1–5, 10–28 as the continuation of J’s account of the first establishment of the covenant, begun in Exod 19:20–25 but displaced because there was “no room” beside E’s account of the covenant in 20:22–23:33 and 24:3–8. From this vantage, the original sources lacked 34:6–7, and only through the creative, but late, hand of the “compiler” does the chapter become a tale of covenant renewal. Childs, Exodus, 607–9, while introducing some novel suggestions and placing greater theological value on the final arrangement, still follows this same basic analysis: “A close look at the contents of the chapter [Exod 34] confirms the thesis that an original covenant is being discussed. The theme of covenant renewal, which is confined to vv. 1, 4, 28b, is redactional.” Both commentators ignore Exod 34:6–7 in their reconstructions of the text’s history.

82 Wells, “Book of Exodus,” 52.

relation to the surrounding narrative, functioning as a creed-like distillation of God’s self-revelation through his preceding and accompanying actions and thus as a “hermeneutical key” to the narrative—a relationship which will be explored and emphasized in the present study. Göran Larsson compares the centrality of these verses in Jewish tradition to “certain summaries of the Gospel among Christians, such as John 3:16,” and a number of scholars find such a function suggested by the Exodus text. In describing 34:6–7, Brueggemann labels it a “credo of adjectives” which “depends on and gathers together the claims of the verbal recitals” of God’s actions in the narrative.

John Goldingay, likewise, judges these verses to be “a retrospective systematic theological reflection” on the narrative. Terence Fretheim notes the way in which this generalizing description of Yahweh “grows out of the story,” is “drawn into creedal statement,” and thus “constitutes a kind of ‘canon’ of the kind of God Israel’s God is, in the light of which God’s ongoing involvement in its history will be interpreted.”

Third, God’s proclamation in 34:6–7 comprises the narrative and theological climax of the golden calf narrative of Exod 32–34, bringing to fullest dramatic height the deliberation regarding God’s covenant continuance with stiff-necked Israel as well as the interchange between God and Moses around the request, “Show me your ways/glory” (Exod 33:13, 18). Yahweh’s renewal of the covenant in Exod 34 follows directly from this fullest articulation of his mercy. That is, the new covenant has as its basis the name and character of Yahweh.

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84 Umberto Cassuto, Commentary on Exodus, trans. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 439, sees the passage summing up “in synthetic form what is to be deduced from the preceding narrative.”

85 Larsson, Bound for Freedom, 259.


88 Fretheim and Froehlich, Bible as the Word of God, 120.

89 Fretheim, Exodus, 302.
proclaimed in 34:6–7, in the face of the stiff-necked character of the people. This becomes paradigmatic for the entire history of Israel, as Georg Fischer and Dominik Markl note:

Gottes Selbstoffenbarung in V.6–7 gehört mit 3,14f und 20,5f zu den umfangreichsten in Ex. Jhwh selbst verkündet sie im direkten Anschluss an die doppelte Ausrufung seines Namens und verleiht ihr so höchste Autorität und Würde. Sie bildet einen Wendepunkt in der Geschichte Israels, wo Gott im Augenblick der größtmöglichen Schuld seines Volkes trotz allem seine Barmherzigkeit zusagt.90

Fourth, this self-description of God functions in the narrative as the ground for worship and for penitent prayer. Moses’ response to the words is immediate: he bows down in worship and requests Yahweh’s pardon of sin and covenant restoration for stiff-necked Israel. As the history of stiff-necked Israel unfolds, Exod 34:6–7 will continue to mold Israel’s approach to Yahweh for mercy, most explicitly Moses’ intercession in Num 14:17–19, but also the exhortations of Lev 26:40–45 and Deut 30:1–3 as well as the exilic penitential prayers of Dan 9:3–19; Ezra 9:6–15; and Neh 9, and certain cries of the Lamenter (e.g., Lam 3:22–23, 41–42; 5:7, 16, 21).91 Horst Seebass has explored the ways in which even the Aaronic blessing in Num 6:22–27 stands in close relation to this fundamental self-expression of Yahweh.92

Fifth, the status of Exod 34:6–7 as the turning point of the golden calf narrative gains greater significance in light of the role of the golden calf narrative itself as a turning point within

90 Georg Fischer and Dominik Markl, Das Buch Exodus, NSKAT (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2009), 357 (authors’ emphasis).

91 Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, Amos, AB 24A (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 638–79, in their excursus, “When God Repents,” root the prophet’s intercession in Amos 7:1–6, along with several other key OT texts, in the intercession of Moses in Exod 32–34, “the only major public instance in the Hebrew Bible of a prophetic intercession successfully resulting in divine repentance, at least before the time of Amos.”

the tabernacle chapters of Exodus and within the larger Pentateuch narrative. Only because of Yahweh’s gracious character does he willingly come to dwell with sinful Israel in the newly built tabernacle and continue with them in all their journeys. Marvin Sweeney marks the crucial role of these golden calf chapters:

Exodus 32–34 appears at a crucial point in the general Pentateuchal narrative…, immediately following YHWH’s instructions concerning the building of the tabernacle in Exodus 25–31 and [immediately preceding] the compliance report in Exodus 35–40 which establishes the tabernacle as the holy center for YHWH’s presence in the midst of the people.93

Pier Cesare Bori highlights the “centrality of this [golden calf] event in the biblical context,” noting the ways in which it both presupposes and manifests the foundational themes of OT theology: monotheism, creation, revelation, election, covenant, mediation, and the law.94 Exod 34:6–7 then, is the turning point of the turning point, the center of the center. New Testament scholar King She draws together the conclusions of Daniel Timmer,95 Young-Ja Lee,96 Jerry Harmon,97 and Hermann Spieckermann98 to drive this point:

Exodus 31:18–34:35 is hermeneutically significant because it reveals the portrait and character of the OT God. Whereas Lee and Timmer affirm that Exod 31:18–34:35 is the center of the center of the Torah, Harmon sharpens the focus to show that Exod 34:6–7 functions as the climax of the golden calf episode. Furthermore, Spieckermann argues that Exod 34:6–7 may be the theological center of the OT. In other words, Exod 34:6–7 is very likely the apex of divine self-revelation in the OT.99

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96 Young-Jae Lee, “A Study in the Composition of the Unit Exodus 31.18–34.35 as the Centre of the Centre of the Pentateuch: A Synchronic and Diachronic Reading of the Text” (PhD diss., Aberdeen University, 2004).
97 Harmon, “Exodus 34:6–7: A Hermeneutical Key.”
2.1.2.d. Foundational Text for Old Testament Theology

Given all this, it is no surprise that some scholars have made prominent use of 34:6–7 in developing a theology of the OT. Aquinas, influenced by Maimonides, argued that the revelation of the name of God in Exodus was fundamental to all other revelations to OT prophets, that the “entire Old Testament centres around the revelation of God’s essence … to Moses.”\(^{100}\) While Aquinas tended to focus on the revelation of the divine name in Exod 3:14, with its heritage of philosophical interpretations, a stronger case can be made for a focus on Exodus 34:6–7—which William Propp describes as “one long divine name,” “Yahweh’s full name … which he has been progressively revealing to humanity and Israel.”\(^{101}\) Christopher Seitz has argued for “the centrality of God’s personal name for any theological account of the Old Testament,” and Fretheim points to Exod 34:6–7, a “virtual exegesis of this name”\(^{102}\) and a “confessional statement … a truth-claim regarding the kind of God active in Israel’s life” which “provides a hermeneutical key to the story.”\(^{103}\) Fretheim explains the necessity of such statements for OT theology:

Through much of [the 20th] century, confessional recitals of God’s mighty acts in Israel’s history (e.g., Deut 26:59–; Josh 24:21–3) have been thought to provide the clue to Israel’s God-talk. These recitals are important in assessing the God of the narratives, but they are insufficient, for they do not often make clear what kind of God is acting…. That which provides for the continuity between past and future is not Israel’s story. Rather, it is basic convictions regarding God. These convictions can be seen clearly in the most oft-repeated Old Testament confession regarding God, quoted above, Exod. 34:6–7 (and its parallels).\(^{104}\)

In his brief introductory essay on “The Theology of the Old Testament” in the ESV Study

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\(^{102}\) Fretheim, *Exodus*, 301.

\(^{103}\) Fretheim and Froehlich, *Bible as the Word of God*, 120.

\(^{104}\) Fretheim and Froehlich, *Bible as the Word of God*, 121.
Bible, Jack Collins takes Exod 34:6–7 as a starting point in presenting the “fundamental character of God.” Hermann Spieckermann, Walter Brueggemann, and James Hamilton have all offered extensive outworkings of OT theology which center on Exod 34:6–7. Brueggemann describes the passage as an example of the OT’s “most characteristic speech about God,” “the speech to which Israel ‘regresses’ in times of most acute crisis,” and therefore a proper “beginning place for Old Testament theology.” Hamilton speaks of the revelation of Yahweh’s character in Exod 34:6–7 as the “gravitational lodestone which held together the stories [the biblical authors] told, the songs they sang, and the instructions they gave” and which establishes “the center of biblical theology.”

2.2. The Marginalization of the Phrase “Visiting Iniquity of Fathers against Sons”

Thus, the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” occurs twice in the book of Exodus in what are, arguably, Exodus’ two most prominent passages. Given the prominence of these passages, it is strange how customary it has been for interpreters to isolate the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” from these narrative and rhetorical contexts and to either ignore it or marginalize it. This has been true both in academic biblical scholarship and in popular Christian and Jewish religious practice.

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2.2.1. Marginalization and Neglect of the Phrase in Biblical Studies

The very works of OT theology which promote the centrality of Exod 34:6–7, for example, often discard 34:7b: “yet he will certainly will not neglect punishment, visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons and against sons of sons, against the third and the fourth generation.” Fretheim prizes Exod 34:6–7 as the chief example of “truth-claims regarding the kind of God active in Israel’s life” which can act as a hermeneutical key to the scriptural story, but he then quotes Yahweh’s self-description in Exod 34:6–7 without the closing phrase about visiting iniquity.109 His paraphrased summary of this creedal statement—“God is a loving father, always”—is notably one-sided and even draws criticism on this account from Fretheim’s co-author.110 Spieckermann gives more discussion to 34:7b, but he views it as a late Deuteronomic expansion to justify the severity of the exile.111 What he values in Exod 34:6–7 is the beginning of a canonical trajectory away from texts and theologies which interrelate wrath and mercy toward those in which God’s loving nature is so prominent that wrath is simply excluded, left behind.112 For Spieckermann, then, the central piece for OT theology is the Gnadenformel, comprised only of 34:6–7a.113

Exodus 34:6–7 is at times promoted as such a crystallizing and definitive statement of God’s character that it can be used to deny divine retributive punishment altogether—this in spite

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109 Fretheim and Froehlich, *Bible as the Word of God*, 120.

110 Fretheim and Froehlich, *Bible as the Word of God*, 131. Here Froehlich responds: “Apologetic zeal gives in too quickly to the instincts of contemporary mentalities without allowing room for their critique by the biblical witness. The author concludes that the responsible discernment of the center of the Scriptures points to the ‘real God’ as the God of love, of affirmation, of mercy and grace. This God, of course, has been part of the church’s proclamation all along, but the descriptions also cater directly to the religious instincts of our generation. Bonhoeffer calls it ‘cheap grace.’ Fretheim wants to assure this generation that they have nothing to fear, that this image of God indeed is the ‘constant.’ The biblical talk about God’s wrath and indignation, according to him, is not of the same order; it is ‘contingent,’ and therefore dispensable, not part of the essence.”


113 This tendency is captured by the article title of Andreas Michel, “Ist mit der ‘Gnadenformel’ von Ex 34,6(+7?) der Schlüssel zu einer Theologie des Alten Testaments gefunden?” BN 118 (2003): 110–23.
of the fact that 34:7b explicitly ascribes “not neglecting punishment” and “visiting iniquity” to Yahweh. Such an application of 34:6–7 can only be made by ignoring or marginalizing v. 7b. In rejecting the theological validity of problematic OT passages of divine punishment and retribution, C. S. Cowles reasons:

To do this is to bask in the glow and glory of the one who is ‘for us’ and not ‘against us’ (Rom. 8:31); a God who is ‘the LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin’ (Ex. 34:6–7).

Eric Seibert confronts passages which speak of God’s wrath, judgment, or the violent overthrow of his enemies with a call to “probe, question, and even challenge what we read in the Bible” when it does not align with “Israel’s core confession about the character of God … as one who is ‘merciful and gracious’ (Exod. 34:6).”

Since the late 1980s, there has been a stream of articles which highlight the theological significance of Exod 34:6–7 and which emphasize its dual accent on divine mercy and divine judgment. The majority of these studies, however, pay scant attention to the visiting phrase, and the phrase does not shape their theological appropriation of the passage in any discernible way.

The imbalance between the narrative prominence of the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers” and the interpretive attention paid it is especially apparent in a number of commentaries on

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Exodus or the Pentateuch which ignore the phrase altogether. In the commentary of Martin Noth, after a brief consideration of the source history of 34:6–7, the explanation of this passage is limited to the observation that it is “an addition which is made up of customary, stereotyped phrases.”

J. Plastaras offers no reflection on the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” under either Exod 20 or 34. Hyatt does not quote, mention, or comment on Exod 20:5b–6. On Exod 34, he mentions the important revelation of God’s character in 34:6, but ignores 34:7. Everett Fox has no comment on the phrase in Exod 20:5, and on 34:7 notes only that third and fourth generation “may mean an entire household, that is, generally the largest number of generations alive at one time,” citing Clements. In his recent commentary, Mark Smith notes only that “the motivation clause in [20:]5b–6 appears in longer form in 34:6–7, reflecting an older liturgical context”; and on 34:6–7 he comments only that these verses show “hope for divine compassion even as divine justice is acknowledged.”

In his exposition of the Pentateuch, Oswald Allis cites Exod 20:5–6 only in a brief comment on love and fear as motives for obedience; he ignores 34:6–7 altogether. Victor Hamilton discusses the prohibition of images in Exod 20, but ignores 20:5–6. Lohfink’s Theology of the Pentateuch does not mention Exod 34:6–7, nor does he interact with the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5.

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120 Hyatt, Exodus, 225.
125 Norbert Lohfink, Theology of the Pentateuch: Themes of the Priestly Narrative and Deuteronomy, trans.
their narrative prominence, it is particularly surprising that Sailhamer’s *The Pentateuch as Narrative* provides little reflection on Exod 20:5–6 in its narrative context and barely mentions 34:6–7, other than that here “a special emphasis is given to the importance of God’s grace.” In citing Exod 34:6–7, Sailhamer breaks off before the visiting phrase, simply omitting it.\(^{126}\)

Even an elementary Hebrew grammar illustrates this tendency to neglect the visiting phrase. The textbook by Gary Pratico and Miles Van Pelt contains a series of brief excurses on three Exodus passages that are “essential for understanding the revelation and meaning of God’s covenant name (יהוה)”—Exod 3:13–15; 6:2–8; and 34:5–7.\(^{127}\) Having promised a discussion of 34:5–7, however, the excursus dedicated to this passage prints the Hebrew text only of 34:5–6, and the linguistic and theological commentary which follows addresses only v. 6. “With these words [v.6], God himself reveals those attributes of his character that define his relationship with his chosen people.” An additional paragraph is devoted to the ensuing prayer of Moses and Yahweh’s response (vv. 9–10), but the attributes of God in v. 7 (which includes the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons”) are ignored entirely.

2.2.2. Marginalization and Neglect of the Phrase in Synagogue and Church

The confusion over the meaning of this phrase is enabled and masked by the general disregard shown it not only in academic biblical theology, as discussed above, but also in the teaching and worship of the religions which look to Exodus as sacred Scripture: Judaism and Christianity. If there are no deep investments at stake in the phrase in either scholarship or piety, there is little compulsion to clarify or to justify an interpretation of the passage.

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While Judaism has traditionally afforded a privileged place to Exod 34:6–7 in its prayers, branding these verses the Thirteen Attributes, the closing words of v. 7b are not included in many modern articulations of this traditional liturgical formula. Jacob Milgrom notes:

This formula is basic to the penitential prayers of the Jewish liturgy. Strikingly, however, only the first part of the formula is quoted. Moreover, the quotation stops with nakkeh, ‘remit (punishment),’ splitting off the rest of the phrase lo’ yenakkeh, ‘He does not remit,’ and thereby totally reversing its actual meaning from ‘He does not remit all punishment’ to ‘He does remit punishment.’ Thus it seems that the rabbis have not only quoted selectively but have even done violence to the text.

Milgrom goes on to argue that the rabbis are following “good biblical precedent” on this point, since the formula surfaces a number of times in the canon, often in truncated form without the punishment language. Leslie Brisman not only defends this curtailment of v. 7b in the Thirteen Attributes, but he also expresses his preference that the “vulgar” ending within Exodus 34:6–7, which is likely a later insertion of an imperceptive theologian, be normed by the liturgical formula.

Within Christian liturgy, neither Exod 20:2–6 nor 34:6–7 play prominent roles. Widespread

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128 Articulations and enumerations of the Thirteen Attributes vary (although the number thirteen seems to remain stable), and so the precise termination point varies as well. W. Gunther Plaut, *Exodus*, The Torah: A Modern Commentary (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1983), 396–97, has the thirteenth attribute as ונקה לאר ינקה, translates this “yet he does not remit all punishment,” and comments, “There are limits to his mercy.” His listing does not mention the “visiting” of sins. Benno Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus*, trans. Walter Jacob (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1992), 984–85, discusses the “famous thirteen Talmudic attributes” and favors the division of S. D. Luzzatto, which strikes a completely different balance. In Luzzatto’s enumeration, attributes 7–9 mention the forgiveness of the three different sin terms in Exod 34:7 individually, tagging the phrase ונקה לא ינקה on to each, and attributes 10–13 each mention the visiting of the iniquity of fathers upon sons (10), sons of sons (11), the third generation (12), and the fourth generation (13).


131 Leslie Brisman, “On the Divine Presence in Exodus,” in *Exodus*, ed. Harold Bloom, MCI (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 121, “The last phrase is always translated along the lines of ‘He will not utterly forgive,’ or ‘He will by no means clear the guilty,’ on the assumption that it introduces the following qualification to God’s mercy: ‘He visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.’ But I wonder if such a qualification is not a later insertion on the part of a theologian who could make no sense of God’s presence and God’s mercy. Solution? ‘God is always “present” in the sense that He registers and takes action; but He chooses not to strike back with perfect aim and sometimes hits as far away as the third or fourth generation.’ I paraphrase as vulgarly as I can because I believe the thought vulgar and no part of the [Thirteen] Attributes.”
three year lectionary cycles assign Exod 20:1–17 or 1–20 to the Third Sunday in Lent. Exodus 34:6–7, on the other hand, finds no such regular public reading, except in the Roman Catholic Church where it is appointed for Holy Trinity Sunday in Year C. As if to confirm the present point, however, this reading is limited to Exod 34:4–6, 8–9, with v. 7 simply omitted with its phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons.”

In Reformed catechisms, Exod 20:5–6 is cited as part of the second commandment against graven images. However, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Shorter Catechism offer no comment or explanation of the transgenerational elements here, and the Westminster Larger Catechism remarks only that God labels as haters those who break this command and threatens “to punish them unto divers generations.”

Among Lutherans, Exod 20:5–6 has some currency due to Luther’s use of it as the “Close of the Commandments” in his Small Catechism. There, he begins his explanation of each commandment with the words, “We should fear and love God so that we…,” a formula which Luther draws from the twofold dynamic of Exod 20:5–6. He cites these verses in the catechism and explains:

God threatens to punish all who break these Commandments. Therefore we are to fear His wrath and not disobey these commandments. However, God promises grace and every good thing to all those who keep these commandments. Therefore we also are to love and trust him and gladly act according to his commands.

Elsewhere, Luther freely dismisses certain elements of the Decalogue as addressed only to the “Jews” at Sinai, and therefore not binding on Christians (e.g., graven images and Sabbath

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132 Heidelberg Catechism, Question 92; Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 49; Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 107. The Heidelberg Catechism cites the Exodus wording of all ten commandments under Question 92. There, Exod 20:4–6 is quoted as the second commandment. However, in explaining this commandment against idolatry under Questions 96–98, nothing is mentioned or explained regarding Exod 20:5b–6.


134 Martin Luther, Small Catechism, in Kolb and Wengert, eds., Book of Concord, 354 [SC I:22].
observance), but here he channels the address of God in Exod 20:5–6 directly to catechumens. Still, Luther’s explanation of these verses treats v. 5 as a generic threat of punishment and offers no explanation why or how God will punish the iniquity of fathers upon sons. Thus, while Luther’s Catechism suggests that the phrase is a valid and vital characterization of God with which Christians must reckon, it does not go very far to aid such reckoning.

The sizable Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) does little with Exod 20:5–6, even in its treatment of the Decalogue. Under the doctrine of God, the CCC does have a well-developed series of paragraphs describing the revelation of the name, character, and uniqueness of God in Exodus, beginning at the burning bush and culminating in the theophany of Exod 34:6–7. When referencing this latter passage, however, the CCC draws attention only to 34:5–6 and 34:9:

When Moses asks to see his glory, God responds “I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name ‘the LORD’ [YHWH].” Then the Lord passes before Moses and proclaims, “YHWH, YHWH, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness”; Moses then confesses that the LORD is a forgiving God. The divine name, “I Am” or “He Is,” expresses God’s faithfulness: despite the faithlessness of men’s sin and the punishment it deserves, he keeps “steadfast love for thousands.”

Throughout the CCC, no reference is made to God “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons,” so that the Roman Catholic catechism, like its Protestant cousins, has no practical theological role for Exod 20:5b or 34:7b.

2.3. Factors Contributing to the Marginalization of the Phrase

I have argued that the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” appears as a constitutive element in two Exodus passages of the utmost literary and theological significance. In the previous section, I have documented a broad neglect and decontextualization of the phrase

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which does not seem consistent with the theological weight and literary centrality of the phrase in its biblical usage. A number of factors have contributed to this marginalization of Exod 20:5 and 34:7, including trends within biblical studies proper, the modern proclivity across disciplines for developmental explanatory frameworks, and commonly held moral and metaphysical assumptions.

2.3.1. Classical Source Criticism and the Biblical Theology Movement

Without pretending that the neglect of and distaste for our phrase is a modern phenomenon, it is worth noting two trends in OT scholarship which have marginalized Exod 20:5b and 34:7b. First, source criticism devalued both verses as late additions. Scholars propose various provenances and histories for the Decalogue in Exod 20, but most schemes (1) involve an original series (or two original series) of short commands later supplemented with explanatory or motivational clauses and (2) view 20:5b–6 and especially the phrases “for those who hate/love me” as a Deuteronomic gloss. Likewise, Yahweh’s Name-speech in 34:6–7 has received little attention from source critics because the important clues for isolating sources and redaction are seen as lying in the narrative events preceding it and in the covenant laws following it, the latter classically designated the Cultic Decalogue or J-Decalogue, while “the majority of modern commentators take it for granted that [34:6–7] is a foreign intrusion in the present text.”

Second, the recital theology of G. Ernest Wright and Gerhard von Rad, so foundational to


the biblical theology movement of the mid-twentieth century, emphasized the revelatory value of
God’s *actions* in history and the importance of certain brief *historical* credos. Donald Gowan
notes that, “One reason scholars have tended to overlook this creed [Exod 34:6–7] is that it does
not at all fit the recent emphasis on Old Testament theology as the recital of the mighty
redeeming acts of God.” James Barr was an early critic of this movement, emphasizing that “a
God who acted in history would be a mysterious and superpersonal fate if the action were not
linked with this verbal communication.” Fretheim likewise cautions:

> Through much of this century, confessional recitals of God’s mighty acts in Israel’s
> history (e.g., Deut. 25:5–9; Josh 24:2–13) have been thought to provide the clue to
> Israel’s God-talk. These recitals are important in assessing the God of the narratives,
> but they are insufficient, for they do not often make clear what kind of God is
> acting.

And Brueggemann emphasizes that Exod 34:6–7 provides “a credo of adjectives about the
character of Yahweh, very different in texture from the credo of verbs on which von Rad has
focused our attention.” In stark contrast to Brueggemann’s more recent works, the neglect of
Exod 34:6–7 in von Rad’s influential *OT Theology* is almost total: von Rad assesses Exod 34:6
as “theologically much less ambiguous” than Exod 3:14 and then has nothing more to say about
34:6–7.

These factors help to explain how our phrase, uttered in two of Yahweh’s greatest speeches
in the Pentateuch, fell between the cracks in OT scholarship during the dominance of source-

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von Rad, “The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch,” in *From Genesis to Chronicles: Explorations in Old
Testament Theology*, ed. K. C. Hanson, trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 1–58; *Old

140 Donald E. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* (Louisville:


142 Fretheim and Froehlich, *Bible as the Word of God*, 121.


critical concerns and the biblical theology movement.\textsuperscript{145}

2.3.2. Developmental Views of the Phrase as Primitive, Superseded

There are also more fundamental and longstanding factors, however, which have served to render the phrase ineffectual and voiceless. The image of a jealous God, visiting iniquity of fathers against sons, is often relegated to an early and outmoded stage in various developmental schemes. Such schemes often originated in the “naïve belief (which captured the world of anthropology, ancient history and classics in the nineteenth century) in a progress of mankind from childishness to intelligence.”\textsuperscript{146}

From a socio-developmental view, within certain models of societal and legal evolution, Exod 20:5b is branded primitive, pre-logical, and pre-civilized, so that one line of Israel’s inevitable, natural progress can be plotted along the arc from communal and transgenerational ideas to individualism and personal legal rights and responsibilities.\textsuperscript{147} From this vantage, “value


\textsuperscript{147}Henry Sumner Maine, \textit{Ancient Law: Its Connection with the Early History of Society, and Its Relation to Modern Ideas}, 4th ed. (London: John Murray, 1870), 134, 168, writes, “At the outset, the peculiarities of law in its most ancient state lead us irresistibly to the conclusion that it took precisely the same view of the family group which is taken of individual men by the systems of rights and duties now prevalent throughout Europe…. The movement of the progressive societies has been uniform in one respect. Through all its course it has been distinguished by the gradual dissolution of family dependency and the growth of individual obligation in its place. The Individual is steadily substituted for the Family, as the unit of which civil laws take account.” Maine’s description of ancient “corporate” law was influential in OT studies via H. Wheeler Robinson, \textit{The Christian Doctrine of Man} (Edinburgh: T \& T Clark, 1911); \textit{Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel} (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964). For a contemporary salute to individualism as the essence of a free, democratic society, and a warning against regressive cultural influences (especially Islamic) which would draw societies back into a corporate, “clan” framework, see Mark S. Weiner, \textit{The Rule of the Clan: What an Ancient Form of Social Organization Reveals about the Future of Individual Freedom} (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013). Weiner, writing for a popular audience, explicitly embraces the socio-developmental axioms of Henry Maine. He argues for the validity of Maine’s analysis with broad-ranging illustrations of clan and clan-like dynamics from the Nuer of South Sudan, medieval Iceland, the Palestinian Authority, modern Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and the Philippines. Weiner’s unique thesis is that the notion that a strong central state power is a threat to individual liberty is not only false but completely backward, at least in this sense: the rise of strong, central governments is necessary to define and legally maintain and enforce individual rights and individual identities in society. In the absence of such a strong state
belongs to the individual and it is the individual who is the sole bearer of moral responsibility.… Collective responsibility is … barbarous.”

From a biblio-developmental view, the canon of the Hebrew Bible grows with internal reflection of newer writings upon older, involving the re-interpretation, re-formulation, or even rejection of previous views. In relation to our phrase, Deuteronomic and prophetic hands are credited with a shift toward individual ethical accountability, employing textual strategies to intentionally neutralize or abrogate the ‘visiting’ phrase. This approach is exhibited already in the Talmud: “Moses pronounced an adverse sentence on Israel—the visiting of the iniquities of fathers on the children—and it was revoked by Ezekiel” (Makkot 24a). And Gerhard von Rad expresses the mainstream perspective of mid-twentieth century scholarship when he writes:

Ezekiel [18] countered the complaint that Jahweh lumped the generations together in wholesale acts of judgment by roundly asserting the contrary—each individual stands in direct relationship to God, and Jahweh has the keenest interest in the individual.… In advancing this view, Ezekiel abandoned the old collective way of thinking. How modern and revolutionary the prophet appears here!… Jeremiah too has heard it said that the children had to bear their fathers’ guilt, and he too used what was a radically individualistic view to counter the saying (Jer. 31:29f).

T. C. Foote stresses the subsequent degeneration of Israel’s thought after the exile, so that in spite of the “healthier sentiment” expressed by Deut 24:16, Jer 31, and Ezek 18, “the lower standard prevailed, it may be through Babylonian influence.” Jeremiah 32:18, for example, in which Yahweh “repays the iniquity of the fathers into the lap of their children after them,”

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149 Two extensive treatments of such inner-biblical (re-)interpretation are Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*; and Bernard M. Levinson, *Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). However, a general awareness of these inner-biblical dynamics has always been present among biblical scholars.

150 Cited by Sarna, *Exodus*, 111.

reveals “the remarkable ethical change when compared with the true Jeremiah [in 31:29–30].”

Thus, the concept of Yahweh “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” is relegated to early texts with primitive thought or to later texts in which Israel’s thought had degenerated. This bibliodevelopmental view is sometimes joined with an emphasis on a dominant canonical image of Yahweh which can and should trump such fringe portrayals of God in the OT. Fretheim, for example, suggests:

More generally, the larger biblical portrait stands over against an image of God as an abuser of children. One must be prepared to use the principle ‘Scripture interprets Scripture,’ in such a way that the Scripture interprets itself against itself. The internal biblical capacity to be self-critical provides a paradigm for all readers of Scripture.”

From a religio-developmental view, Jack Miles asserts that a doctrine of transgenerational punishment was necessary to ancient morality structures since the early Israelites did not believe in life after death—if you do not reap the punishments your misdeeds deserve during your lifetime, then you will receive them after your death, your children representing your “extended self.”

Pieter Middelkoop roots our visiting phrase in the “inveterate belief of natural religion in a revenge-taking God.” At the other end of the presumed religio-developmental timeline, portrayals of God such as Exod 20:5b and 34:7b are sometimes normed and trumped by the person of Jesus Christ, with his proclamation about and personal manifestation of God’s character. Seibert suggests that “Old Testament portrayals that correspond to the God Jesus

152 Theodore C. Foote, “Visiting Sins upon the Innocent,” JAOS 28 (1907): 316. Foote, 309, aims to “call attention to a remarkable instance of a more advanced ethical concept yielding to an inferior one which thereupon dominates the subject for nearly twenty-five centuries.” According to Foote, 315, both Exod 20:5 and 34:7 are contributions of this late, relapsed thinking. Deut 24:16, on the other hand, is the first biblical pronouncement on the subject and, against a presumed ANE background of corporate punishment, stands as “a highly ethical statute” which is “far more just.”

153 Fretheim and Froehlich, Bible as the Word of God, 107.


revealed can be trusted as reliable reflections of God’s character, while those that fall short [those that are “contradictory” or “excessively violent and harsh”] should be regarded as distortions of the same.”

Thus, various developmental frameworks have been constructed and employed in which our phrase is primitivized, abrogated, and superseded. Such frameworks, by necessity, construe Exod 20:5b and 34:7b in the most absolute, unnuanced, and decontextualized sense, in order to establish in starkest terms one pole of the developmental spectrum. This has served both to obscure the contextual meaning and to diminish the theological validity of the expression.

2.3.3. Moral Aversion and Metaphysical Assumptions

Even apart from such frameworks, however, readers often encounter our phrase with immediate aversion. Many scholars have expressed ethical objections to the idea of divine retributive punishment in general, and others certainly to transgenerational divine retribution in particular—the phrase is “unfortunate [and] offensive” and “against all equity,” and “elemental notions of fairness recoil at this thought.” It is “a patently unjust doctrine.” Coupled with the

156 Seibert, Disturbing Divine Behavior, 12, 50, 172–73.


158 Annemarie Ohler, The Bible Looks at Fathers, trans. Omar Kaste (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 95; Hengstenberg, Dissertations, 2:446, citing the view of Immanuel Kant; Thomas W. Mann, Deuteronomy, WestBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 150. Examples could be multiplied extensively. Consider Noth, Exodus, 163: “It is evidently not realized here [Exod 20:5] that this gives rise to the problem of a ‘just’ individual divine retribution.” George Jackson, The Ten Commandments (New York: Revell, 1898), 54: “Men have read in [Exod 20:5] the blind vengeance of a vindictive Deity, the unreasoning fury of one who, when he has been wronged, strikes out wildly, not knowing or caring on whom his blows might fall.”
categorization of the phrase as primitive, such ethical objections pronounce Exod 20:5b a “time-bound declaration,” recognizing that “the ethical words [of Scripture] are limited to their times and their places” and must be rejected if they are “damaging, and not life-affirming, in a contemporary circumstance.” Kaminsky suggests that such objections stem “from a larger Enlightenment bias that places greater value upon moral systems that emphasize the individual.” However, there is nothing exclusively modern in ethical objections to the phrase. Ancients as diverse as Cicero and Gregory of Nyssa have expressed moral abhorrence toward punishment of children for the sins of fathers, and Exod 20:5 was paraded by Marcion as self-evident indication of the wanton character of the OT God.

Finally, metaphysical assumptions—whether acknowledged or not—often exert decisive pressure on readings of Exod 20:5 and 34:7 and contribute to the dismissal or theological marginalization of our phrase. Many scholars, for example, exclude a priori any notion of “interventionist” or “supernatural” divine action in the world, an assumption that undergirds

159 Levinson, Legal Revision, 87.
162 Joel S. Kaminsky, Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 180. From the vantage of Western individualism, of course, it is not merely divine transgenerational punishment in Exod 20:5 which causes offense, but even Yahweh’s demand of exclusive worship in 20:3. Hector Avalos, “Yahweh is a Moral Monster,” in The Christian Delusion: Why Faith Fails, ed. John W. Loftus (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2010), 221, writes, “One could easily argue that the denial of religious freedom is at the ‘moral heart’ of the OT. It is the very first of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:3…. The intolerance of other religions is found in every single biblical book…. In contrast, most Near Eastern religions valued religious diversity and allowed the worship of almost any god people chose. This freedom to worship would actually be more consistent with American ideals.”
our modern (and post-modern) historical-scientific outlook. Dale Patrick discusses reading strategies and theological approaches in light of the “cultural gap [which] may make the modern reader of Scripture skeptical of its depiction of divine interventions.” Patrick puts it plainly: “What was realism for them seems unrealistic to us.” The spirit of this outlook is captured nicely by popular author and humorist A. J. Jacobs: “Do I believe in a traditional biblical God? Well, not in the sense that the ancient Israelites believed in Him. I could never make the full leap to accepting a God who rolls up His sleeves and fiddles with our lives.” For C. H. Dodd, the view of a provoked God working calamities in the world is not consistent with “the highest

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165 George M. Marsden, The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 18, “[By the 1980’s] Despite the attacks on scientific objectivity, and despite increased tolerance for some ideological perspectives, the prejudices against traditional religious perspectives as violating canons of academic respectability were stronger than ever. Old secular liberals and postmoderns, despite their differences, typically agreed that acceptable theories about humans or reality must begin with the premise that the universe is a self-contained entity.” Joseph Ratzinger, Scandalöser Realismus? Gott handelt in der Geschichte, 3rd ed. (Bad Tölz: Urfeld, 2005), 7, describes this posture as a new Gnosticism, which restricts God to the realm of the subjective and denies divine activity in the real world. In his 1988 Erasmus lecture, “Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: On the Question of the Foundations and Approaches to Exegesis Today,” in Biblical Interpretation in Crisis: The Ratzinger Conference on Bible and Church, ed. Richard John Neuhaus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 2, Ratzinger describes the impact of this metaphysical assumption on biblical exegesis, when God is no longer “a factor to be dealt with in historical events. But since God and divine action permeate the entire biblical account of history, one is obliged to begin with a complicated anatomy of the scriptural word. On one hand there is the attempt to unravel the various threads (of the narrative) so that in the end one holds in one’s hands what is the ‘really historical,’ which means the purely human element in events. On the other hand, one has to try to show how it happened that the idea of God became interwoven through it all.”

166 Patrick, Rendering of God, 88–89.

human ideals of personality,” so that the Bible’s language of divine wrath and punishment can only be retained as metaphorical descriptions of “an inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe.” Propp, in discussing the historicity of Exodus, notes that everyone has his or her biases; he lists some of his own, including his sense that the Torah is an unconvincing historical witness because it
describes unnatural occurrences so bizarre that, were they the testimony of a modern witness, I would unhesitatingly consider him/her to be schizophrenic or ‘under the influence.’ Because of the peculiar history of biblical research as a subdiscipline of theology, it is embarrassingly necessary to insist that the supernatural has no more place in academic scholarship than it has in the courtroom.

Such assumptions require an interpretation of God visiting iniquity of fathers against sons in which God effects consequences for sins only in and through natural means (secondary causes), through the ongoing moral order knit into the creation. The possibility of divine “visiting” as a decisive overturning of the ongoing order, a manifest coming down or breaking in of God’s will and power, so that the consequences which are experienced are distinct from the natural results and outgrowth of iniquity, is excluded. This has resulted in “modernized” understandings of the phrase as signifying the natural tendency for traits and habits to be passed between generations or for the natural consequences of parents’ negligence and failings to be suffered by their children. While such observations are morally instructive, they hardly fit the

168 C. H. Dodd, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans (London: Fontana Books, 1959), 47–50, elaborates this view in a discussion of Paul’s use of “the wrath of God” in Rom 1:18, positing a three-stage development from primitive OT to prophetic OT to mature NT views of the relationship between divine anger and calamities in the world, and finally advocating this mature outlook of Jesus and Paul. He concludes: “There is something impersonal about ‘the Wrath of God’ from the beginning, and something incapable of being wholly personalized in the development of religious ideas…. The idea of an angry God is a first attempt to rationalize the shuddering awe which men feel before the incalculable possibilities of appalling disaster inherent in life, but it is an attempt which breaks down as the rational element of religion advances. In the long run we cannot think with full consistency of God in terms of the highest human ideals of personality and yet attribute to Him the irrational passion of anger.”


170 Cassuto, Commentary on Exodus, 243, rejects such explanations of 20:5b and 34:7b as “merely a modernization.” Foote, “Visiting Sins,” 309, notes with both approval and honesty, “It is true that a way has been found of ameliorating the injustice by confining the visitation to hereditary ills, but this is modern.” Examples of such a tendency abound and will be discussed further in the following chapter under §3.1.1.c.
contexts of profound theological self-revelation of Yahweh in which the phrase occurs in Exodus; such observations are so obvious and accessible to common sense and everyday experience that, if this is all that is expressed in this phrase, it is small wonder that Exod 20:5 and 34:7 have fallen into disuse.

Another common metaphysical assumption excludes a priori God’s speaking in any literal sense to the people of Israel or to Moses, even in episodes such as Exod 20 and 34:6–7 in which the theophanic appearance and direct self-revelatory speech of God are central to the texts’ claims. It has been suggested that the characterization of God as jealous and visiting iniquity is “a time-bound declaration; that is, perhaps something of Israel’s unworthy exclusivism and pride is reflected here.”171 To this, one might object that Exod 20:5 and 34:7 are presented not as Israel’s words about God but as God’s own self-description, spoken directly by God in his theophanic presence on Mount Sinai. Ashby describes well the claims of the Exodus text: “Israel did not produce the Torah either by her own efforts or by the ingenuity of Moses. The Torah and the Ten Commandments owe their importance solely to the God who appeared at Sinai.”172 Yet it is broadly assumed that this could not have been the case, or that, if it were, the extant texts do not record these words in any direct sense.173

Scholarly investigations of the provenance of Exod 20:5–6 or 34:6–7 have been content to search exclusively within Israelite social settings, without any perceived need to offer arguments against an origin in historical divine speech (the origin suggested by the text in which they stand

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173 Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. Leo G. Perdue, 2 vols., OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 1:200, writes, “It should not be overlooked that we have in the Old Testament texts only words about revelations of God, but not the actual revelations of God themselves, even when the evidence of the Old Testament texts treats the self-revelation of God.” The only ground which Preuss offers for this assumption is itself a further assumption: the OT texts were “written mostly, not by those who were participants in these ‘revelations,’ but by later witnesses.”
The words chosen are recognizable by us as deeply meaningful, but they are all generalizations of past experience as interpreted in faith. When God pronounces his Name to Moses, as he passes the latter by after hiding him in the cleft of the rock and covering him with his hand (33:21–23), he then quotes what appears to be a liturgical confession. The source or setting of the confession is unknown. It is composed of a series of apparently old liturgical expressions, whether put together by the Yahwist himself, borrowed from an unknown liturgical setting, or already present in the epic of the Tribal League which the Yahwist is putting into writing for the first time — all this is a matter which we simply have no means to decide.

According to Wright, we do not know for sure “the source or setting” of the liturgical confession given expression here, but it is self-evident, apparently, that the character of God in the text is simply quoting Israel’s existing conceptions of Yahweh. Brueggemann is also typical of this standard assessment, which is really a standard assumption: “This is no doubt a highly liturgical formula reflecting Israel’s mature and disciplined theological reflection.”

In her 1995 dissertation on Exod 34:6–7, Susan Marie Pigott surveys the arguments for frequently posited origins for this formula: cultic, wisdom, Deuteronomic. She presents arguments against each, and instead suggests a fourth possibility: the formula originated in its present narrative context based on “an actual encounter between Moses and Yahweh, an encounter that was so significant it was recorded in the narrative of the golden calf and preserved

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174 Baker, “Finger of God,” 1–4, speaks of “various attempts to cloud the issue, by trying to find a way of saying that these words come from God without him having to actually speak them.” Baker cites David J. A. Clines, “The Ten Commandments, Reading from Left to Right,” in Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible, JSOTSup 205 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 26–45, who categorizes such efforts as follows. Scholars either (a) say that someone else spoke or composed the Decalogue, without acknowledging that this implies that God did not do so; (b) change the subject and focus instead on the debate about whether or not the Decalogue goes back to the time of Moses; (c) imply that the text does not intend to mean that God actually spoke the Decalogue; or (d) pretend God actually did speak these commands even though it is clear they do not believe it. Clines, in contrast, emphasizes that the text claims that God himself audibly spoke the Decalogue at Sinai, but also acknowledges that he cannot accept this as true.


in the cult by means of a standard formula.”177 While Pigott’s work has been cited on a number of other counts, this particular thesis, that the origin of Exod 34:6–7 is best accounted for in words which God actually spoke to Moses, has been roundly ignored for over twenty years. There is no necessity to consider Pigott’s proposal or to debate it, because the premise that God does not literally speak can be and is simply assumed.

And yet the prominence of Yahweh speaking in these passages is undeniable, so that scholars with a theological interest have found it necessary to explain (assert, really), for certain audiences, what the expression “God said” actually means in the biblical narrative. I beg the reader’s patience in quoting at length from Thomas Mann’s popular commentary on Deuteronomy. Here he is reflecting on the Decalogue:

What do I mean by those two apparently simple words, “God said”? The Deuteronomic emphasis on Moses as the mediator of the covenant between God and Israel, and thus as the mediator of God’s word, suggests an answer to this question. The word of God is a mediated word. It comes through human words. This means that the expression “God said” is a metaphor. For at least a hundred years, most biblical scholarship has operated with the conviction that the words “God said” should not be taken literally. The expression does not mean that a supernatural being having the physical organs of mouth, tongue, vocal chords, and lungs actually spoke Hebrew words out of the sky, and that people (in this case, Moses) heard the words, just as they would hear the words of another human being. Instead, most biblical scholars prefer to think of those words as metaphorical. A metaphor is a word or expression that literally denotes one thing but is used in place of another to suggest a likeness between them. The transfer of senses fits only in a poetic, figurative way. To take the expression literally ruins the effect.… The Ten Commandments are human words about God, about what God wants for human society. Thus these words, including the phrase ‘God said,’ are part of the metaphorical picture of God. To take these words literally, as an exact report of an audible voice, would be to misinterpret them.178

177 Pigott, “God of Compassion,” 110.
178 Mann, Deuteronomy, 46–47, 48. Note that biblical scholars have this “conviction” and they “prefer to think of those words as metaphorical.” Mann does not specify how regarding these words as actually being audibly spoken by God to Israel would “ruin the effect” and “misinterpret them,” he simply asserts this. His accent on the agency of Moses is contradicted by the text which emphasizes the later agency of Moses in divine revelation to Israel subsequent to and in contrast to the initial, direct words of Yahweh to Israel in Exod 20, at least in 20:2–6. Such a “metaphorical” reading is certainly not possible for the voice from the cloud in the accounts of Jesus’ transfiguration in the NT Gospels (Matt 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35), which clearly draw upon Sinai imagery and
Bernard Levinson speaks of this kind of “troping” as a “new idea” which Israelite scribes introduced into the ancient world. Thus, they “wiped the genre [of ancient law] clean of mortality by transforming the royal speaker from a human monarch into their divine king, Yahweh.”

Dale Patrick speaks in similar terms and roots this metaphoric move in the sense of unconditional ought … [which] has the force of the voice of God. The people of antiquity were simply reasoning from their hearts when they attributed law to divine command. The Bible raises this sense of sacred duty to a primary experience of God. Even the secular person can imagine hearing the commanding voice from Sinai, though he or she no longer believes there is a Speaker.

Such an emphasis on the human agency and literary invention of divine speech in the Old Testament, even that speech narratively depicted as uniquely uttered by Yahweh himself in self-defining revelation, often leads directly to the further assumption that the reliability of such words is limited, qualified, and subject to our own scrutiny, assessment, and judgment. Fretheim writes:

Human beings, then or now, do not have a perfect perception of how they are to serve God as agents in the world. They are sinful and finite creatures. While it is difficult to evaluate the agents’ perception, it is important to note that the role of divine agents is often expressed in terms of the direct speech of God. Should we understand such direct divine speech in the Old Testament (rare in the New Testament) in less than literal terms? Israel may have put into direct divine speech understandings they had gained through study and reflection rather than an actual hearing of God’s words. And might we say that Israel did not always fully understand?

With fewer question marks than Fretheim, Brian Blount describes God’s revelatory voice as something that cannot be heard by the human ear but rather only encountered by the human spirit, and thus subject to the limitations of those perceiving it there:

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The human spirit is a kind of inner ear. It is the instrument upon which the reverberations of God’s voice make their impact. It is the human spirit that translates what our eyes see, our fingers touch, our noses smell, our bodies experience, and our ears do not hear into the voice of God. That is why even though God does not talk in a way we are accustomed to hearing others talk, we are able to listen to God. God’s voice, then, is like an inaudible whisper—sometimes gentle, sometimes fierce—that jangles the nerves of the human spirit until, tensed and alert, it attends to what it is that God wants to ‘say’. When that spiritual whisper grips the human spirits where they live, it becomes an incarnate Word. God’s eternal voice for all becomes a living Word exclusively for them. God’s whisper takes on flesh. That flesh is the human word of the human disciples who have written our biblical texts. Like all flesh, it is limited, and often the ethical words they have written are also limited to their times and their places. This means that the words of those texts ought to be challenged when we find that they were influenced by their contexts in such a way that they are damaging, and not life-affirming, in a contemporary circumstance.

The assumption that Yahweh cannot or does not speak in audible words, and that Exod 20:5 and 34:7 cannot record Yahweh’s audible speaking to Israel and to Moses at the mountain, has a double impact in marginalizing these passages. First, it has tended to obscure the narrative distinction and theological prominence given to these words as Yahweh’s uniquely spoken and definitive self-revelation discussed at length previously in this chapter, since the “God said” passages and the narrator’s own words are basically leveled out—it is all human reflection and pronouncement regarding Yahweh. Second, such an assumption qualifies and limits the reliability of these characterizations of God, so that those aspects which trouble modern sensibilities can be depreciated as “time-bound” and “not fully understood” or can be reinterpreted in a sense compatible with the interpreter’s notions of God and of justice.

183 Widmer, Moses, God, and the Dynamics, 182, points out the obvious: the text claims that these are “YHWH’s words, not Israel’s credo.” Moberly, Mountain of God, 77, captures the theological ramifications of this distinction: “Men can only call upon the name of God and rehearse his attributes, as they customarily do in the cult, because at the critical moment in Israel’s history Yahweh revealed himself and proclaimed his name first.”
184 Some interpreters seek to maintain space for divine “revelation” impinging upon this human reflection, whether upon the Hebrew authors’ composition or upon the contemporary readers’ understanding. Walter Brueggemann, An Unsettling God: The Heart of the Hebrew Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 3–4, allows: “Even if one is shy about speaking of ‘revelation,’ if one is theologically serious, one can entertain the possibility that human imagination of a constructive kind is led by a revelatory intrusion.” Brueggemann, “Biblical Authority: A Personal Reflection,” in Struggling With Scripture, 24, notes that only in this way can “the text yield something
In summary, then, we have highlighted the incongruity between the narrative and canonical importance of Exod 20:2–6 and 34:6–7, on the one hand, and the lack of careful, contextual interpretive attention and theological appropriation which the visiting phrase in these passages has received, on the other. The project of the present study is to engage in just such a careful, contextual investigation. The goal will be to hear this phrase within its Exodus context and to describe its rhetorical meaning and function within its narrative. The study will proceed with the assumption not only that the visiting phrase is theologically significant, but also that this significance is a significance firmly tethered to its narrative and rhetorical function in the Exodus story.

other than an echo of ourselves.” Others, however, are more absolute in their ascription of divine portrayals and divine speech in the OT to purely human thoughts. J. C. L. Gibson, *Language and Imagery in the OT* (Peabody: MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 138, asserts that OT portrayals of Yahweh “give us an impression of how ancient Israel conceived God, not of course as he is in himself.… The time for knowing him is not yet, but in another life.” Kurt L. Noll, “The Kaleidoscopic Nature of Divine Personality in the Hebrew Bible,” *BibInt* 9 (2001): 1, looks to the social sciences for hypotheses to explain the varied portraits of Yahweh in the Bible: “Each Yahweh text reflects the needs and environmental circumstances of the communities that formulated the text. To paraphrase Emile Durkheim: each Yahweh is a projection onto the heavens of a Yahwistic society.” Here, we are not far from the interpretations of human religion as idealized self-projection suggested by Feuerbach, Freud, and others. In any case, it is helpful to recall the old rejoinder to such approaches offered by J. Alec Motyer, *The Revelation of the Divine Name* (London: Tyndale, 1959), 11: “It is not a serious and responsible treatment of the Old Testament to make it subserve the interests of an evolutionary theory when its fundamental assertion is of the initiative of God in self-revelation; to treat its characters as men with a genius for religion and bent on finding God, when, for the most part, they are shown to us as possessing a genius for apostasy and bent on backsliding; and to talk about man’s need of being educated upward to the knowledge of God, when God’s own assessment of man is that he has sinned in departing from a known ideal and needs to be redeemed.”
CHAPTER THREE

STUDIES RELATED TO EXODUS 20:5 AND 34:7

3.1. The Current Status of the Question

For most studies, the matrix for the interpretation of the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” is not its narrative context within the book of Exodus. Instead, as mentioned in the introduction to this study, the primary touchstones commonly become: (1) ancient Near Eastern conceptions of transgenerational or collective responsibility, (2) moral, legal, philosophical, anthropological, or sociological reflections, (3) later OT narratives which seem to exhibit transgenerational punishment, (4) contrasting OT passages which seem to reject transgenerational punishment, or (5) sapiential reflections on the nature of fathers, families, faith, and fortune.

It is the leap from Exod 20:5 or 34:7 straight to Ezek 18, however, which is the most reflexive and pervasive—and this move is no contemporary innovation. The Talmud observes, “Moses pronounced an adverse sentence on Israel—the visiting of the sins of the fathers upon

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3 Most common are Deut 7:9–10; Deut 24:16; Jer 31:29–30, and Ezek 18.
the children—and it was revoked by Ezekiel.”4 A passage from Gregory of Nyssa’s *The Life of Moses* is also illustrative. When discussing the death of the firstborn sons in Exod 12, Gregory quickly distances this account from God and from actual history:

> How would a concept worthy of God be preserved in the description of what happened if one looked only to the history? The Egyptian acts unjustly, and in his place is punished his newborn child, who in his infancy cannot discern what is good and what is not…. If such a one now pays the penalty of his father’s wickedness, where is justice? Where is piety? Where is holiness? *Where is Ezekiel*, who cries, “The man who has sinned is the man who must die” and “A son is not to suffer for the sins of his father”?5

Amazingly, Gregory does not mention, nor does he wrestle with the fact, that God describes his justice in explicitly transgenerational terms in the book of Exodus itself, in 20:5 and 34:7. Instead, he immediately disqualifies the Exodus dynamic via Ezekiel. Variations on this reading strategy continue to dominate the interpretation of Exod 20:5 and 34:7b to the present.

The neglect of the wider Exodus context for interpreting these passages is also consistent with prevailing assumptions regarding their textual history. While source- and form-critical accounts of Exod 20:5 and 34:7 range widely, there has been some consensus that (1) Exod 34:6–7, rather than Exod 20:5–6, exhibits the most original form of the formulaic language which they share;6 (2) Exod 34:6–7 is brought into its present context from previous

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4 b. Mak. 24a. Solomon Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1909), 187–89, judges that this perspective (the abrogation of Exod 20:5 by Ezek 18) is “the one generally accepted by the Rabbis,” with the exceptions of sufferings brought on by certain great and notable offenses such as Adam’s sin or the golden calf apostasy. Tertullian, *Adv. Marcionem*, II:15, in similar fashion, looks to Ezek 18 to soften Exod 20:5, noting that transgenerational punishment had to be threatened because of Israel’s “hardness,” but that, according to Ezek 18, “after Israel’s hardness, the hardness of the law might also be subdued, and justice no longer judge the nation but individuals.”


6 Robert C. Dentan, “The Literary Affinities of Exodus XXXIV 6f,” *VT* 13 (1963): 34, is an early representative: “It seems clear that Exod. xxxiv 6f, by reason of the fullness of its form as well as by its strategic placement in the unfolding of the Sinai drama, is the original text upon which all the others are dependent.”
culitic/liturgical use in Israel; 7 and (3) Exod 20:5–6, as a motive clause, is a later addition to the originally succinct commands of the Decalogue, 8 borrowed from Exod 34:6–7 and modified for theological reasons by a Deuteronomic redactor. 9

Two interpretive strategies often follow these text-historical judgments. First, the meaning of the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” is sought within the life of ancient Israel or in its ANE milieu (behind the text) without consideration of the meaning or role of the phrase within the Exodus narrative. Second, interpreters invest theological significance in the priority of Exod 34:6–7 and the derivative nature of Exod 20:5–6. 10 Exegetical inquiry now focuses on the

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7 The third-person reference to Yahweh, as well as the broad reuse of the formula throughout the canon, has led to the prevalent assumption of its culitic-liturgical origin. Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *God of the Living: A Biblical Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 132, “Admittedly, this … takes place in third-person speech about YHWH, a circumstance that makes clear that the text was originally employed as a formula to praise YHWH in the cult. In Exodus 34, the formula consciously becomes YHWH’s own speech because, in view of the original sin of idolatry, only God himself can say why and how he will continue to be accessible to Israel.” For a counter assessment, see R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34*, JSOTSup 22 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), 128–31, who argues that 34:6–7 is such a fitting development of its context that an origin within the present narrative is the most likely assumption. Helpful overviews of scholarly proposals regarding the origin of 34:6–7 can be found in Scoralick, “JHWH, JHWH,” 143–45; and Susan Marie Pigott, “God of Compassion and Mercy: An Analysis of the Background, Use and Theological Significance of Exodus 34:6–7,” (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1995), 85–111.

8 This assumption has been helpfully critiqued by Rifat Sonsino, *Motive Clauses in Hebrew Law: Biblical Forms and Near Eastern Parallels*, SBLDS 45 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980), 194–96, 226. After a review of ANE literature, Sonsino observes that “the idea of unilinear evolution from shorter to longer compositions is simply a fallacy,” and he cautions, “A motive clause cannot be ascribed to later editors just because it is a motive clause.”

9 Nathan C. Lane, *The Compassionate but Punishing God: A Canonical Analysis of Exodus 34:6–7* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 40–41, studies Exod 20:5–6 as “a unique and interesting quotation of the original” and identifies “three significant changes in the credo” which “clarify the ambiguity of the earlier version of the credo [Exod 34:6–7] which a later redactor did not believe adequately delineated why some were objects of wrath and some were extended mercy.” His characterization of this redaction as Deuteronomic is widely shared. See, as examples, Martin Noth, *Exodus*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 163; Richard Adamiak, *Justice and History in the Old Testament: The Evolution of Divine Retribution in the Historiographies of the Wilderness Generation* (Cleveland: John T. Zubal, 1982), 16; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, 299; Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 2. See also Jörg Frey, “‘God is Love’: On the Textual Tradition and Semantics of a Core Expression of the Christian Notion of God,” in *Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in the World of Antiquity*, ed. Reinhard G. Krantz and Hermann Spieckermann, FAT 2/33 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 223, who finds it “noteworthy that in this apparently late Deuteronomic text [Exod 34:6–7] for the many to whom God’s grace is offered, mention is no longer made of the love for God and the keeping of His commandments, as is the case in older Deuteronomic texts such as … the explanation of the commandment forbidding the worship of foreign gods in the Decalogue…. The concept of free and unconditional grace seems to be breaking through here.”

theological rationale which led the redactor to modify Exod 34:6–7 to its later form in Exod 20:5–6. This approach ignores the narrative sequence of an initial Exod 20:5–6 being repeated but rephrased in light of the golden calf apostasy in Exod 34. More pointedly, this approach ignores the central Exodus story line of the progressive revelation of the divine name and character, along which 20:5–6 stands as penultimate to the culminating revelation in 34:6–7.

3.1.1. Common Variations in Understanding the Visiting Phrase

Where does all this leave the question of the meaning, function, and theological significance of the phrase “visiting the iniquity of fathers against sons”? Proposed answers fall into a dizzying array of permutations. Some regard Exod 20:5b and 34:7b as an irrelevant or three passages of “direct characterization” of Yahweh, he pursues the sequence of Exod 3:14–15, followed by 34:6–7, and only then 20:5–6. He explains, “Although the reader first meets Exod. 20, I will discuss the divine epithets in the decalogue later since the picture emerges more clearly in this longer passage [34:6–7], which is more directly connected to its literary context.” Whether from “re-reading” Exod 20 in light of the later passage, or because of the implied reader’s cultural familiarity with liturgical formulae assumed to underlie 34:6–7, Kürle assumes that the reader comes to Exod 20:5–6 with a prior knowledge of 34:6–7, and that the rhetorical effect of 20:5–6 on the reader is determined by its derivative status in relation to 34:6–7.

Such explanations move in two directions, which, while not logically contradictory, set opposite rhetorical or theological tones for these changes. On the one hand, the phrase, “to those who hate me” ameliorates the doctrine of transgenerational punishment from the presumably original formula in Exod 34:6–7. Jacob Milgrom, Numbers, JPS (Philadelphia: JPS, 1990), 394, notes that with the Deuteronomist’s phrase here “the sharp edge of the doctrine was blunted.” On the other hand, Pigott, “God of Compassion,” 213–14, sees the addition of “to those who love me” as a retraction of the theme of unconditional steadfast love from 34:6–7 in favor of the Deuteronomists’ “strict system of retribution according to obedience or disobedience.”

Terence Fretheim, Exodus, IBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 227, highlights this narrative sequence, commenting on 20:5, “Because in 34:6–7 God himself revises this formulation in view of the golden calf apostasy, this passage is finally provisional. Hence it cannot stand alone in any theological statement or contemporary appropriation…. This is an especially sharp illustration of the importance of contextuality in using the text for exegetical or theological purposes.” In addition to the assumptions outline above, another trend in OT scholarship which has obscured the narrative relation of Exod 20:5 to 34:7 bears mention here. In the middle of the twentieth century, it was common to speak of Exod 34:6–7 as the Jahwist’s version of the giving of the divine name to Moses, parallel with Exod 3 (E) and Exod 6:2–3 (P). See David Noel Freedman, “The Name of the God of Moses,” JBL 79 (1960): 151–56; G. Ernest Wright, “The Divine Name and the Divine Nature,” Persp 12 (1971): 178–79; and J. Philip Hyatt, Exodus, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 322–23. Theological reflection on the passage, in this view, hinges on the relationships and contrasting emphases of these three divine name passages, extracted, however, from the concrete interrelations which the narrative progression of Exodus constructs for them. This grouping of Exod 3, 6, and 34 as the giving of the divine name passages for E. P. and J, respectively, contributes to the common tendency to overlook Exod 20:2–6 as a prominent text within the name-revelation trajectory of Exodus. The narrative trajectory between these key texts will be traced below (see §8.3).

A few Exodus commentaries simply skirt the phrase (in both Exod 20:5 and 34:7) without mentioning it. Examples include: Hyatt, Exodus; George A. F. Knight, Theology as Narration: A Commentary on the Book of...
abrogated theological concept. Others invest the phrase with some significance but not in the sense of a literal transgenerational punishment, regarding it as doxological hyperbole, or as morally or socially instructive.

Exodus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976); James Plastaras, The God of Exodus: The Theology of the Exodus Narrative (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1966); and Mark S. Smith, Exodus, NCollBC (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011). Neglect of this explicitly theological phrase is especially striking given the titles of Knight and Plastaras. Several works which address the Pentateuch as a whole also ignore the phrase: Victor P. Hamilton, Handbook to the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); T. Desmond Alexander, From Paradise to Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002); John H. Sailhamer, The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); and Oswald T. Allis, God Spake by Moses: An Exposition of the Pentateuch (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1951). After leaving the phrase untouched in his treatment of Exodus, Sailhamer does offer one brief comment regarding its repetition in Deut 5:9. Thomas B. Dozeman, Exodus, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 485–86, 735–39, while providing helpful commentary on the terms “jealous” and “of those who love/hate me” and while offering some of the most fruitful insights regarding the repetition and reformulation of Exod 20:5–6 within the newly grace-laden context of Exod 34:6–7, gives no explanation of the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons.” He does not discuss the meaning of the verb פָּקַד in his translation notes or commentary, nor does he offer any concrete explanation of the dynamic of transgenerational punishment expressed there, observing only that “the reference to four generations may be literal, or it may signify the common span of life (Job 42:16). In either case the law reflects collective, not individual, guilt” (486).


15 Godfrey W. Ashby, Go Out and Meet God: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus, ITC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 89–90, 135–36, regards the phrase as hyperbole, poetically emphasizing the seriousness of Yahweh’s judgment, yet also its limited nature. Carol Meyers, Exodus, NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 172, after discussing the historical development of cross-generational versus individual accountability in ancient Israel, also ends up suggesting that the words are intended as hyperbole. Samuel R. Driver, The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 195, “The intention of this passage is to teach that God’s mercy transcends in its operation his wrath.” Noth, Exodus, 163, merely notes its doxological function: “In praise of the power of God it is said that his punishments and rewards reach far beyond the single individual.” John Calvin, Sermons on the Ten Commandments (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 74, also seems to regard the phrase as hyperbole, intending to claim no more than “if he had simply said, ‘God will punish you if you corrupt his service, change anything in religion, or imagine him under any figure; do not think you will escape his vengeance’.…. Men are so stubborn and sluggish that if Moses had simply said that, then they might not have been sufficiently aroused by fear.” Regarding the phrase as hyperbole, it may be noted, can cut in two directions: it may dramatically limit his wrath compared to his more extensive mercy (Ashby, Driver) or heighten his power and severity in punishment (Noth, Calvin). Ashby is especially interesting in this regard. While insisting in each case that the phrase should not be taken “literally,” he reads the phrase in 20:5 as “expressing in vivid terms that God’s judgment on disobedience is limited” (p. 89) and the phrase in 34:7 as “a strong statement of God’s justice: he does not let sin go unpunished” (pp. 135–36). This ignores, even reverses, the emphases suggested by the progression of the Exodus narrative, where the accent in 20:5–6 falls on justice, in 34:6–7 on mercy.

16 Thomas C. Oden, “No Other Gods,” in I Am the Lord Your God: Christian Reflections on the Ten Commandments, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Christopher R. Seitz (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 45, reports the view of Origen that God “pretends” his punishing zeal in this passage in order to make his bride live chastely. Ian Cairns,
Even those who identify a literal transgenerational dynamic in Exod 20:5b and 34:7b have advocated a great variety of interpretations. Several exegetical variables come into play, but five issues especially characterize the differences: (1) the timing of the punishment, (2) whether it impacts innocent or only guilty sons, (3) whether active divine interventions or only natural consequences are in view, (4) whether this is a familial or national dynamic, and (5) the precise meaning and relationship between the numbers “third,” “fourth,” and “thousands.”

3.1.1.a. Timing?

A key fork in the road is the “timing” of the dynamic involved. First, transgenerational visitation of sins may be simultaneous. Here, “third and fourth generation” describes the span of generations which might be alive at one time, perhaps living under one roof. A father’s...
influence is directly experienced by these generations, and he has a personal, emotional interest in their welfare. Exodus 20:5 and 34:7, then, rhetorically invert the Israelite ideal of the blessed life: living to see one’s great-grandchildren (cf. Gen 50:22–23; Job 42:16). Idolaters may well live to see their great-grandchildren—only to see the whole household visited by God because of the father’s iniquity. In this view, both idolatrous father and descendants suffer together, simultaneously.  

The story of Achan in Josh 7 is often highlighted as an example.

Transgenerational visitation of sins may be enduring or repeated, even beyond the lifetime of the sinner. This view sees the phrase accenting God’s sternness. Both idolatrous father and descendants suffer, sequentially, generation after generation. Such a view highlights God’s wrath at sin, which is “so great that it will not burn itself out until a number of generations are

context and limit of the father’s sphere of influence, invoking Assmann’s theory of identity construction within cultures. Jan Assmann, “Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,” trans. John Czaplicka, NGC 65 (1995): 127, describes an “everyday form of collective memory” which he calls “communicative memory,” and he describes its limited duration: “As all oral history studies suggest, this horizon does not extend more than eighty to (at the very most) one hundred years into the past, which equals three or four generations or the Latin saeculum.” Such everyday influence takes place within a “communicative household,” which for most people includes but is not limited to the family proper.


21 Walter Brueggemann, “The Book of Exodus: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in General and Old Testament Articles. Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus, NIB 1, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 947, comments that “the cost of the [golden calf] affront endures over the generations”—“God will ‘visit’ ... covenant sanctions upon the community for generations to come.” Enns, Exodus. 416n14, points out that “since the blessing of [Exod 20] v. 6 extends over time, it is best to understand the punishment in v. 5 in the same way.” Douglas Stuart, Exodus, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 454, adopts this view and discerns from it the logical force of the passage: “God will not say, ‘I won’t punish this generation for what they are doing to break my covenant because, after all, they merely learned it from their parents who did it too.’ Instead, God will indeed punish generation after generation (‘to the third and fourth generation’) if they keep doing the same sorts of sins that prior generations did.” See also Jeffrey H. Tigay, Deuteronomy, JPSTC (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 66.
consumed.” As with the above view, an enduring consequences view may also be explained within the context of a family living under one roof, so that “the punishment is directed at the father … allowing him to observe his wickedness worked out in multigenerations, ending his life in despair, for he knows that his life and seed will result in ruins.” This dynamic is sometimes associated with ancient views of a “curse.”

An alternative explanation is that the divine visitation is enduring and ongoing, impacting father and descendants over a period of time, but is terminated by the death of the iniquitous father(s). This view emphasizes the fact that, while punishment may be spread out over a lifetime, so that one’s children and grandchildren inevitably share in the father’s sufferings, the punishment is still directed at the iniquitous father. Thus, at the father’s death, the following generations no longer share his guilt and punishment. Here, the prime biblical narrative is the forty-year wandering of the Exodus generation in the wilderness. The children of this generation must share their fathers’ sufferings (Num 14:33); yet at the death of the offending generation, the children no longer share in this guilt and iniquity but rather inherit the land.

Another alternative sees a delay at work in God’s transgenerational visitation of sins, so
that even though an idolatrous father is not punished, his descendants will be.\(^{26}\) This delay is usually seen as a function of Yahweh’s slowness to anger and readiness to forgive (Exod 34:6–7a), leaving room for repentance.\(^{27}\) This view is common in Jewish tradition and often highlights the *accumulating* nature of guilt: “The wicked continue to ‘fill’ their fathers’ bag of sins.”\(^{28}\) This reading of the visiting phrase is sometimes coordinated with the phrase נָשׂא עוֹן in Exod 34:7a, where נָשׂא is read not as the forgiving of iniquity, but rather as forestalling punishment yet “carrying iniquity on the books,” so to speak.\(^{29}\)

A final *eschatological* interpretation is worth noting, prominent in the targumim but with little mention among modern exegetes. In paraphrasing Exod 34:6–7, both Targum Neofiti and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan modify Yahweh’s transgenerational visitation of sin with the phrase


\(^{27}\) Adrian Schenker, *Versöhnung und Widerstand: Bibeltheologische Untersuchung zum Strafen Gottes und der Menschen, besonders im Lichte von Exodus 21–22, SBS 139* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1990), 85–89, 100, in his broader study of punishment in the OT, takes up Exod 34:6–7 under the heading “Geduld und Schwäche” (Patience and Weakness). Schenker argues that the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers upon sons” signals a period of delay, which leaves room for repentance and turning away from sin. Since God is not bound by time, he can wait “lange und ausgiebig” (p. 88) for the wicked to change their minds. However, if he waits too long, such patience will be misconstrued as weakness. The duration of three or four generations thus expresses a balance (p. 89): “gar keine Strafe wäre Komplizenschaft mit den Bösen, sofortige Strafe würde mehr zerstören als aufbauen. In der Mitte liegt das Angebot der Umkehr und Bewährung.” See also Christoph Dohmen, “Der Dekalogansatz und sein Ursprung,” *Bib* 74 (1993): 180; *Exodus 19–40*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 107–8, 355–56; and Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1:117. Scoralick “JHWH, JHWH,” 146–47, also embraces this interpretation of “ein Versöhnungsangebot, eine Möglichkeit zur Umkehr.” In contrast, Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, trans. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 440, denies that Yahweh’s delay in retribution intends to provide an opportunity for repentance, “since the passage [Exod 34:7b] speaks of the divine attribute of justice not of mercy.”

\(^{28}\) Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 172. Propp mentions Gen 15:16 in this regard, as do the rabbis.

“on the great day of judgment.”

3.1.1.b. Upon Innocent or Guilty Sons?

Do Exod 20:5 and 34:7b envision the punishment of innocent sons of guilty fathers or only guilty sons of guilty fathers? Matters of theodicy are close at hand here, and Abraham’s anxious plea echoes, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous man with the wicked man… Will not the judge of all the earth work justice?” (Gen 18:23, 25) Here, the prepositional phrase “with respect to those who hate me” becomes central. It may modify “sons” or both “fathers … sons” so that Yahweh’s transgenerational visitation targets rebellious sons. If it refers

30 Cited in Karla R. Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue: Exodus 32–34 in Post-Biblical Literature*, StBibLit 61 (New York: Lang, 2004), 179. Ernst W. Hengstenberg, *Dissertations on the Genuineness of the Pentateuch*, trans. J. E. Ryland (Edinburgh: John D. Lowe, 1847), 2:448, argues against an opposite position of his day, which attempted to defend divine justice by limiting Exod 20:5 to temporal punishments, the sufferings of which are not always dealt out according to merit. Hengstenberg responds, “In the passages in question, not suffering, but punishment is spoken of: whether temporal or eternal makes no difference. A God who can suspend temporal punishment over the innocent can also inflict what is eternal.”

31 Levinson, *Legal Revision*, 54, reads Exod 20:5 as a “doctrinal formulation” in which, “although it is my parent who wrongs God, I and my children and my grandchildren are punished for the parent’s wrongdoing, independent of any particular malfeasance on our part.” So also Michael J. Gruenthaner, “The Old Testament and Retribution in this Life,” *CBQ* 4 (1942): 106, argues that a principle of divine “social retribution” in which innocent family members are punished along with, or in place of, the guilty is established in the OT as a possible, justified, and ordinary manner of God’s enacting of justice. For Gruenthaner (p. 109), as the title of his article suggests, this is limited to temporal sufferings and does not apply to ultimate eternal judgment, which he sees Ezek 18 as addressing with its strict doctrine of individual merit.

32 Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 66, “He punishes or rewards descendants for ancestral sins or virtues along with their own, but only if they ‘continue in the deeds of their ancestors.’ Otherwise, descendants are not affected by their ancestors’ behavior at all” (author’s emphasis). Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, 243, paraphrases, “to the third and fourth generation, if these children and children’s children are also of those who hate Me.” Schenker, *Versöhnung und Widerstand*, 87, “Er bestraft die letzte Generation, die ebenso schuldig ist wie die der Väter, für die Schuld, die sie auf sich laden und die die gleiche ist wie die ihrer Väter.”

exclusively to “fathers,” however, then the punished sons may themselves be innocent.\textsuperscript{34}

Furthermore, if Exod 20:5 is a later expansion borrowed from 34:7—which lacks the phrase “with respect to those who hate me”—then the prepositional phrase may have been added to soften an earlier, harsher description of Yahweh and should not be interpreted as part of the original sense of the formula.\textsuperscript{35} On the other hand, while not often pressed for this service, the phrase “upon the third and fourth generations” may favor the punishment only of guilty sons since it marks the range of direct influence a father may have in leading his descendants to imitate his idolatry.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{34} Osborn and Hatton, 	extit{Handbook}, 474, assert without explanation, “Of those who hate me refers back to the fathers, not to the future generations” (authors’ emphasis). Francesco Spadafora, 	extit{Collettivismo e Individualismo nel Vecchio Testamento}, QE 2 (Rovigo: Instituto Padano di arti Grafiche, 1953), 177, “Il parallelismo e l’analogia col v. 6 … non lascian dubbi. In tal modo, il senso è il seguente: ‘Io punisco … l’iniquità dei padri sui figli, fino alla terza e quarta generazione, dei padri, cioè, che mi odiano; mentre estendo indefinitamente la mia benevolenza sui discendenti di coloro che mi amano!’ Le generazioni che disendono da una generazione prav subiranno il castigo meritato da quella.” (“The parallelism and the analogy with v. 6 … leaves no doubt. Thus, the meaning is: ‘I punish … the iniquity of the fathers upon sons, unto the third and fourth generation, the fathers, that is, who hate me; while I extend my benevolence indefinitely upon descendants of those who love me!’ The generations that descend from a depraved generation suffer the punishment deserved by it.”) Cited in Scharbert, “Formgeschichte,” 145 (my translation, my emphasis).

\textsuperscript{35} See footnotes 9 and 10 above, which discuss views on the textual history of Exod 20:5–6 and 34:6–7.

\textsuperscript{36} Paterius (d. 604) speaks in these terms, “But when the sons who are punished for their father’s guilt are not little children but already grown, what else should we understand except that they are suffering the punishments of those people whose deeds they imitated? Thus Scripture says rightly, ‘To the third and fourth generation.’ [Exod 34:7] For the sons can see the lives of the parents they imitate up to the third and fourth generation. Punishment extends up to them, for they saw what they would imitate successfully.” Interestingly, Paterius offers an alternative explanation for cases in which little children suffer for the sins of their fathers: here they bear the inherited sin (original sin) from their fathers, unless and until it is washed away in Baptism. Cited in Joseph T. Lienhard, 	extit{Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy}, ACCS 3 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 153. See also the discussion
Anthropological and psychological theories regarding ancient conceptions of collective identity in nomadic or clan-based societies have been advanced which seek to make the visiting phrase culturally (if not morally) comprehensible, if innocent sons are in view. Here, Exod 20:5 evidences an ancient collective mindset, variously described as “corporate personality,” “psychic community,” “family solidarity,” or “corporate identity.” Individuals had no discrete standing but were viewed as part of their clan, extensions of the patriarch’s person, and therefore as legitimate recipients of sanctions against him, irrespective of their own participation in the father’s crime. Others reject this “presumption of a self-evident solidarity between the family head and the members of his ‘house’” as the basis for the transgenerational punishment in Exod 20:5 and 34:7, assuming instead that “the children, as members of the family, are of the same mind as the head of the family and follow his example.” In other words, there is a


39 Tigay, Deuteronomy, 66.

40 John H. Walton and Victor H. Matthews, The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Genesis–Deuteronomy (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 108, describe this in simple terms: “In the ancient Near East a person found his or her identity within a group such as the clan or family. Integration and interdependence were important values, and the group was bound together as a unit. As a result, individual behavior would not be viewed in isolation from the group. When there was sin in a family, all members shared the responsibility.”

41 Houtman, Exodus, 3:28.
3.1.1.c. Active Divine Punishment or Natural Consequences?

A third interpretive crux is whether “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” entails Yahweh’s active intervening punishment or merely natural, built-in consequences of disobedience, a question intertwined with broader discussions about divine action and punishment within OT theology. Many commentators focus on the natural, perhaps gradual consequences of disobedience which lie behind Exod 20:5, without any mention of God’s agency or punishment. The use of the word “inevitable” is characteristic of this view: “Contemporary

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conduct *inevitably* has an impact upon succeeding generations.” They suffer “not because they are guilty of their father’s sins, but because by the self-acting operation of natural laws their fathers’ sins entail disgrace or misfortune upon them.”

The following catena of citations gives voice to this perspective. Among them, three typical claims may be noted regarding the meaning of Exod 20:5 and 34:7. First, patterns of life naturally transfer from generation to generation. Second, enduring consequences automatically emerge from evil deeds. And third, biblical language of God’s active punishing is a primitive or metaphorical way of expressing what we refer to as natural processes or natural results:

There is … no clear biblical example of a punishment deliberately extended because of the sins of a previous generation. The best understanding of the statement in the present verse is, then, that the idolater’s sin will have effects that will rebound upon ensuing generations; and perhaps even that he himself, though he live to see the fourth generation … will never be free from the consequences of his deeds.

A sinful deed is regarded as having objective social consequences, consequences menacing and even fatal not only to the doer of the deed but also to other members of his group, to his children and his children’s children (cf. 20:5).

[Yahweh] certainly will not clear (the effects), visiting the (ongoing effects of) guilt-wickedness of the fathers on the children and grandchildren … to the third and fourth generation…. In context, [Exod 34:7] could be paraphrased: ‘certainly not clearing the name /reputation or removing the ongoing negative impact of sin.’ … This means that God does not add punishment but that the ongoing impact of wickedness will remain as a negative effect upon the family and the community.

The fact that God will visit “the iniquity of the fathers on the children” means that children can expect to experience the consequences of the sinful behavior of their parents. While God is willing to forgive and pardon, He does not interrupt the certain

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44 Sarna, *Exodus*, 110.


and natural consequences of sinful behavior. Children do reap what sinful parents sow.\(^{49}\)

The evil of our world derives not only from God’s judgment upon individual acts, but the judgment has social consequences upon those who come after us. In the end, then, the covenant society must know that there is no such thing as a purely private and individual sin which ultimately does not have a social consequence to be experienced by all. It may also be stressed that from the Biblical view the evil in our world resulting from human acts is also at the same time the active judgment of God. Whether our “fallen” world be depicted anthropologically or theologically, the result is the same because we are interpreting the same world, only from different perspectives.\(^{50}\)

It is, of course, not through extraordinary or miraculous interferences that the sins of the parents are visited upon their children, but through the natural providence of God, operating through the normal constitution of society.\(^{51}\)

It describes how life on earth normally operates. The consequences of the father’s act will certainly be felt by future generations in a variety of ways.\(^{52}\)

The extended commentary on this commandment (Ex 20:5–6) acknowledges that parents often pass on to their children the misdirected and ill-advised patterns of life they learned from their own parents. Wrong notions about God and worship can be maintained for many generations and can result in generations of hardships.\(^{53}\)

And when we come to examine this twofold statement of God’s dealings with man, what is it but a simple and unscientific statement of the truths which nowadays we sum up under the convenient term of heredity? The race is one. For good or ill, the life of the one is bound up in the life of the many.\(^{54}\)

My great grandchildren may hear the echoes of my present idolatrous choices. These echoes can be studied psychoanalytically, or in intergenerational history, or sociologically.\(^{55}\)

Since this is God’s world, and since we are all involved with one another, breaches of God’s law by one generation do indeed affect those of future generations to come. Slavery, exploitation, imperialism, pollution, immorality are all examples of this


\(^{50}\) Wright, “The Divine Name,” 182–83.

\(^{51}\) Driver, *Book of Exodus*, 195–96 (author’s emphasis).


\(^{55}\) Oden, “No Other Gods,” 45.
principle. What we call “natural results” are just an expression of God’s law in operation, punishing breaches of His will.\(^{56}\)

Biblical authors make the distinction that while only the guilty himself may be persecuted, responsibility for the fathers’ guilt does lie on the sons, and experience shows that the sins of the fathers do have their entirely spontaneous effects on the sons. Where we say “entirely spontaneous,” the Bible speaks of God’s activity.\(^{57}\)

Given the universe as it stands, the rules that govern it are not freaks of momentary caprice. There is a difference between saying: “If you hold your finger in the fire you will get burned” and saying, “if you whistle at your work I shall beat you, because the noise gets on my nerves.” The God of the Christians is too often looked upon as an old gentleman of irritable nerves who beats people for whistling…. [Exod 20:5–6] is a statement of fact, observed by the Jews and noted as such. From its phrasing it might appear an arbitrary expression of personal feeling. But to-day, we understand more about the mechanism of the universe, and are able to reinterpret the pronouncement of the “laws” of heredity and environment. Defy the commands of the natural law, and the race will perish in a few generations; co-operate with them, and the race will flourish for ages to come. That is the fact; whether we like it or not, the universe is made that way…. Of some laws such as these, psychology has already begun to expose the mechanism; on others, the only commentary yet available is that of life and history.\(^{58}\)

While Exodus presents God as the subject of the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers upon sons,” these explanations use “sin” or “consequences” as the acting subjects.\(^{59}\) If God is granted a verb, it is perhaps to “allow,”\(^{60}\) to “restrain,”\(^{61}\) or merely to “inspect”\(^{62}\) the self-emerging

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\(^{59}\) This observation echoes the critique of Klaus Koch by Elpidius W. Pax, “Studien zum Vergeltungsproblem der Psalmen,” *SBFLA* 12 (1960): 74: “It is therefore not so that God gives sin a certain force over men with which to dispose of their affairs and that sin now stands in the foreground as the active subject. In actuality—and linguistically, too—God is the subject.” Translated and cited in John G. Gammie, “The Theology of Retribution in the Book of Deuteronomy,” *CBQ* 32 (1970): 4. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., et al., *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 179, paraphrases, “the sins of the fathers visiting the children to the third and fourth generation,” a significant and undefended departure from Exod 20:5 which has Yahweh as the subject of פָּקַד (“visiting”).

\(^{60}\) Pigott, “God of Compassion,” 83.

\(^{61}\) Inch, *Scripture as Story*, 36, “Even so, God promises to restrain evil influence while cultivating the good we do. Evil is therefore dissipated in three or four generations, while good lingers for a thousand.”

\(^{62}\) See the subsection “Lexical Studies of the Verb פָּקַד” below, particularly the position of André Wénin.
consequences. While some scholars speak in more direct terms of Yahweh’s punishment or even “vengeance,” few describe the kind of active, personal, determinative, “interventionist” punishment by God exhibited in Exod 1–15. This will be a point of emphasis in the narrative reading of Exod 20:5 and 34:7 in the present study.

3.1.1.d. Familial or National Dynamic?

The literature reveals a general tendency to speak of the transgenerational dynamic in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 at the level of individual fathers and their descendants (a distributive view). Given the national-covenantal setting at Sinai, and the later OT accent on “the iniquity of our fathers” as a national (rather than merely familial) reality, it is certainly possible that Exod 20:5 and 34:7b are to be read as operating also, or even primarily, on a national-generational level (a collective view): “God will visit … covenant sanctions upon the community for generations to come” with decisive impact on “the relation Yahweh will have with Israel.”

3.1.1.e. Third, Fourth, and Thousands

A constellation of interpretive cruxes also emerges from the numbers in these passages, including the question whether אָלֶפֶּים actually functions as a number or as term for kinship

63 Dozeman, Exodus, 486.

64 Gruenthaner, “The Old Testament and Retribution,” 107, notes that “some have tried to soften … the doctrine by saying it refers to the natural consequences of parental transgression, such as disease, poverty, disgrace, social ostracism, etc. It undoubtedly comprises these, but it is not restricted to them; it also refers to the misfortunes due to a special intervention of Providence.”

65 Freedman, “Divine Commitment and Human Obligation: The Covenant Theme,” Int 18 (1964): 427–28, observes that “while the commandments are addressed to the individual and require individual compliance, it is the community which is answerable to God for the actions of its members; only in rare instances does God deal directly with covenant violators; the community is the legally constituted agency of his judgment.”


67 Cassuto, Commentary on Exodus, 243, takes the warning as “directed to the entire nation as a single entity in time throughout its generations.” Enns, Exodus, 416.

groups. If a number, does it imply thousands of people (breadth of mercy) or thousands of generations (duration of mercy)? How should the third and fourth generation be reckoned, that is, does third refer to grandchildren or great-grandchildren? Does the insertion of “and against sons of sons” into the expression in 34:7 modify, or just equivalently rephrase, the counting of generations in 20:5–6? Is third or fourth merely a biblical idiom (“x or x+1”) for “whatever number” or “plenty of”—and if so, is it still dwarfed by, or perhaps rhetorically equivalent to, the thousands? Does third or fourth imply a limitation of punishment (only three or four), or rather a severity (the extinction of the family line within the span of three or four generations)?

3.2. Key Studies Relating to the Visiting Phrase

Often, scholarly debate is oriented around two or three key works on a topic. Currently, this is not the case with the meaning and function of “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” in

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70 Driver, Book of Exodus, 195.

71 Childs, Exodus, 388.

72 Here, for example, Weinfeld, Deuteronomy 1–11, 297, disagrees with Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, Der Dekalog: Seine späten Fassungen, die originale Komposition und seine Vorstufen, OBO 45 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 26–32.


74 Scoralick, “JHWH, JHWH,” 146, cites the estimate of Gottfried Vanoni that the contrast in Exod 34:6–7 is at least 40,000 years in contrast to 80 years.

75 Levinson, Legal Revision, 53n52, cites this as the position of Meir Weiss, “Some Problems in the Biblical Doctrine of Retribution,” Tarbiz 31 (1961–1962): 236–63; 32 (1962–1963): 1–18 (Hebrew). Weiss suggests that third and fourth here means only a large number of generations and is therefore basically equivalent to a thousand generations. Levinson dismisses this as “harmonistic” and as not taking into account the function of three or four generations in Neo-Assyrian treaties, which usage Levinson maintains lies behind Exod 20:5–6.

76 Scharbert, “Formgeschichte,” 144, notes the latter emphasis, for Exod 20:5 at least. So also Matthias Franz, Der barmherzige und gnädige Gott: Die Gnadenrede vom Sinai (Ex 34,6–7) und ihre Parallelen im Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt, BWANT 160 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003), 143, for Exod 34:7.
The phrase has garnered interest in several areas of study, including: (1) lexical studies of the multivalent verb פָּקַד; (2) studies of corporate and individual conceptions of responsibility in ancient Israel; (3) studies in “inner-biblical exegesis”; (4) form-critical and canonical studies focused on Exod 34:6–7; and (5) narrative studies of the golden calf episode in Exod 32–34.

3.2.1. Lexical Studies of the Verb פָּקַד

E. A. Speiser ventures, “There is probably no other Hebrew verb that has caused translators as much trouble as pqd.” Key studies are those of Klaus Koch (1955), Josef Scharbert (1960), Gunnel André (1980), and J. C. Lübbe (1990), supplemented by a number of articles. Koch diminishes any sense in this verb of God actively punishing, seeing it as an idiom of the built-in consequences of a deed falling upon the doer. Scharbert critiques Koch, and emphasizes that both God’s careful inspection and his appropriate punitive action are encompassed in “visiting iniquity upon.” Gunnel André proposes “to determine the destiny” as the core meaning for the verb, which may appear to synthesize Scharbert’s dual components of both inspecting and acting. For André, however, this “determining” is largely declarative, depicting a judicial pronouncement rather than an act of punishment. Lübbe investigates פָּקַד according to componental analysis and semantic domains, grouping its occurrences into thirteen domains. In his view, Exodus 20:5 and 34:7 fall under “event of punishment and reward,” which depicts “caus[ing] to suffer for an offense,” with the possible glosses “punish, cause to suffer the

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77 Among five recent Exodus commentaries (Houtman, Dohmen, Meyers, Stuart, and Propp, all cited above), only one citation of secondary literature is shared by any two commentaries in their treatment of these verses: Scharbert, “Formgeschichte.”


80 André, TDOT 12:57–59.
consequences, chastise.”

While פקד is often paired with the preposition לע, marking the recipient in contexts of divine punishment, no systematic study of the collocation פקד על has been published. Such an analysis will be the focus of Chapter 5, in an effort to identify the contextual—rather than etymological—meaning of this verb in Exod 20:5, 34:7, and other פקד על passages. More extensive discussion of the four scholars above and their influence on the contemporary discussion of פקד in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 will be included in that chapter.

3.2.2. Studies in Corporate and Individual Punishment

The discussion in OT studies of corporate vis-à-vis individual understandings in ancient Israel, long oriented around H. Wheeler Robinson and his theory of corporate personality, continues to generate many scholarly contributions. Two of these works with significant attention to Exod 20:5 and 34:7 are the studies by Jože Krašovec (1994) and Joel Kaminsky (1995). Krašovec’s study focuses on Exod 34:6–7 and 20:5–6 (along with related passages Num 14:18, Jer 32:18, and Deut 7:9–10) under the question, “Is there a doctrine of ‘collective retribution’ in the Hebrew Bible?” After an extensive review of narrative and prophetic texts which speak of collective or inherited punishment, however, Krašovec concludes that references to collective divine retribution are “exceptions to a rule [of individual retribution]” and are ultimately anthropomorphisms, serving as “metaphorical pointer[s] to the inescapable

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81 Lübbe, “Hebrew Lexicography,” 9. Grouping by semantic domain holds great promise for Hebrew lexicography. However, it is unclear on what basis Lübbe decides to assign Exod 20:5 and 34:7 to this category. His characterization of these verses as punitive simply invites, rather than resolves, all of the questions which circle around the meaning of “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons.”

82 On H. Wheeler Robinson and his critics, see footnote 37 above.


84 Krašovec, Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness, 151.
consequences of evil conduct.” His analysis of Exod 34:6–7 emphasizes the essential place of the repentance, reform, and fidelity of the people in Yahweh’s decision to remake the covenant, which I will argue is a fundamental misreading of the narrative.

Joel Kaminsky, in his 1995 study *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible*, also takes up the theme of collective or inherited punishment. Kaminsky seeks to rescue notions of collective responsibility from the disrepute brought on by classical critical reconstructions of Israel’s religious history. These pitted the prophets’ high ethical perspective of individual responsibility against earlier, more “primitive,” corporate understandings of divine retribution such as Exod 20:5. Kaminsky argues that “the modern bias that grades texts that are more individualistic as theologically superior to those that are more corporate is highly dubious,” and he demonstrates “the frequency, centrality, and persistence” of corporate ideas in the OT.

Exodus 20:5 plays a prominent role in Kaminsky’s work, especially as the baseline against which he examines passages often read as rejecting corporate responsibility (Deut 7:9–10; 21:15–20; 24:16; Jer 31:29–30; and Ezek 18). Building on the work of Barnabas Lindars, Herbert May, Moshe Greenberg, Paul Joyce, and especially Gordon Matties, Kaminsky stresses the concrete rhetorical situations being addressed by the prophets as well as the co-occurrence of individual and corporate elements within the books of Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.

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proposes that Jer 31 and Ezek 18 may have arisen as \textit{ad hoc} creations that grew out of pastoral necessity…. It is … likely that the same person maintained both sets of theological ideas [that is, individual and corporate], expressing one set in certain pastoral circumstances and the other in a different set of pastoral circumstances. Even if one rejects this latter idea, that these alternate theological systems could coexist in the same prophet, one should remember that, canonically speaking, they do coexist.\footnote{Kaminsky, \textit{Corporate Responsibility}, 153.}

Kaminsky concludes that individual and corporate conceptions “function in a complementary, rather than a contradictory, fashion,”\footnote{Kaminsky, \textit{Corporate Responsibility}, 178.} and he warns,

\begin{quote}
Although there is evidence of some movement toward an innovative new theology that individualizes retribution, to read this movement as a radical shift toward individualism that completely rejected older corporate notions is problematic. It both oversimplifies the relationship between corporate and individualistic ideas by portraying these two sets of ideas as poles in an evolutionary schema, and it often leads scholars to read every passage that highlights the individual as automatically rejecting corporate ideas.\footnote{Kaminsky, \textit{Corporate Responsibility}, 119.}
\end{quote}

In arguing for the continuing relevance and value of corporate perspectives, Kaminsky accents the sociological benefits of corporate themes in the OT and intertestamental literature. “Ancient Israel’s fundamental insight into the fact that we are all our ‘brother’s keeper’ could provide a corrective to many of our current philosophical and political tendencies that inform us only of our rights as individuals, but rarely of our responsibilities as members of larger communities.”\footnote{Kaminsky, \textit{Corporate Responsibility}, 14. Kaminsky’s discussion is not, however, devoid of theological considerations, noting that transgenerational punishment left room for God’s undeserved mercy (p. 136n56): “There is evidence that the transference of punishment may have been a sign of God’s mercy upon the sinner, rather than of God’s unfair behavior toward the children of the sinner.” See also pp. 186–87.}

Kaminsky does not highlight, however, the massively theocentric orientation of the biblical corporate retribution texts, most particularly Exod 20:5 and 34:7, which proclaim the

prospect of Yahweh’s visitation in judgment and thus call people to an ethical recommitment not only to one another but most crucially coram deo, together as the people of God, beginning with a forsaking of all false gods and with exclusive trust in and worship of Yahweh.

Kaminsky’s work stands as the most important reexamination and rehabilitation of the Bible’s corporate dimensions of human responsibility and divine retribution. Two points, in particular, have relevance for the present study. First, a sharp dichotomy between corporate and individual ideas in Hebrew thought is untenable. In Yahweh’s “visiting’ fathers’ iniquities against children,” corporate and individual dimensions may both be involved. The organic relationship between father-child sin and the increasing provocation of Yahweh’s anger over a number of generations display corporate assumptions. At the same time, the possibility of personal repentance and the individualized treatment often shown display complementary—not contradictory—individual principles.

Second, it is through careful attention to historical-rhetorical and canonical contexts that Kaminsky brings this complementary relationship between collective and individual considerations into clearer focus and guards against imposing an assumed dichotomy upon the texts. In his explanation and use of Exod 20:5 (and 34:7), however, Kaminsky fails at precisely this point. While he reads Jer 31 and Ezek 18 in light of their historical and canonical contexts, Kaminsky simply assumes a meaning for “visiting iniquity of fathers upon sons” in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 apart from any “pastoral necessity” which gave rise to their utterance within the narrative and apart from other relevant Exodus passages. He provides very little examination of these key Exodus verses, and where he does, he remains vague and even inconsistent. That Kaminsky devotes more attention to a careful, contextual reading of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Deuteronomistic History than to Exodus may stem from his goal of demonstrating the persistence of corporate ideas in the Hebrew Bible and countering the claim that these prophets
rejected and annulled corporate responsibility. Nevertheless, his study, with all its insight, leaves the precise rhetorical situation and narrative context of Exod 20:5 and 34:7 unexplored.

### 3.2.3. Studies in Inner-Biblical Exegesis

Two of the most prominent scholars in the area of inner-biblical exegesis have devoted significant attention to the language of “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons.” Michael Fishbane discusses Exod 34:6–7 and related passages at some length, and Bernard Levinson makes Exod 20:5 the centerpiece of his demonstration of the scribal re-working of inherited, authoritative texts across the canon.

Fishbane, in his landmark study *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, sets out to examine the hermeneutical exegesis and re-application of received, authoritative texts evidenced *within* the pages of the Hebrew Bible. He traces the theological and rhetorical reformulation of Exod 34:6–7 in Exod 20:5–6, in Jer 31 and Ezek 18 (via Deut 24:16), in Deut 7:9–10, in Jonah, in the Psalms, and elsewhere. As the biblical corpus develops, the received textual theology (the “*traditum*”) of “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” is “sharply rejected” (Jer 31 and Ezek 18) and replaced with a “novel viewpoint by means of a presumptive misquote” (Deut 7).

Fishbane translates ἡμικαταστάσεως (ἡμικαταστάσεως) in Exod 34:7 as “requite.” Its transgenerational dynamic refers only to the divine realm, since, contrary to other ANE legal traditions, the “biblical law corpora are decidedly opposed to vicarious punishment” in human jurisprudence. He refers to the visiting phrase as “the *theologoumena* of extended grace and punishment,” as “the divine

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teachings of deferred punishment,” and as “the notion that divine mercy was expressed through deferred punishment.”  

Beyond these generalities, Fishbane does not engage in significant reflection on the contextual meaning of this originating phrase within Exodus. Unfortunately, without such careful nuancing, the assumed meaning of the *traditum* of Exod 34:7 (and 20:5) remains an assumption, and discussions regarding later applications, elaborations, and modifications of the formula risk becoming clumsy, overstated, and too-conveniently aligned with Fishbane’s interest in inner-biblical controversy. The same criticism can be leveled at the work of Levinson, to whom we now turn.

Bernard Levinson is a second key figure in inner-biblical exegesis. Like many of his writings, his 2008 monograph *Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel* focuses on the role played by scribes in shaping the canonical text, creatively modifying traditions and texts which have come to them bearing the authority of God. “There is no priority of completed, authoritative canon to human critical engagement with the canon.” Levinson’s title captures his conviction that such revision held (and holds) a vital role in maintaining a viable and vital theology in changing circumstances in the face of a religious text with enduring authority.

Levinson’s work is important to the present study because he uses the doctrine of transgenerational punishment, specifically Exod 20:5, in order to demonstrate his thesis.

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97 Levinson, *Legal Revision*, 11.

98 Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 18–19, also speaks of the “inner-biblical dynamic of traditum-traditio” as “culturally constitutive and regenerative in the most profound sense” and sees it as vital in answering the question “How does biblical religion renew itself?”
Levinson locates the source and significance of both the “hate me” / “love me” terminology\(^9\) and the notion of “visiting iniquity of fathers upon sons to the third and fourth generation” in connection with neo-Assyrian treaties.\(^10\) He then unpacks this “visiting” dynamic via an imaginative first person paraphrase: “Although it is my parent who wrongs God, I and my children and my grandchildren are punished for that parent’s wrongdoing, independent of any particular malfeasance on our part.”\(^11\) By speaking in the first person and by assuming the posture of an innocent but suffering son, Levinson maximizes the potential injustice of this passage and maximally problematizes it. In contrast to Levinson’s paraphrase, in the Exodus context of Exod 20:5, Yahweh is primarily addressing his audience within the narrative as fathers, warning them against idolatry. Levinson not only ignores the narrative-rhetorical context of Exodus, he also actively imports the rhetorical perspective of the proverb cited in Jer 31 and Ezek 18 into his paraphrase of Exod 20:5.

At the same time, Levinson dismisses any proposal from other scholars which serves to soften or qualify the visiting phrase, repeatedly branding such as “harmonizations,” “rabbinic eisegesis,” and efforts to “evade the problem of theodicy.”\(^12\) It should be noted that in Legal Revision, the successful demonstration of Levinson’s thesis requires that later scribal modifications of Exod 20:5 not merely complement or supplement the theology of 20:5, but skillfully counter and subvert it.\(^13\) Therefore, Levinson’s thesis profits from an “original”

\(^{9}\) Against prevailing views, Levinson does not read the prepositional phrases “to those who hate/love me” as late additions to Exod 20:5–6.

\(^{10}\) Levinson, Legal Revision, 51–54.

\(^{11}\) Levinson, Legal Revision, 54 (my emphasis).

\(^{12}\) Levinson, Legal Revision, 53n52, 54n54, 55n56, 167.

\(^{13}\) Joshua Berman, “Supercessionist or Complementary? Reassessing the Nature of Legal Revision in the Pentateuchal Law Collections,” JBL 135 (2016): 220, 222, reviews and critiques the “supercessionist” approach of Levinson: “Levinson maintains that, for revising authors, the endeavor of garbing subversive innovation in the mantle of abrogated texts is accomplished only with ‘extraordinary ambivalence.’ He provides no evidence for this contention, however, and it is unclear on what basis he ascribes ambivalence to the revising authors.” After
meaning of Exod 20:5 which is maximally problematic, an “odious … ethical and theological problem.” Every assumption which he makes regarding the meaning of 20:5 serves this purpose. No examination of the phrase within the Exodus narrative is conducted which might qualify or soften the unassailable “odiousness” of the original meaning in any way.

3.2.4. Studies on Exodus 34:6–7

As recently as 2001, Ruth Scoralick could write, “Angesichts der oft betonen theologischen Bedeutung von Ex 34,6f. ist die exegetische Literatur zur Stelle erstaunlich spärlich.” This was true up until the late 1980s. Since then, there has been a notable increase in exegetical attention to this passage. As mentioned previously, however, the majority of these studies, while focused on the theological significance of Exod 34:6–7, pay little if any attention to the visiting phrase, and the phrase does not shape their theological appropriation of the passage. Here, I will discuss five scholars who have attended to the visiting phrase in their studies of Exod 34:6–7: Scharbert, Dentan, Brueggemann, Spieckermann, and Scoralick.

Josef Scharbert devotes the largest part of his 1957 article “Formgeschichte und Exegese von Ex 34,6f und seiner Parallelen” to the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers upon sons,” especially in its Exod 20:5b formulation. Already here, Scharbert anticipates his later article on the meaning of פקד, stressing that God makes “thorough inspection” (genauen Kontrolle) with

reviewing and comparing the two approaches, Berman endorses instead the complementarians: “The authors of the various corpora saw themselves as the inheritors of a rich legal tradition and, in creating new compositions, saw it as their duty to give a nod to recognized works of standing within the community…. Even if a norm is expressed differently in one age than in a previous one, this is not seen as inconsistent or contradictory. The original instruction in the earlier code may be accessed, for it was there that YHWH instituted the general concept, and its first form of expression.”

104 Levinson, Legal Revision, 55.
105 Scoralick, “JHWH, JHWH,” 142.
106 Twelve examples are cited above in ch. 2, footnote 116.
regard to iniquity and, if appropriate, takes care of it with punishing disaster.”

In other words, Yahweh only punishes the sons if his examination determines that they share the same iniquity as their fathers. Thus, Scharbert concludes that the trajectory from Exod 20:5 and 34:7 to Deut 7:9–10 and Ezek 18 is not a development from collectivism to individualism, but rather a gradual clarification and unfolding of an idea which was there from the beginning.

Robert Dentan’s 1963 study, “The Literary Affinities of Exodus xxxiv 6f,” explicitly seeks to “examine the formula in isolation from its present context.” On the basis of “affinities” of the various elements of 34:6–7 to usage within wisdom literature, and noting involvement of wisdom influences in the liturgical life of Israel (e.g. the Psalms), he posits a wisdom-liturgical origin. “One can assert with confidence that the entire formula is a product of the School of the Wise Men…. There is no mention of Israel; the spirit is universalistic; the concern is not with Israelite man, but with man as such…. There is nothing here of the militant, jealous and holy deity of early Hebrew religion.” (Thus, Dentan shifts the meaning of the passage away from its narrative-contextual significance entirely.) He ascribes the transgenerational language specifically to wisdom influences (cf. Job 5:4; 20:10) and suggests that the idiom of “visiting iniquity” is borrowed by the formula’s author “from the prophet, or the prophetic school, with which he was most familiar.” Yet he offers little explanation, merely observing that “the

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107 Scharbert, “Formgeschichte,” 139.
111 W. Ross Blackburn, The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus, NSBT 28 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 156, discusses two interpretive ramifications of Dentan’s non-contextual reading. First, his characterization of the punishment language as harsh reads the passage against the grain of its grace-centered context. Second, his universal, individualized reading of the text loses the narrative concern with the fate of Israel as a nation.
112 Dentan, “Literary Affinities,” 49.
113 Dentan, “Literary Affinities,” 47.
inescapable fact that children commonly suffer for the failings of their parents is adduced … as evidence that sin does not flourish unrequited.”

Walter Brueggemann and Hermann Spieckermann have both published multiple works in which they advocate Exod 34:6–7 as a key starting point for OT theology, although they derive starkly different portraits of Yahweh from this core text. For Brueggemann, Exod 34:6–7 bears special prominence because of its construction as a “credo of adjectives” and because it is “the speech to which Israel ‘regresses’ in times of most acute crisis.” In his view, Exod 34:6–7 reveals “a Character who has a profound disjunction at the core of the Subject’s life.” Because Yahweh’s two-fold nature can’t be harmonized, systematized, or even necessarily depended upon, the second half of 34:6–7 “bears witness to something wild, unruly, and dangerous in Yahweh’s life.” On the one hand, Brueggemann is helpful here, insisting that we not dissolve or simply ignore the radical tension between Yahweh’s mercy and punishment in this text. On the other hand, Brueggemann sets up this disjunction in such absolute and unresolvable polarity, that, as Michael Widmer has observed, he ends up implying that “Yahweh is both gracious and

114 Dentan, “Literary Affinities,” 49.
115 Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 216, ascribes greater weight to adjectival depictions of Yahweh, which serve as generalizations summarizing the most characteristic dimensions of his numerous verbal acts. His entire illustrative presentation of this claim centers upon the adjectives in Exod 34:6–7. Mark J. Boda, The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology: Three Creedal Expressions (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 27–51, discusses Exod 34:6–7 as one of three central texts for OT theology, echoes Brueggemann’s division of the passages by parts of speech, and emphasizes the function of the passages as a “character creed” of consistent actions (participles and imperfects) and personal attributes (adjectives and nouns).
118 Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament, 271. See also Brueggemann, “Book of Exodus,” 947: “The contradiction, however, is not confined to this one double usage, but is reflected all through the rhetoric. God does deal with violators of covenant in two very different ways that cannot be logically or in practice harmonized. Moreover, the formula itself gives no hint of how to work out this contradiction. It is inadmissible to resolve the tension programmatically or systematically…. That contradiction makes the God of the Bible interesting, credible, and dangerous.” Note the title of Brueggemann’s recent book: An Unsettling God: The Heart of the Hebrew Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009).
merciless, forgiving and unforgiving, loyal and disloyal, reliable and unreliable, etc.”

Methodologically, Brueggemann’s approach has weaknesses. First, he waxes theological on these two verses with almost no explicit reflection on their surrounding Exodus context. Second and related, he examines the rhetorical function of these verses as a creed or confession spoken by Israel about their God, rather than the rhetorical act of Yahweh himself, addressed to Moses and the people. Finally, while championing due weight for the second half of the passage in 34:6–7, Brueggemann actually offers little reflection and attempts little precision in explaining the visiting phrase, in its narrative context or otherwise.

In contrast to Brueggemann’s emphasis on balanced tension, Hermann Spieckermann emphasizes the rhetorical imbalance of Exod 34:6–7, tilting so heavily toward compassion, grace, and mercy that the punishment elements are basically cancelled out. Where Brueggemann sees an unruly, irreconcilable polarity, Spieckermann sees a *Gnadenformel* (“grace formula”). He regards the punishment language in 34:7 as a vestige of Deuteronomic retribution theology, which the canonical re-use of this passage tends to leave behind.

The language of the third and fourth generation, however, he roots in the historical

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120 Brueggemann frequently designates these verses as Israel’s “credo.” Interestingly, in “The Book of Exodus,” 947, he stresses both the human and divine nature of the formula. He writes, “This is no doubt a highly stylized liturgical formula reflecting Israel’s mature and disciplined theological reflection.” And two sentences later, he remarks, “Taking it, as we do, as God’s self-disclosure, this formulation is not exhausted in its particular use after the calf episode, but provides an enduring reference point in Israel’s life with God.” Brueggemann, *An Unsettling God*, 3–4, explains this tension: “Even if one is shy about speaking of ‘revelation,’ if one is theologically serious, one can entertain the possibility that human imagination of a constructive kind is led by a revelatory intrusion. In any case, with reference to Exod 3:1–9; 19:1–24:18; 34:6–7, Israel’s own text attests that the distinctiveness of YHWH in the tradition of Israel is the result of YHWH’s generous self-disclosure, first to Moses and then through Moses to Israel.” With all this said, however, Brueggemann’s analysis of 34:6–7 does not reflect on the passage as God’s speech to Moses and Israel within the narrative situation of Exodus.


situation which gave rise to this bold, grace-titting theology: the exile. By placing the transgenerational language alongside the overwhelming rhetoric of forgiving mercy, 34:6–7 subsumes the suffering of exile into a new religious experience—a new awareness of God’s forgiveness. “Die[se] Vergebung ist die Erfahrung der vierten Generation nach der Zählung von Ex 34,7.”¹²³ Spieckermann focuses on the restriction or limitation of punishment expressed by the phrase so that, in the context of the late exile, “to the third and fourth generation” becomes an expression of hope, centered in divine mercy.

Ruth Scoralick’s 2001 study, “‘JHWH, JHWH, ein gnädiger und barmherziger Gott…’ (Ex 34, 6): Die Gottesprädikationen aus Ex 34,6f. in ihrem Kontext in Kapitel 32–34,”¹²⁴ is widely cited in the literature, and for good reason. More than any of the preceding, Scoralick offers a perceptive reading of the relationship of Exod 34:6–7 to the Exod 32–34 narrative. She notes that most studies of 34:6–7 have focused interest on only one pole of the formula (e.g. Spieckermann on v.6–7a; Scharbert on v. 7b), and is herself deliberate in maintaining and explicating the relationship between the two. Scoralick’s work is also valuable in that she draws together insights from Dohmen,¹²⁵ Schenker,¹²⁶ and Muffs¹²⁷ into her own close textual reading of 34:6–7

¹²⁴ Ruth Scoralick, “‘JHWH, JHWH, ein gnädiger und barmherziger Gott…’ (Ex 34,6): Die Gottesprädikationen aus Ex 34,6f. in ihrem Kontext in Kapitel 32–34,” in Gottes Volk am Sinai: Untersuchungen zu Ex 32–34 und Dtn 9–10, ed. Matthias Köckert and Erhard Blum (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 2001), 141–56. The title uses the term “Gottesprädikationen,” which Scoralick seems to prefer to Spieckermann’s “Gnadenformel” as a designation for Exod 34:6–7, likely because it leaves room for both the grace and the punishment language.
¹²⁵ Christoph Dohmen, “Dekaloganfang,” 180; and Exodus 19–40, 355, describes Exod 34:7 as a concrete illustration (Erläuterung), an interpretation (Auslegung), and an explanation (Erklärung) of 34:6. This relationship weighs toward regarding even the punitive aspects of v. 7 as somehow related to and supportive of the overarching quality of divine mercy in v. 6. Thus, Dohmen (p. 180) sees Yahweh’s gracious and compassionate nature as manifest “in seiner Vergebungsbereitschaft … im Gegenüber zur Notwendigkeit des Strafens, welch selbst aber wieder mit dem immer als Versöhnungsangebot aufzufassenden Strafaufschub verbunden bleibt.”
¹²⁶ Schenker, Versöhnung und Widerstand, 85–89. See footnotes 27, 29, and 32 above.
¹²⁷ Yochanan Muffs, Love and Joy: Law, Language and Religion in Ancient Israel (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 20, views the expression “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” as a merciful deferral of punishment. He reads the preceding נַשֶּא עון as indicating forbearance rather than forgiveness: “God bears their sin but does not expunge it entirely.” Muffs offers a stark analogy: “The atom bomb will destroy us
so that it stands—as much as any study—as a sort of consensus reading.

Scoralick suggests a chiastic structure in Exod 34:6–7 in which the Stichwort חסד binds v. 6b (“rich in steadfast love”) to v. 7a (“guarding steadfast love”). The center of the chiasm is thus Yahweh’s steadfast love. This makes v.6a (“slow to anger”) and v. 7b (“visiting iniquity of fathers upon sons”) (7b) the outside terms in the chiasm. Thus associated, the visiting phrase can be read as a function of divine patience. Scoralick follows Schenker in reading the verb פקד not as a “punishing visitation” (strafend heimsuchen) but as “inspection, examination” (prüfen), and she cites Schenker at length, emphasizing God’s waiting (warten) and examining (untersuchen) during the second, third, and fourth generations. Only when “weiteres Zuwarten müsste als Schwäche erscheinen” does the time for punishment arrive. This postponement of punishment serves as a continual invitation to reconciliation.128

Scoralick also offers a few well-developed insights from the Exodus narrative context. As one example, she connects the use of ראה in Exod 3, where Yahweh emphatically states that “I have indeed seen the misery of my people,” with the echo in 32:9, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people.” The events of the golden calf have afforded Yahweh another look at Israel: “Und auf den zweiten Blick sieht Gott offenbar tiefer: die Hartnäckigkeit des Volkes. Und so wie Gott beim Volk tiefer blick—die Charakterisierung als hartnäckig wird nicht mehr zurückgenommen (34,10)—, so offenbar er auch die Weise seines Mitseins, seinen Namen, umfassender. Das gescheint in Ex 34, 6f.129 The newly revealed depth of the people’s sinfulness

and our family now, in our lifetime, or we will die at a ripe old age, and our children will die in an atomic holocaust. Which of the two alternatives will the sensible person choose? I think one would prefer the second option, and so, it seems, did the ancients.” For his interpretation, Muffs leans on Exod 32:32, as well as Moses’ citation of the phrase in Num 14:18, where it is bracketed by “Lord, have patience” in v. 17 and “as you have carried (ns’) this people … up to now” in v. 19. In this context, Muffs asserts, Moses’ citation of the visiting phrase “cannot be anything but an expression of mercy and at least partial forgiveness. It is certainly not an expression of strict justice and total destruction, as it is usually understood.”

128 Scoralick, “JHWH, JHWH,” 146–47. See also Schenker, Versöhnung und Widerstand, 87.

calls forth a new and deeper self-revelation of Yahweh’s nature. This dynamic further highlights 34:6–7 as the ultimate, fullest revelation of the divine character within Exodus.

3.2.5. Narrative Studies of the Golden Calf Episode in Exodus 32–34

Before 1983, few scholars treated Exod 32–34 as a unity. In that year, two studies appeared which approached these chapters as a single narrative: H. C. Brichto’s “The Worship of the Golden Calf: A Literary Analysis of a Fable on Idolatry,” and Walter Moberly’s *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34.* Moberly’s monograph, in particular, has proved indispensable for its methodological, narratological, and theological contributions to the present study. In their works, both Brichto and Moberly discuss 34:6–7, but unfortunately both also completely ignore the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons.”

A third study, however, offers one of the most extensive reflections on the visiting phrase since Scharbert’s 1957 article. Michael Widmer’s monograph, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer: A Study of Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14,* publishes his 2003 dissertation written under Walter Moberly. Widmer attempts to read 34:6–7 within the flow of the Exodus story, noting that “after the golden calf incident, YHWH’s self-disclosure seems to come as a deliberate reformulation of his previous pronouncement [in 20:5–6]” and therefore

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130 Herbert C. Brichto, “The Worship of the Golden Calf: A Literary Analysis of a Fable on Idolatry,” *HUCA* 54 (1983): 4, argues that Exod 32–34 “make up a carefully crafted narrative in the service of a single theme.” For Brichto, that theme is the vanity of worshipping God with self-made images, in counterpoint with the mystery of divine immanence through his human mediator(s).


132 This is also true of a more recent article by Moberly, “How May We Speak of God? A Reconsideration of the Nature of Biblical Theology,” *TynBul* 53 (2002): 177–202, which takes up the discussion of Exod 34:6–7 directly. Moberly poses the question, “How should v. 7b (‘but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity…’) be understood?” But the ellipsis here is significant. Moberly again disregards the transgenerational language in his explanation of the passage.

stands as a “divine re-characterization.” Widmer suggests that by speaking in the third person (“Yahweh, Yahweh”), God conveys these words to Moses as a model for prayer, a traditional rabbinic insight which is integral to his study.

Widmer pays particular attention to the transgenerational language in Exod 34:7b. Building on Scharbert and others, he reads the פַּּכַד-phrase to mean that “God comes first to examine the sins of successive generations before measures are taken.” Regarding the preceding language of Yahweh “bearing iniquity” (נָשָׂא עִון), Widmer concludes, “The sin is not necessarily eradicated, but temporarily put off by a patient God…. In other words, the terminology reflects both YHWH’s loving patience and His moral demand.”

In his interpretation of both these phrases, Widmer points ahead to his later chapter on Num 13–14. He writes, “We shall see that this reading of נָשָׂא is enforced and exemplified in Numbers 14 where YHWH patiently ‘bears’ Israel’s sins until a time when He calls them to accountability.” Widmer uses Num 14:20–35 as “an intertextual hermeneutical key to the complex concept of YHWH’s visitation of the iniquities of fathers upon children to the fourth generation.” In Numbers, children suffer for forty years with their parents in the wilderness—

134 Widmer, Moses, God, and the Dynamics, 184, 202.
136 Widmer’s study then proceeds to Num 13–14, connecting the dots and noting how Moses’ intercessory prayer in Num 14 adopts, almost verbatim, the language which Yahweh proclaims in Exod 34:6–7, including the language of deferred punishment, expressing even this as a prayer for mercy.
137 Widmer, Moses, God, and the Dynamics, 199.
138 Widmer, Moses, God, and the Dynamics, 191.
139 Widmer, Moses, God, and the Dynamics, 191.
140 Widmer, Moses, God, and the Dynamics, 198.
while the parents live. After the death of the exodus generation, however, “the children are not [any longer] the bearers of their parents’ guilt, but are the potential bearers of the divine promise.”141 Widmer describes this theological dynamic as a “synthesis of trans-generational retribution and the principle that individuals and their contemporaries should be rewarded and punished on the basis of their own conduct…. In fact, Numbers 32 makes it evident that the new generations’ standing before God will depend on their own response to the divine promise (32:6–15).”142

While Widmer’s analysis is stimulating, it is questionable whether his use of Num 14 as the hermeneutical key to Exod 34:6–7 brings greater clarity to God’s self-revelation. He does not make a convincing case that the Numbers narrative represents the definitive concrete manifestation of Yahweh’s two-fold character, nor does his explanation, which ultimately synthesizes divine grace with individual merit, retain the overwhelming and climactic emphasis of Exod 34:6–7 on the depth of divine mercy in the face of a demonstrably and incorrigibly stiff-necked people. I will argue below, on lexical-semantic grounds, that Yahweh’s quality of “forgiving (נשׂא) iniquity” in Exod 34:7 must be allowed its normal idiomatic sense of forgiving, lifting, removing—not merely “temporarily bearing with”—in spite of the logical tension in which it stands there alongside “visiting (פקד) iniquity.” I will also argue below that the pervasive Exodus theme of divine freedom and hiddenness, and the strong note of this theme in Exod 33–34 especially, should caution interpreters against advancing one highly precise pattern of God’s judgment as the sole meaning of the visiting phrase, as Widmer attempts. Yahweh utters the visiting phrase as a strong assertion of his prerogative in punishing sinners, as Yahweh who reigns forever. It is likely not intended to depict a single, precise dynamic of his

141 Widmer, Moses, God, and the Dynamics, 343–44.
142 Widmer, Moses, God, and the Dynamics, 344.
transgenerational dealings with his people in accordance with which he is binding himself to act. Widmer’s work is helpful and persuasive in connecting one later canonical instance of divine punishment back to Exod 34:6–7 as an example of Yahweh “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons,” but goes too far in stressing the Num 14 interactions as the paradigmatic instance of the divine transgenerational punishment which must be read backwards into Exodus in order to define and to limit the intended sense of the visiting phrase in Exod 34:7.
CHAPTER FOUR
ANALYSIS OF THE HEBREW TEXTS OF EXODUS 20:5–6 AND 34:6–7

This dissertation focuses on the meaning and function of the phrase “visiting the iniquity of fathers upon sons” within its narrative and rhetorical contexts in the book of Exodus. Careful attention to the precise meaning of the words, word combinations, and grammatical constructions of the passages in which the phrase occurs is a necessary initial step and serves as a foundation for the narrative-rhetorical analysis which follows. This chapter takes up such lexical and syntactical considerations.

For the purpose of this study, the most extensive examination is devoted to the following terms and phrases: jealous (קנא, בְּעָנָא), iniquity of fathers (עון אבות), third and fourth (שלשים, רבעים), acting in lovingkindness to/for (עשה חסד ל, בַּשֵּׁם חָסְדֵּיתָא), to/for thousands (לאלפים), hating and loving (שָנָא, אָהַב), preserving lovingkindness (נִצְּרוּ חָסְדֵי, בַּזְּרָה חָסְדוֹת), forgiving iniquity (נִשְׁא עון), and will certainly not leave unpunished (ונִקָּה לֹא יְנִקֶּה). Many of the lexical elements discussed under 20:5–6 are also applicable to Exod 34:6–7. Some elements unique to Exod 34:6–7 raise little debate and are discussed in numerous studies; therefore, the analysis of 34:6–7 here will largely focus on the last three expressions just mentioned. Beyond all these, the expression פַּקַּד עון...עַל (“visiting iniquity in punishment against”) warrants particular attention and is treated in its own chapter which follows.

Prior to this lexical and grammatical analysis, this chapter will support a focus on the Masoretic Text with a brief discussion of the minor textual variants extant for these passages. The chapter concludes by justifying the boundaries of Exod 20:2–6 and Exod 34:6–7 as literary and rhetorical units.
4.1. Establishing the Text

4.1.1. Textual Variants in Exodus 20:2–6

The most notable textual anomaly of Exod 20:2–6 in *BHS* is the unusual accenting,¹ since none of the three most significant textual variants substantially alters the meaning of the passage. In v. 3, the Septuagint (LXX), followed by the Vulgate, translates “πλὴν ἐμοῦ” (“besides me, except for me”) for עלְפני, but this does not demand a different Hebrew original. In v. 5, the Nash Papyrus (first or second century BC) text of the Decalogue reads אל קנוא rather than the MT אל קנא. This is an equivalent adjective form for “jealous,” with no significant difference in meaning.² Finally, Propp cites three medieval Hebrew manuscripts that read “visiting iniquity of fathers upon sons and upon sons of sons, upon the third and the fourth generation.”³ However, Goshen-Gottstein cautions that only a few unique medieval readings reflect earlier traditions and that there was a natural tendency toward harmonization within texts.⁴ In this case, harmonization is likely, since the parallel passage in Exod 34:6–7 contains the extra phrase “and against sons of

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¹ Verses 3 and 4 terminate with rebia’ (rather than with sop ʾāṣiq and sillāq) in many MT manuscripts, and there is an atnah (rather than sop ʾāṣiq) before the sillāq at the end of vv. 2 and 5. See James D. Price, *The Syntax of Masoretic Accents in the Hebrew Bible*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 27 (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1990), 156–58; and, especially, Mordechai Breuer, “Dividing the Decalogue into Verses and Commandments,” in *The Ten Commandments in History and Tradition*, ed. Ben-Zion Segal and Gershon Levi (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990), 291–330, who describes the two simultaneous systems of cantillation for the Ten Commandments, one which divides by the traditional verses, and the other by commandments. Also factoring the Masoretic paragraphing, Breuer outlines several legitimate divisions of the Decalogue which can be justified by the MT. “It is hard to choose between them on the basis of logical considerations” (313).


³ Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 111, identifies these as Kennicott mss 109, 181, and 369. Propp follows the private suggestion of David Noel Freedman that this extra phrase may represent the original reading which dropped out, before canonization, due to the scribal error of haplography. However, medieval harmonization with Exod 34:7 seems more likely than medieval reliance on a manuscript tradition which disappeared before canonization.

sons.” For Exod 20:2–6, then, the present study will follow the MT as it stands.

4.1.2. Textual Variants in Exodus 34:6–7

No textual variants arise in the visiting phrase of v. 7, and there is no reason to prefer other minor variants in Exod 34:6–7 to the MT. The extant Hebrew manuscript tradition is largely consistent in its witness for the text of Exod 34:6–7; most of the variants occur in the versions.5 Many commentators note the LXX reduction of “Yahweh, Yahweh” in v. 6 to a single use of the name. This is more easily explained as the elimination of redundancy in the LXX than as a reduplication of an originally single occurrence in its Hebrew Vorlage.6 For the phrase נוצר חסד לאלפים in v. 7, the LXX expands this to two verbs and two qualities: δικαιοσύνην διατηρῶν και ποιῶν ἔλεος εἰς χιλιάδας (“preserving faithfulness and performing kindness for thousands”).

While it is not impossible that the LXX renders a Hebrew text with an additional verb and object, missing in the MT, it is noteworthy that both δικαιοσύνη and ἔλεος are common renderings for חסד in the Pentateuch of the LXX.7 In Pentateuchal usage, δικαιοσύνη bears the sense of personal kindness and faithfulness rather than legal righteousness or justice.8 Clearly, the lead verb διατηρέω reads the MT נצר, yet the second verb ποιέω (קטן) is more expected in expressing acts of חסד and appears in the parallel expression in Exod 20:6. The LXX rendering δικαιοσύνην

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5 Judith E. Sanderson, An Exodus Scroll from Qumran: 4QpaleoExod and the Samaritan Tradition, HSS 30 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 321–23, lists the portion of the Exodus text which this Qumran manuscript contains, between 6:25 and 37:16, with several gaps. Among these gaps are Exod 20:2–17 and 34:4–9, so that this unique, ancient witness is not available for the key texts in this study.

6 Compare the LXX omission of the first of two occurrences of יאסר in Exod 34:9.


8 Consider the narrative contexts of Gen 19:19; 20:13; 21:23; and 24:27. Note also the rendering of the Hebrew pairing נצר חסד in Gen 24:27 and 24:49 as δικαιοσύνην…και ἀλήθειαν and ἔλεος και δικαιοσύνην, respectively, suggesting δικαιοσύνην here functions as a close synonym with ἔλεος and ἀλήθεια. Contrast this to the more narrow range of meaning for δικαιοσύνη in the LXX Psalms, where all 82 occurrences render the Hebrew terms צדק orצדק, and where the paired expression נצר חסד (Pss 25(24):10; 40(39):11–12; 57(56):4; 61(60):8; 85(84):11; 89(88):15; 115:1(113:9); 138(137):2) is rendered uniformly with ἔλεος and ἀλήθεια but never with δικαιοσύνη.
διατηρῶν καὶ ποιῶν ἔλεος, therefore, likely utilizes hendiadys to render the single phrase נצור חסד. This doubled expression may further heighten the emphasis on Yahweh’s kindness, but it does not alter or add to the meaning of the MT.⁹ The Vulgate takes Exod 34:6–7 as Moses’ declaration regarding Yahweh, rather than Yahweh’s self-proclamation. In its translation of ונ枷 לא נ枷 in v. 7b, the (negated) active verb of Yahweh is lost: nullusque apud te per se innocens est (“and with you no one, by himself, is innocent”). Nevertheless, there is no indication here of a different Hebrew Vorlage. The one variance in the Samaritan Pentateuch is also in this phrase, where it reads לו instead of לא. Tsedaka translates this variant, “And the innocent He will clear him,”¹⁰ which reverses the sense of MT ונ枷 לא נ枷 (“but he will certainly not leave unpunished”). However, the canonical re-use of this phrase with לא in Num 14:18; Jer 30:11; 46:28; and Nah 1:3 makes the originality of לו unlikely. Also, while the Samaritan Pentateuch resolves the contradiction with the preceding context, it introduces a new contradiction with the “visiting iniquity” phrase which follows. The textual tradition of the Peshitta suggests no significant variants for these verses.¹¹ Thus, also for Exod 34:6–7, there is a correspondence between the MT and the best original Hebrew text discernible through the manuscripts and versions.

4.2. Lexical-Syntactical Analysis of Exodus 20:5b–6

5 כ אטני יהוה אלהיך אל קנא פקד עון אביו עון שבאו על רב

6 ועשוה חסד לאלפים לאמבי ולשמרי מצותי:

4.2.1. כי, For, Because

Here, the conjunction כי (“for, because”) functions in its common explicative (or

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⁹ This doubling may also be influenced by the final words of the previous verse, Exod 34:6: רבייחס ואמתי. As noted above, the LXX of Gen 24:49 renders איתי נאמר as ἔλεος και δικαιοσύνην.


evidential) sense, giving the evidence of or argument for the preceding assertion, in this case the injunction against having other gods and idolatry. Rifat Sonsino lists ֵ-clauses first in his classification of the literary forms of the motive clauses in OT law. “Most often, [ֵ] expresses the reason behind the law…. On occasion, it may also introduce a dependent parenthetic clause.”

In outlining the varied content and strategies of the motive clauses, Sonsino notes that some motive clauses reinforce obedience through a statement of truth, often theological. Here, he catalogues motive clauses which (1) express God’s authority, (2) allude to the historical experiences of the people, (3) instill a fear of punishment, or (4) promise well-being to the compliant. Sonsino identifies Exod 20:5–6 as motivation by such a statement of truth, specifically as a category (3) statement in which “the warning and its implied punishment are placed in the mouth of God.” It is interesting, however, that all four of these statement-strategies appear in Exod 20:2–6: types (1) and (2) are employed in Exod 20:2, type (1) in v. 5, and type (4) in v. 6, in addition to type (3) in v. 5. Frequently overlooked as mere footnotes to OT laws, such statements often express a rich theology, as they clearly do here in Exod 20.

Berend Gemser notes that the Decalogue contains three such motive clauses, all introduced by ֵ (Exod 20:5–6, 7, 11). Sonsino reckons a fourth, Exod 20:12, the promise attached to the command to honor parents, introduced by לְמַעַן (“so that”) rather than by ֵ (“because”), yet

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12 Joüon, §170da; Arnold and Choi, §4.3.4.b.
standing as an additional significant parallel to Exod 20:5b–6.18

4.2.2. אנכי (not אני), The Longer Pronoun “I”

While the strict lexical meaning of the independent first person pronoun אני (rather than אנכי) in 20:5. The usage of these alternate lexemes is fairly balanced in Exodus, with 39 occurrences of אני and 22 of אנכי, but the use of אנכי with the Tetragrammaton as its predicate occurs only in 20:2 and 20:5.19 Elsewhere in the OT, this אנכי יהוה formulation is found mainly in passages with direct allusion to Exod 20: the repetition of these Decalogue verses in Deut 5:6 and 5:9, the paraphrase of Exod 20:2 in Ps 81:11, and two occurrences of the expression “I am Yahweh, your God, from the land of Egypt” in Hosea 12:10 and 13:4. The three other OT occurrences of אנכי יהוה are in the highly rhetorical passages of Isa 43:11, 44:24, and 51:15. In contrast, the expression אני יהוה is found 17x in Exodus alone, and 196x in the Hebrew Bible. The comparative rareness of אנכי יהוה has fueled rabbinic20 and source-critical21 speculations.

18 Sonsino, Motive Clauses, 86.
19 The sequence אני יהוה also occurs in Exod 4:11, but here אני יהוה is in apposition to אני, as Yahweh answers his own preceding question: “Who makes a man mute or deaf or sighted or blind? Is it not I, Yahweh?”
20 See Louis Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews, 7 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3:94–95. Some suggested that God spoke thus because Jacob had warned his children to anticipate such future address from God: “With the word ‘Anoki’ He addressed my grandfather Abraham; with the word ‘Anoki’ He addressed my father Isaac, and with the word ‘Anoki’ He addressed me. Know then, that when He will come to you, and will so address you, it will be He, but not otherwise” (p. 95). Others surmised that the longer form of the pronoun was actually an Egyptian loan word, whereby God “treated them as did that king his home-coming son, whom, returning from a long stay over sea, he addressed in the language the son had acquired in a foreign land. So God addressed Israel in Egyptian, because it was the language they spoke” (p. 94). אנכי resembles the Egyptian first person singular pronoun ink and probably seemed more exotic because of its disappearance in post-biblical Hebrew.
21 Source analysis has typically explained this rarer usage of אנכי as an E tendency, in contrast to the exclusive use of אני in texts ascribed to P. See S. R. Driver, The Book of Genesis, 12th ed., WC (London: Methuen, 1926), x. W. J. Martin, Stylistic Criteria and the Analysis of the Pentateuch (London: Tyndale, 1955), 14–15, critiques source-critical explanations, arguing instead that the usage patterns of אני are explained by its heightened deictic force.
Granting that later OT texts do demonstrate a preference for אֶֽנִי, the clustering of the expression אֶנִי יְהוָה in texts directly referencing Yahweh’s self-proclamation at Sinai may suggest another explanation for the use of אֶנִי יְהוָה in Exod 20:2 and 5. While semantically equivalent to אני, the more distinct אֶנִי may be employed here precisely because it is more distinct. With an extra syllable and longer vowels, it is rhythmically more replete. Preceded and followed in Exodus by 17 repetitions of אני יְהוָה, the exclusive use of אֶנִי יְהוָה in Exod 20 is more rare. Thus, the expression אֶנִי יְהוָה carries a rhetorical weight and distinctiveness well-suited to the unique occasion of the self-proclamation of Yahweh to Israel at Sinai.

4.2.3. יְהוָה, אֱלֹהִים, אֵל, Yahweh, Elohim, and El

The first two of these appellations for Israel’s God are among the most common words in the OT, with יְהוָה occurring more than 6800x and אֱלֹהִים 2600x. The noun אֵל is comparatively less frequent, with 238 occurrences. These divine designations have occupied a central and storied place in the OT scholarship of the modern period; the literature is vast and precludes even a cursory survey here.

The divine name יְהוָה has a special prominence within the book of Exodus, and, despite longstanding attempts by scholars to invest it with an original, etymological meaning, it is ultimately through the narrative’s usage of the term and through the narrative’s characterization

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25 See the numerous related works throughout the bibliography. To reference authors and titles here would produce a footnote of two full pages.
of this name’s bearer that the name יהוה acquires its meaning in the narrative. G. R. Driver postulated an origin of the name in a primeval god-cry, “Yah.”26 Albright proposed that יהוה originated as a Hiphil (causative) form of the verb הוה meaning “(he who) causes to be (creates),” a position later advanced by David Noel Freedman and Frank Moore Cross.27 Shelomo Goitein linked יהוה with the Arabic root hwy expressing deep passion, and concluded that “I am Yahweh” originally meant “I am the one who is passionately extreme both in punishing and rewarding,” which carried a “primitive monotheistic sense.”28 Thomas Römer, has suggested an etymology for Yahweh from a secondary meaning of hwy as “to blow,” pinning the historical origin of “Yahweh” to a desert storm deity: “he who blows.”29 Others, however, question the sufficiency of the evidence for determining an historical origin, and criticize these attempts as “conjecture and speculation.”30 Even Freedman acknowledges that in nearly all OT occurrences, including the most ancient passages, the Tetragrammaton “clearly appears both grammatically and syntactically as a personal name. Its original verbal form and force have left no trace.”31 Andrea Saner observes:


30 Geoffrey H. Parke-Taylor, Yahweh: The Divine Name in the Bible (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1975), 49. More recently, R. W. L. Moberly, The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 199, writes, “We have neither the evidence nor the tools to enable effective historical penetration behind the Exodus text [regarding the origin of the name YHWH]. The choice is either to repeat Israel’s tradition, making clear its status as Israel’s tradition, or to say that we know nothing.” In any case, it seems more sensible to allow the narrative texts themselves to establish the character of the God who bears this name. The repetition of אנכי יהוה framing the “no other gods” of Exod 20:3 and elaborated by the language of divine jealousy, punishment, and lovingkindness in Exod 20:5–6, for example, is a better grounds for such a characterization than a dozen competing etymological speculations.

Religio-historical approaches to understanding the roots of the divine name “YHWH” and Yahwism will not aid the reader in understanding the text of Exodus…. The etymological approach is specifically limited because it separates the history of the name from that of those who worshipped the God so named…. Even if the origins of the name “YHWH” could be deduced, it would be unclear how this could inform one’s reading of Exodus … since the origins would be historically removed from the narrative in its received form.32

This is not to deny that for the ancients a name “was not merely a convenient collocation of sounds by which a person, place or thing could be identified; rather a name expressed something of the very essence of that which was being named,”33 and that, thus, “the etymology of a divine name held certain associative possibilities for the Israelites.”34 However, such associations are not necessarily determinative for the characterization of the name-bearer within a narrative, nor should externally reconstructed etymologies override an etymological explanation provided within the narrative.

The primary meaning-association of the name Yahweh in Exodus, therefore, must be rooted in the overall characterization of its bearer within the narrative. The narrative associates the name with the Qal form of הָיוֹת in Exod 3:12–15 (cf. Exod 4:12, 15).35 In light of this, Van Bekkum’s summary that the divine name in Exodus “is either a promise (‘I will certainly be there’) or an allusion to the incomparability of YHWH (‘I am who I am, i.e., without peer)”
seems more hermeneutically significant than the proposals above. Even these meanings of יהוה, however, must not be isolated from the overall “freighting” of the divine character who bears this name, which takes place along the plotline of the Exodus narrative. In fact, the book of Exodus emphasizes the absence or insufficiency of prior understandings of Yahweh and his name (3:13; 5:2; 6:3) and points to the crucial role of Yahweh’s actions and words in the story in supplying the proper understanding of this name (6:7; 7:5, etc.; 33:18–19). This dissertation will argue that the narrative crystallizes such characterization in summary statements such as Exod 20:2, 20:5–6, and 34:6–7.

The name יהוה is a personal name, while אלהים and אל are common nouns denoting the generic category of god or deity. Thus, Propp can translate Exod 20:5b, “For I am Yahweh your deity (אלהי), a jealous deity (אל), reckoning fathers’ sins…” Other titles and epithets for God appear in the OT, but יהוה is the only personal name by which he makes himself known to Moses and Israel. Exodus forbids the worship of other gods (אלהים אחרים, Exod 20:3) or another god (אל אחר, Exod 34:14), but nowhere does it or could it speak of another Yahweh. Similarly, יהוה does not appear with pronoun suffixes. As in Exod 20:5, אלהים commonly appears as “your God,” “their God,” or “our God.” Elsewhere, though less commonly, אל is suffixed as “my

36 Wout Jac. van Bekkum, “What’s in the Divine Name? Exodus 3 in Biblical and Rabbinic Tradition,” in The Revelation of the Name YHWH to Moses: Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity, ed. George H. van Kooten, TBN (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 5. Tremper Longman III, How To Read Exodus (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 104, is representative of another common reading of the divine name in Exod 3, rooted in expressions of היה found there: Yahweh is “self-defining. He is unable to be narrowed down. He is the ground of existence.” See also the LXX of Exod 3:14: ἐγὼ εἰμί ὁ ὄν.

37 The precise sense of Exod 6:3 has been widely debated, particularly the question whether the vocabulary Yahweh was previously unknown to Moses and the Israelites. Whatever conclusion one reaches, however, the observation of Moberly, Old Testament of the Old Testament, 35, still obtains: “Although it is one and the same God who was God of the patriarchs and is God of Israel, something is novel and discontinuous in this God’s self-revelation to Moses as YHWH.”

38 Propp, Exodus 19–40, 102.


40 This suffixing of אלהים with a personal pronoun, in address to Israel, carries profound theological significance. Feldmeier and Spieckermann, God of the Living, 34, “Formulations that combine YHWH with ‘your
God.”41 But nowhere does the OT speak of “your Yahweh” or “my Yahweh.” (So also I speak of “my father” but not “my Carl.”) Finally, unlike אלהים, the name יהוה is never modified by attribute adjectives.42

In the context of Exod 20:5, the apposition of אל קנא does not function as a divine epithet (“El, the Jealous” or “Jealous God”) associating Yahweh with an already recognized title,43 but rather begins the description of the character and ways of Yahweh which is continued by the participial phrases which follow.44 That is to say, אלהים here is neither a personal name nor a title serving to further identify the speaker, but rather a generic term for deity45 which begins to describe the kind of God that Yahweh their God is. While the usage of אלהים is often interchangeable, Franz has noted that אלהים is used more frequently with adjectives and when describing God’s character or nature, while אלהים generally focuses on godhood itself, often with an indication toward whom he stands in relationship.46 This is the pattern of usage exhibited in God’ and ‘our God’ evidence the degree to which YHWH binds himself to Israel and expects Israel to bind itself to him.” Zimmerli, I Am Yahweh, 20, notes that “I am Yahweh” stands as a “staunch polemical self-assertion” in relation to idols, but with the addition of אלהים with a pronoun suffix in relation to Israel, this becomes “a merciful, promissory word of consolation.”

41 In Exod 15:2 and in 11 other passages in the OT. In OT usage, only the first person singular pronoun is used with אלהים. The basic equivalency in meaning between אלהים and אלהים is attested in Ps 118:28, where אלהים and אלהים stand in poetic parallelism. Note also the opening words of Ps 63:2: (“O Elohim, you are my El!”).


43 This claim opposes Frank Moore Cross, “אל ‘el,” TDOT I:257, who associates this construction with pre-Yahwistic Canaanite epithets. He judges the similar construction in Exod 34:6 to be borrowed from the Canaanite liturgical formulation, “El, the compassionate and merciful.” For the expression אלהים אלהים, he finds “no parallels in Canaanite polytheism to the exclusive loyalty demanded by Yahweh” and so proposes an origin for this epithet in the early liturgies of Israel, patterned however on the older Canaanite “El” ascriptions. See also Cross, “Yahweh and the God of the Patriarchs,” 258–59, where he argues for a general pattern of such borrowing of “many of the traits and functions of El … as traits and functions of Yahweh in the earliest traditions of Israel.”

44 The construction אלהים + attributive participle is often used in such contexts which describe the kind of God which Israel’s God is, especially in the Psalms: Deut 7:9; Pss 7:12; 57:3; 77:15; 89:8; 99:8; Isa 45:15. In other contexts, this construction is used to identify God as the God who has done certain things: Gen 35:1; 3; 2 Sam 22:48; Pss 18:33, 48; 106:21.

45 Terence E. Fretheim, “אל,” NIDOTTE I:400. The function of אלהים as a common/generic noun is most starkly illustrated in Hos 11:9 and Isa 31:3, which assert that a subject is “god (אלוהים) and not man (איש)” or “man (איש) and not god (אלוהים).”

46 Matthias Franz, Der barmherzige und gnädige Gott: Die Gnadenrede vom Sinai (Ex 34, 6–7) und ihre
The adjective קנא, here in attributive relation to אל, is usually translated “jealous.” קנא depicts someone as susceptible to or stirred to intense, fervent emotion, often with a connotation of conjugal possessiveness and protectiveness. It is zeal of a particular kind: the zeal “to remain exclusively favored in covenant relationship [which] grows out of the recognition of the righteousness of this fidelity.”

Provan describes Yahweh’s jealousy as “an intolerance of rivals” and Thoennes as “an intolerant love.” For this reason, it is consistently used in contexts involving Yahweh, his people, and other gods. And while the English word “jealous” does risk negative connotations not present in the Hebrew, it is nevertheless more precise in expressing this nuance of קנא than simply “passionate” or “fervent.”

While קנא describes an interior emotional state or disposition, it can also imply activity emerging from such jealous zeal, so that HALOT glosses אל קנא in Exod 20:5 as “the God striving for his goal.” The emotional intensity of קנא is captured by the pious exclamation,

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50 HALOT (Study Edition) II:1110. God’s zeal as the ground of assurance that he will indeed act and accomplish his intention is especially notable in Isaiah’s usage of the noun קנא: Isa 9:6; 37:32; 42:13; 59:17; 63:15; 2 Kgs 19:31 (Isaiah to Hezekiah). See also Ezek 39:25 and Joel 2:18.
“Zeal for your house has consumed (אכל) me” (Ps 69:10 [Eng 69:9]; cf. Ps 119:139).

God’s zeal is often associated with his fiery anger. Andersen notes that the triple use of the expression אכל קנא in Deut 4:24, 5:9, and 6:15 is bracketed with references to God as a consuming fire and to his burning anger.51 In Ezekiel, God speaks “in the fire of my jealousy” (Ezek 36:5; cf. 38:19), and Zephaniah twice warns that “the fire of his jealousy will consume the whole earth” (Zeph 1:18; 3:8). Song of Songs, in exultation and warning, declares that love (אהבה) and jealousy (קנאה) are more powerful than death, floods, and wealth: “Its flashes are flashes of fire, the flame of Yah” (Song 8:6). Of the seventy OT passages in which קנא appears, fifteen contain a reference to fire or smoking within the immediate context.52 Of course, in Exod 20:5, Yahweh’s jealousy is pronounced in a setting of theopanical fire, smoke, and storm.

The noun form קנאה (“zeal, jealousy”) is frequently paralleled or closely associated with words for wrath and anger such as חמה, חרון, and עברה.53 The verb קנא is often used in parallel with verbs of being provoked or incensed to anger: חרה, כעס, and קצף.54 Even God’s zealous commitment to save Zion can be expressed in terms of his wrath against her enemies: God’s promise to gather and restore his remnant people to Jerusalem in Zech 8 begins, “I am jealous for Zion with a great jealousy (קנאה大きה) and with a great wrath (חמהגדול) I am jealous for her” (8:2).55 Frequently related to Yahweh’s anger, “כנאה penetrates down further to the reason for his

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51 Andersen, “Yahweh, the Kind,” 48. Similarly, regarding the man who turns away to other gods and thinks he is safe in his stubbornness, Deut 29:19 [Eng 29:20] warns: “Yahweh will not be willing to forgive him, but the anger and jealousy (קנאה) of Yahweh will smoke against that man, and every curse written in this book will come upon him, and Yahweh will obliterate his name from under heaven.”

52 Dane C. Ortlund, Zeal Without Knowledge: The Concept of Zeal in Romans 10, Galatians 1, and Philippians 3, LNTS 472 (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 47.

53 קנא appears alongside חֵמָּה in Num 25:11; Ezek 5:13; 16:38, 42; 23:25; 36:6; Zech 8:2; Prov 6:34; 27:4; alongside חרי in Zeph 3:8; and alongside עבָרָה in Zeph 1:18 and Ezek 38:19.

54 קנא parallels חרה in Ps 37:1 and Prov 24:19; חמה in Deut 32:16, 21 and Ps 78:58; כעס in Ps 79:5; and קצף in Zech 1:14–15.

55 See also Zech 1:14–15, which clarifies that this jealous wrath is directed against Israel’s enemies, “the nations” who “furthered the disaster” against God’s people.
anger: the covenant relationship into which he has entered with Israel has been breached.”56

The emotional intensity of the root קֶנָּא has led commentators to favor etymological association with an Arabic root (qana’a) meaning dark red, but Reuter concludes that “etymological investigation of the root qn’ is unproductive” and finds no semantic connection to Arabic qana’a.57 Mettinger points out that any conceptual link between קֶנָּא and the El worship of Canaanite religion is unlikely as well:

[This designation] sounds like the El names … whose background was mainly Canaanite. In this case, however, we have a name which distinguishes itself from its Near Eastern environment. YHWH’s violent “jealousy,” which tolerates no rival, is without parallel in the religious literature of the ancient Near East.58

In the OT, the adjective קֶנָּא is used exclusively of Yahweh and always in contexts which speak of other gods.59 Here in the Decalogue it follows the prohibition of other gods and idols (Exod 20:3–5a), where it functions both as the rationale ((tasksa) for Yahweh forbidding the worship of other gods and also as a warning against such worship because of its association with impassioned punishment.60 Thus, in terms of rousing Yahweh to jealousy, idolatry is the chief offense. At the same time, the language of personal hatred in 20:5 (לשׂנאי) and the use of the plural מצותי in the following verse (“with respect to those who love me and who keep my commandments,” Exod 20:6) suggest that, on another level, the breaking of any of Yahweh’s commandments constitutes a deeply personal betrayal, a provocation to jealousy.61

56 Ortlund, Zeal Without Knowledge, 26.
58 Mettinger, In Search of God, 74. See also Ortlund, Zeal Without Knowledge, 29.
61 Patrick D. Miller, “Divine Commands and Beyond: The Ethics of the Commandments,” in The Ten Commandments: The Reciprocity of Faithfulness, ed. William P. Brown (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 28. See also Num 15:39, which labels the forsaking of Yahweh’s commandments (plural) to follow one’s own eyes and heart as “whoring” (זרה), a concept closely related to divine jealousy (קֶנָּא), as discussed below. The next verse summarizes: “So that you may remember and perform all my commandments and be holy to your God.”
Most scholars read קנא in Exod 20:5 as implying a marriage metaphor. Yahweh is jealous for the exclusive devotion and faithfulness of Israel, thus pictured as his wife, and is therefore angered by her idolatry and by her “whoring after” other gods. While others caution against stressing the conjugal associations of קנא, their arguments are largely overstated. The Exodus context of קנא weighs in favor of a marital analogy. Fischer and Markl note the matrimonial tone of Exod 20:2: “Hiermit erklärt sich Jahwe feierlich zum Gott Israels, ähnlich wie Brautleute einander als Frau und Mann das Ja-Wort geben.” Exodus 20:3 establishes the radical exclusivity of Yahweh’s relationship with Israel, and the mention of “other gods” makes explicit the “three cornered relationship” which Richard Bell sees at the heart of the verb קנא. The verbs of love and hate in 20:5–6 are frequently used in the Pentateuch to describe marital affection and love.

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63 H. G. L. Peels, “Ḳנָא,” NIDOTTE 3:939, asserts that the metaphor breaks down: a husband’s jealousy is directed toward his rival, but Yahweh’s jealous anger is directed toward his disloyal covenant partner (Exod 20:5). No metaphor is perfect, but Peels’ assumption here that jilted spouses are not provoked to anger also against the offending spouse seems an obvious mistake. In fact, the noun קִנְאָה and the verb קנא are used throughout Num 5 in laying out the procedure for a husband over whom a “spirit of jealousy” has come; here, the husband pursues retribution against his wife alone; his rival lover is not mentioned. Prov 6:32–35 gives the other side of the coin. Adulterers are warned of provoking a husband to jealousy since his wrathful vengeance against his wife’s lover will be immitigable. Nahum H. Sarna, Exodus, JPSTC (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 110, resists the analogy with human marriage because OT usage seems to intentionally reserve the adjective forms קַנָּא and קַנוֹא for God and never for jealous humans. Carol Meyers, Exodus, NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 171, likewise, notes that this “may indicate a degree of emotional intensity greater than that experienced by humans.” This is likely true, but does not disqualify the analogy or indicate that Yahweh is not addressing Israel here as her husband-figure. Most recently, Nissim Amzallag, “Furnace Remelting as the Expression of YHWH’s Holiness: Evidence from the Meaning of qannā’ (Ḳנָא) in the Divine Context,” JBL 134 (2015): 233–52, argues for a complete distinction between human uses (metaphorical, stative sense of emotional jealousy) and divine uses (concrete, active sense of metallurgic destruction and reconstitution/revitalization by fire) of קנא. It is difficult, however, to reconcile Amzallag’s thesis with the close connection between Yahweh’s jealousy and idolatry, and particularly with the use of the Piel and Hiphil forms of קנא to express the people’s provocation of Yahweh to jealousy by their idolatry. It would make little sense to say that Israel “caused Yahweh to remelt” by their worship of other gods.

64 Georg Fischer and Dominik Markl, Das Buch Exodus, NSKAT 2 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2009), 223.

devotion (חתם, love)\textsuperscript{66} or the withholding of due affection and love within a marriage (שׂנאה, hate).\textsuperscript{67} Mills suggests that perhaps the marriage covenant is a more appropriate parallel to Sinai than a suzerainty-vassal treaty.\textsuperscript{68} The double use of קַנָּא in Exod 34:14 further strengthens its marital associations, as Yahweh’s rhetoric in 34:14–16 interweaves the themes of divine jealousy, intermarriage with Canaanites, and whoring (זנה) after other gods.\textsuperscript{69}

Rooted in the metaphor of human marital dynamics, God’s self-description in Exodus as “jealous” or “zealous” can be viewed as an anthropomorphism, or more specifically, an anthropopathism.\textsuperscript{70} However, acknowledging קַנָּא as an anthropomorphism is no warrant for dismissing the full theological legitimacy of this “jealous” characterization. Ancient and contemporary polemics against the OT portrayal of God have seized on this term as offensive, and even dangerous.\textsuperscript{71} Brongers rejects the sense of “envious” or “jealous” for קַנָּא as “einen

\textsuperscript{66} Gen 24:67; 29:18, 30, 32; 34:3; Deut 21:15–16.

\textsuperscript{67} Gen 29:31, 33; Deut 21:15–17; 22:13–16; 24:3.

\textsuperscript{68} Mary E. Mills, *Images of God in the Old Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 34. The position of William L. Moran, “The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” *CBQ* 25 (1963): 77–87, and others, who limit the language of love and hate to the analogy of political loyalty, like that demanded in ANE suzerainty treaties, will be discussed below. Both metaphors—marital and political—are likely active in Exod 20:2–6, but it is also a unique *theological* situation: the deity and his people.

\textsuperscript{69} Exod 34:14–16 is the first use of זנה in the OT canon as a metaphor for idolatry. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 615, remarks on Exod 34:14: “As the following references to ‘whoring’ suggest, he is like a jealous husband married to a wanton Israel.”

\textsuperscript{70} McBride, “Essence of Orthodoxy,” 147, “The epithet is a forceful anthropopathism. It attributes to Yahweh a predisposition to behave like a jealous, dishonored, and justifiably angry spouse should Israel prove unfaithful to its primary covenantal obligations.”

schroffen Anthropopathismus” and “eine falsche Interpretation der Dekalogstellen.” 72 Gibson circumnavigates such “repulsive” portrayals of God by stressing the OT’s awareness that “all descriptions of God are metaphorical, an awareness that is, if anything, more rather than less sophisticated than ours, since we tend to think that with our god metaphors we are describing God as he really is.” 73

While the analogical nature of God-talk and divine condescension in revelation are vital concepts—and too complex for discussion here—five points warrant emphasis. 74 First, the Exodus narrative presents the language about Yahweh in Exod 20:5–6 not as “our God metaphors” but rather as God’s own publicly audible self-description to Israel. Second, Exod 34:14 asserts that “his name is Jealous (קִנְאַת).” “The name identifies the very person,” 75 and, thus, a recognition of the anthropomorphic nature of קִנְאַת should not discount it as a genuine and vital description of Yahweh’s own character. As Durham puts it, commenting on Exod 34:14,

3–21 also discusses the connection between the Bible and human violence. Collins suggests that it is not the depictions of religious zeal and violence in themselves which are dangerous, but rather the presumptions of divine authority with which they are approached, so that “the biblical portrayal … becomes pernicious only when it is vested with authority and assumed to reflect, without qualification or differentiation, the wisdom of God or the will of God.”

72 H. A. Brongers, “Der Eifer des Herrn Zabaoth,” VT 13 (1963): 276. Bell, Provoked to Jealousy, 9, 13, judges that “Brongers is clearly embarrassed by the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic nature of the קִנְאַת יהוה. He appears to downplay the idea of Yahweh being the jealous husband of Israel when she turns to other gods. Also in discussing the texts where קִנְאַת occurs, he tries to avoid ideas of ‘jealousy’ or ‘envy’… Perhaps Brongers … wants to remove any anthropopathic description of God in the OT.”


74 Tony Lane, “The Wrath of God as an Aspect of the Love of God,” in Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 145–46, critiques the view of C. H. Dodd, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans, 2nd ed. (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1959), 47–50, that “the wrath of God” in the New Testament, because it is an anthropomorphism, is an impersonal concept. Lane’s critique of Dodd resonates with the discussion offered here, especially points four and five. Lane acknowledges that God’s wrath is an anthropomorphism but notes that the love of God is equally anthropomorphic, though Dodd and others do not therefore conclude that God’s love is impersonal. Lane also notes that to take seriously the personal wrath of God does not necessitate “crudely literal” readings of divine wrath, as if it shares every aspect of sinful human anger (any more than God’s love should be literally equated “with human love in all its imperfection and distortion”).

75 Reuter, “קִנְאַת gn’,” TDOT 13:54.
“Yahweh’s jealousy … is demanded by what he is.”76 Third, while קַנָּא is thus closely tied to
Yahweh’s own person and nature, the jealousy which strikes out in wrath and punishment never
emerges arbitrarily or from Yahweh’s essential disposition, but always as a response to
provocation.77 It is thus a relative rather than an absolute divine attribute.78 Fourth, to allow the
metaphor its full theological weight is not to suggest that every point of comparison with human
jealousy is in view here (e.g., pettiness, dependency, Schadenfreude).79 While human jealousy,
like human wrath, may at times rightly be regarded as a dangerous insanity or poisonous
irrationality which carries a person blindly along, God’s jealousy is “intentionally formed and
driven by a sense of care.”80 And fifth, to downplay an exclusive, impassioned divine jealousy
and zeal is to warp the characterization of Yahweh in the OT. “A Stoic notion of divine
impassibility … is inconsistent with the biblical understanding of God.”81 Discussing the
depiction of God in Exodus, Muffs writes, “We have … a personal God presenting a full blown

Every Tongue Confess: Essays in Honor of Norman Nagel on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday, ed. Gerald S.
Krispin and Jon D. Vieker (Chelsea, MI: Bookcrafters, 1990), 288–89, discusses this dynamic and notes, alongside
the verb סער, the use of the Hiphil of קנא (“make jealous”) to express such provocation. For example, “They
provoked him to anger with their high places, and they made him jealous with their idols” (Ps 78:58; cf. Deut 32:16,
21; Ezek 8:3).
78 This terminology is drawn from Patrick D. Miller, Deuteronomy, IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 76:
“The absolute attribute of the holiness of God as one who is apart from all others, transcendent and distinguished
from all other reality, has its correlate in the relative attribute of jealousy” (emphasis in original).
79 See Tertullian, Adv. Marcionem, II:16. When Marcion and the gnostics denounced God’s jealousy and
wrath in the OT, Tertullian responded, “O these fools, who from things human form conjectures about things divine,
and because in mankind passions of this sort are taken to be of a corruptive character, suppose that in God also they
are of the same quality.” For a discussion of the dark dimensions of human jealousy and envy in comparison with
the jealousy of divine love, see Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III, The Cry of the Soul: How Our Emotions
80 McCarthy, “Divine Wrath,” 873–74. McCarthy discusses the description of divine wrath in the OT by
Abraham J. Heschel, The Prophets (Peabody, MA: Prince, 1999), 247–57, 279–98, who claims that God’s wrath is
not a “passion” but rather a “pathos,” demonstrating God’s concern for justice and also guaranteeing God’s
commitment to the world. It would seem that such a characterization is equally suited for the jealousy predicated of
Yahweh in the OT.
81 Reuter, TDOT 13:53. For a vivid meditation on the OT portrayal of Yahweh’s impassioned jealousy,
especially as a parallel to that of a properly protective spouse, see Allender and Longman, Cry of the Soul, 121–32.
personality…. The biblical God is anthropomorphic. He who strips God of His personal quality distorts the true meaning of Scripture.”

Yahweh’s jealousy is not asserted here in a bare context of divine description or abstract theologizing, but rather in a specific context: Yahweh’s covenant with Israel, whom he has rescued from bondage and brought to himself at Sinai. This brings a two-fold dimension to Yahweh’s jealousy on a number of levels. First, the basis of Yahweh’s jealousy is two-fold: “both … the uniqueness of God (who is not one among many) and the uniqueness of his relationship to Israel.” Patrick accents this second point: “Far from being a base primitive motive, jealousy is the logical expression of the mutually exclusive relation existing between God and God’s people…. Yahweh claims Israel as ‘my own possession’ (Exod 19:5), ‘distinct … from all other people’ (Exod 33:16).” Yet such jealousy is also directly related to His own being; Hengel suggests that “Yahweh’s zeal is probably best understood as an expression of his holiness.”

This two-fold basis of divine jealousy in God’s unique self and God’s unique relationship with Israel means that God’s jealousy also has a twofold set of objects. On the one hand, God is

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83 Cole, Exodus, 156.

84 Dale Patrick, Old Testament Law (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 43. See also Martin Buber, “Holy Event (Exodus 19–27),” in Exodus, ed. Harold Bloom, MCI (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 47, “YHVH has not revealed Himself to any other family of the ‘families of the earth’ save only to this Israel, and to them He has revealed Himself really as the ‘zealous God.’ And in the mouth of … Hosea … YHVH illustrates His zealousness by His experience with Israel in the desert: I loved (11:1) and they betrayed me (9:10; 11:2; 13:6).”


86 The focus or concern of jealousy is sometimes introduced by the preposition ל following the verb קנא (Piel), as in Ezek 39:25b: הקאתו לירושלים ולחワン קנא ("and I will be jealous for my holy name"), or Zech 1:14: ינאה לירושלים ולחワン קנא ("I will be jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy").
jealous for his own name (Exod 20:7; Ezek 39:25) and his own honor (Isa 42:8; 48:11). On the other hand, the focus of Yahweh’s jealousy and zeal is also for his land and his people (Joel 2:18), for Judah and Jerusalem (Zech 1:14), for Zion (Zech 8:2). Such a twofold jealousy resonates with Brueggemann’s thesis that Yahweh, at his core, is both “severely preoccupied with self-regard and passionately committed to life with the partner.” While Exod 20:5 certainly warns about the punishment for waywardness that springs from Yahweh’s jealousy, this same jealousy for his name, working in tandem with his jealousy for his people, ultimately springs forth in mercy and salvation (see Ezek 39:25; cf. Ezek 36:1–15). Thus Mohler can write: “God will bring salvation, restoration, and the promise of a new covenant … because of his name and His zeal for His own name. God will rescue Israel in order to defend His own reputation.” Ultimately, therefore, Yahweh’s jealousy attests not only to his incomparability and the intensity of his divine personality and will, but also to the strength of his covenant relationship with Israel. As Patrick Miller puts it, “It is God’s way of saying, I will have nothing less than your full devotion, and you will have nothing less than all my love.”

Within the immediate context of Exod 20:5–6, these observations may suggest that the description of Yahweh as אֵל קַנָּא flows not only into the act of visiting iniquity in 20:5b, but also

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87 Hyatt, Exodus, 212, describes Yahweh as “a God who is jealous of his position.” Elliger, “Ich bin der Herr,” 14, describes God as jealous “insofern er über seiner alleinigen Verehrung wacht.”

88 Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament, 283. See also p. 227, “The tension or contradiction is that Yahweh is for Israel (or more generally, ‘for us,’ pro nobis) in fidelity, and at the same time Yahweh is intensely and fiercely for Yahweh’s own self. These two inclinations of Yahweh are not fully harmonized here [Exod 34:6–7], and perhaps never are anywhere in the Old Testament. This reading of the statement entails the conclusion that there is a profound, unresolved, ambiguity in Yahweh’s life.”

89 In this sense, the description of Yahweh’s garb in Isa 59:17 is perfectly coherent: “He put on righteousness (צדק) as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation (ישועה) on his head; he put on garments of vengeance (נקם) and he wrapped himself in jealousy (קנאה) like a robe.”

90 R. Albert Mohler, Words from the Fire: Hearing the Voice of God in the 10 Commandments (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 66.

91 Lane, Compassionate but Punishing God, 44.

92 Miller, Deuteronomy, 76.
into the act of doing חסד in 20:6. This is how Freedman understands the text: “The essential meaning of qn’ is ‘ardor, passion,’ which finds its expression either in judgment or kindness (cf. Exod 20:5–6).” McBride presses this further, interpreting Yahweh’s reassertion of his קנא-character in Exod 34:14 alongside the disclosure of his grace and mercy in 34:6–7 as a shift in emphasis “from spousal ‘jealousy’ and probably retribution to ‘zealous,’ passionate commitment to preservation and even possible restoration of the covenant relationship.”

Thus, while divine jealousy is potentially devastating, it is always bound to the character of Yahweh and to the covenant purposes of Yahweh for his people, Israel. In view of this, the charge of Dozeman that “the formulation of divine jealousy in the Decalogue allows for no change in how God responds to humans [because] both the vengeance and love of God are automatic responses triggered by the actions of love and hate in humans” is a mischaracterization of Yahweh and of divine jealousy.

4.2.5. פקד על, “Visiting-in-Punishment Against”

In Exod 20:5, the participle פקד expresses a divine action that flows from Yahweh’s character as Israel’s “jealous God.” An extensive discussion is required regarding the multivalent root פקד, its various meanings, and its sense in this passage. The next chapter is devoted entirely to this verb, with particular attention to the idiomatic meaning and use of פקד with the preposition לפני in contexts of iniquity. There I argue for the English rendering visit-in-punishment.

95 In contrast to this perspective, Kaminsky, Corporate Responsibility, 63–64, associates the expression קנא with “a terrifying view of divine wrath … linked to concepts that are quite ancient.” He cites Rudolf Otto, The Idea of the Holy, trans. J. W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 18, who describes divine holiness and wrath in the OT as wanton and indiscriminate: “There is something very baffling about the way in which it is kindled and manifested. It is … ‘like a hidden force of nature’, like stored-up electricity, discharging itself upon anyone who comes too near.”
96 Thomas P. Dozeman, Exodus, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 737.
against and conclude that פקד על expresses a divine, decisive bringing of devastation against someone, in punitive repayment of iniquity. This punishment overturns a situation of impunity following a period of apparent divine inaction, inattention, or absence.

4.2.6. עון אבות, Iniquity of Fathers

The word עון is one of the most common terms for sin in the OT, alongside חטאה (“sin, error, mistake”) and פשׁע (“rebellion, transgression”). The three occur as a series in Exod 34:6–7, indicating the full array of sin against God,97 and there they are followed by the repetition of עון as a summary term encapsulating all three. The same seems to be true here in Exod 20:5: עון is a summary term for overall sin and guilt. Yet, as a summary term, it is apt for a context in which the offense is emphatically coram deo. “Unlike the broad usage of ḥṭ’, the term ‘āwōn, iniquity, has predominantly a religious and ethical function.”98 “It is a deeply religious term, almost always being used to indicate moral guilt or iniquity before God.”99 Koch notes that the rhetoric of the Bible occasionally objectifies עון as “an almost thinglike substance on earth” and “even as a self-efficacious, combative power that eventually ‘finds’ the perpetrating subject.”100 However, in Exod 20, in the context of Yahweh’s jealous covenant relation to Israel—and human obedience or disobedience as “loving” or “hating” Yahweh—عبر is not depicted as a self-acting foe but as the offense against Yahweh and guilt before Yahweh.101

97 Robin C. Cover, “Sin, Sinners (OT),” ABD 6:32, “In at least eight passages, ‘awōn is used alongside both ḥṭ’ and pš’ in simply designating ‘sins’…. We may suppose that the individual terms have lost some of their crisp distinctiveness, and are employed as virtual synonyms.”

98 Alex Luc, “עָוֹן,” NIDOTTE 3:351.


101 Stanislas Lyonnet and Léopold Sabourin, Sin, Redemption, and Sacrifice: A Biblical and Patristic Study (Rome: Pontificio Instituto, 1998), 18, explain the personal nature of sin as offense against God, focusing on its connection to God’s love: “It may be argued that sin in some way does affect God inasmuch as it wounds man, whom God loves. With greater reason sin can be called an ‘offense against God’ insofar as it violates the covenant between God and the people, a covenant which is tantamount to a marriage bond.”
Little interpretive weight can be placed on the fact that the words אבות (fathers) and בנים (sons) are indefinite, although this does leave the phrase more flexible and more difficult to nail down. It does not immediately suggest a collective understanding as a definite formulation might have: visiting the iniquity of the fathers—one national generation—upon the sons—the next national generation. Yet neither does it preclude this corporate, national understanding.

Elsewhere in Exodus, אבות is used in reference to the pre-Exodus generations: “the God of your fathers,” “which he promised to your fathers,” etc. Such usage, however, always has a pronoun suffix; it is never simply “fathers” or even “the fathers.” Thus, “iniquity of fathers” in Exod 20:5 does not point backwards to the pre-Exodus ancestors, so that the people are to reckon themselves as the sons. Instead, “iniquity of fathers” is used here to warn of the potential consequences of the way of life of the present and subsequent generations (as “fathers”) upon the generations of their descendants (“sons”).

The OT exhibits patterns of usage for the expression עון אבות (“iniquity of fathers”) which may be relevant to its interpretation in Exod 20:5 and 34:7. The expression עון אבות occurs 14x\(^\text{102}\) in the Hebrew Bible, usually with a plural pronominal suffix on אבות (“iniquity of our fathers,” “your fathers,” “their fathers”).\(^\text{103}\) It is always עון rather than another sin term which is used in construct with plural “fathers.”\(^\text{104}\) These constructions use עון (“iniquity”) in the singular or

\(^{102}\) The passages are Exod 20:5; 34:7; Lev 26:39, 40; Num 14:18; Deut 5:9; Neh 9:2; Ps 109:14; Isa 14:21; 65:7; Jer 11:10; 14:20; 32:18; and Dan 9:16.

\(^{103}\) עון appears with the singular “father” only twice: בם אביו, “because of the iniquity of his father” (Ezek 18:17), and בם אב (“because of the iniquity of the father” (Ezek 18:19). The plea in Ps 79:8 that Yahweh not remember עונת ראשׁנים is often translated as “iniquities of forefathers” (cf. Jer 11:10: שהות אבות והאסתרים: “the iniquities of their former fathers”). Thus, NASB, NIV, NRSV, and Luther’s German Bible. Also Mitchell Dahood, Psalms 51–100, AB 17 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 249. These read עונת ראשו as a substantive meaning “preceding ones,” that is, ancestors. It seems more natural, however, to take ראשו as an attribute adjective: “former iniquities,” referring to their own past iniquities rather than to those of their forebears. Thus ESV, KJV, and LXX. See Marvin E. Tate, Psalms 51–100, WBC 20 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 297–98. In any case, the noun here is not אבות.

\(^{104}\) Two passages contain a similar construction but use חטאת (“sin”) rather than עון (“iniquity”): חטאת אביו, “the sins of his father” (1 Kgs 15:3; Ezek 18:14). Note that in this expression, father is singular.
plural, with no distinction in meaning.\textsuperscript{105} The iniquity of fathers is consistently presented in relation to negative, always disastrous consequences for the children. There is ordinarily a clear implication of the children’s own sinfulness alongside their fathers’ iniquity. Exod 20:5 and 34:7 are ambiguous regarding the iniquity of the sons themselves, which creates an interpretive difficulty, but in other passages, the tendency is to explicitly indicate the corresponding iniquity of fathers and children.\textsuperscript{106} As typical examples:

\begin{quote}
Behold, it is written before me: I will not keep silent but rather will repay into their lap—their iniquities and the iniquities of their fathers, together. (Isa 65:6–7a)

We acknowledge, O Yahweh, our wickedness, the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against you. (Jer 14:20)

And the descendants of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. (Neh 9:2)
\end{quote}

When the field of investigation is widened to include the dozens of texts which speak of the concept of the fathers’ sins without the exact formulation עון אבות, this tendency continues to hold true. The acknowledgement of present/personal sin along with the sin of the fathers is especially common in the post-exilic literature, most notably in the prayers of confession in Dan 9, Ezra 9, and Neh 9. These seem to be related directly to Lev 26:39–42:

\begin{quote}
And those among you who remain will rot away, because of their iniquity, in your enemies’ lands—and also because of the iniquities of their fathers (בעונות אבות) they will rot away, together with them. But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, that they have perpetrated treachery against me and also walked contrary to me, so that I myself will walk contrary to them and bring them into the land of their enemies, and their heart is then humbled and they make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember my covenant with Jacob.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{105} For example, in Lev 26:39–40, “the iniquities of their fathers” (v. 39) and “the iniquity of their fathers” (v. 40) are used interchangeably. People pray in confession of “iniquity” (Lev 26:40; Ps 32:5; Dan 9:13; Ezra 9:13) and in confession of “iniquities” (Lev 16:12; Dan 9:16; Ezra 9:6–7; Neh 9:2), and often both in one prayer.

\textsuperscript{106} Clear correlation of the sinfulness of the children with the iniquity of the fathers is seen in Lev 26:39,40; Neh 9:2; Ps 109:14 (cf. vv. 2–5); Isa 65:7; Jer 11:10; 14:20; 32:18 (implied in v.19); and Dan 9:16. The only exception to this rule, aside from the ambiguous Exod 20:5 parallels, is Isa 14:21 in the oracle against the king of Babylon. Here Yahweh’s judgment without mercy is being pronounced against the kings of Babylon in terms of the complete cutting off of the royal line, with no specific statement of the iniquity of these descendants (Isa 14:20–22).
Here, the sense of “fathers” is primarily corporate, referring to generations of Israel viewed as wholes, and with implications for an entire (exiled) generation of “sons.” The people as a whole are invited to acknowledge “their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers,” so that the people as a (remnant) whole may be restored. This corporate, national sense is the most common usage of עון אבות (Lev 26:39–40; Neh 9:2; Isa 14:21; 65:7; Jer 11:10; 14:20; Dan 9:16); only in Ps 109:14 it is used in the context of individual families (those persecuting the psalmist).

In Exod 20:5 and parallels (Exod 34:7; Num 14:18; Deut 5:9; Jer 32:18) neither a corporate (national) or individual (familial) scope is specified, but the prominence of God’s covenant relation with Israel in these texts, along with the tendency across the OT to use עון אבות in the context of national endangerment, favors a corporate, national scope as the primary sense of “fathers.”

In broad terms, a cumulative theme develops across the OT of an organic connectedness of the present sins (“ways,” “deeds”) of the children with the sins (“ways,” “deeds”) of their fathers. In addition, there is an organic connectedness of the present covenant standing of the children with Yahweh’s covenant dealing with their fathers. In Deut 29:14–15, Yahweh makes his covenant “not with you alone … but also with those who are not here” (that is, with the descendants). The true worship of Yahweh and the knowledge of his mighty deeds and his covenant statutes and commandments were not passed along to each subsequent generation through a new Red Sea deliverance or Sinai theophany. Rather, the children born in the land Yahweh promised and gave to the fathers were to learn about the God of the fathers and the

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107 In addition to other contextual clues, this distinction appears in the plural pronoun suffixes on fathers in these passages, in contrast to the singular pronoun suffix in Ps 109:14: עון אביו, “the iniquity of his fathers.”

108 Cassuto, Commentary on Exodus, 243, emphasizes this point: “The verse, in its simple signification, is directed to the entire nation as a single entity in time throughout its generations …, a warning, so as to keep a man from sin, that in the course of the nation’s life it is possible that the children and grandchildren will suffer the consequences of the iniquities of their father and grandfather” (my emphasis).
covenant he made with the fathers from the fathers.\textsuperscript{109} Yahweh’s covenant is made at Sinai with all subsequent children of Israel, but it is made, in an important sense, through the fathers. Each generation grows out of the previous and stands in relation to Yahweh and the covenant through the previous. Children inherit not only genetic codes but also “ways” from their fathers, most importantly the exclusive worship of Yahweh. When the book of Judges compares each generation’s way of life to those previous, this is presented as Yahweh’s own pattern of divine analysis and judgment: “I will test Israel, whether they will keep the ways of Yahweh, walking in them as their fathers did” (Judg 2:22). Correspondence in disobedience is also a major OT theme:

They have turned back to the iniquities of their earliest fathers, who refused to hear my words; they have gone after other gods. (Jer 11:10)

Zechariah the son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel in Samaria six months. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD, just as his fathers had done. He did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who had caused Israel to sin. (2 Kgs 15:8–9)

To summarize, then, עון אבות is most frequently pictured in terms of negative consequences for the children, usually with the children’s own sinfulness emphasized as well. There is an assumed organic relationship between the iniquity of fathers and that of children: children either “walk in” the ways of their fathers or consciously “turn aside from” them. With one exception, עון אבות is used in contexts where the corporate, national welfare—rather than that the welfare of an individual family—is endangered by iniquity.

4.2.7. Fathers and Sons, or Parents and Children?

The terms “fathers” and “sons” are used to convey a variety of relationships in the OT. However, the nearby language of “father and mother” (Exod 20:12) as well as the expansion “against sons and against sons of sons” in Exod 34:7 indicate that “fathers” and “sons” are used

\textsuperscript{109} See Deut 4:9; 6:20–25; and the dramatic “when your son asks you” or “when the children ask the fathers in time to come” passages in Exod 12:24–27; 13:14–15; Deut 6:20; Josh 4:21–24.
here in an ordinary familial sense, describing generational descent.\footnote{See also the parallel of עון אבתיו (“the iniquity of his fathers”) with חטאת אמו (“the sin of his mother”) in Ps 109:14, a conceptually related passage.} It is possible that על־בנים (“against the sons”) in 20:5 is used in a broad sense of “against the descendants,” with “against the third and fourth generation” further specifying the limit of this transgenerational punishment.\footnote{This is the interpretation of Cornelis Houtman, 	extit{Exodus}, trans. Sierd Woudstra, 4 vols., HCOT, (Leuven: Peeters, 1993–2002), 1:13, who reads “sons” in Exod 20:5 as “descendants in a more general sense,” but in 34:7 as one’s own “children.”} However, such a rendering loses the emotional poignancy of the אבות...בני (“fathers … sons”) pairing.\footnote{Consider the narrative pathos of the conversations involving Abraham and Isaac in Gen 22, the response of Jacob to the reported demise of Joseph in Gen 37, and the loud grief of David in 2 Sam 19: “My son! Absalom! Absalom! My son! My son!”} “Sons” here does not imply children of minority age and status; therefore, studies of Israelite and ANE concepts of “childhood” are not directly relevant to Exod 20:5.\footnote{On the child in ancient Israel, see Martin Ebner, Paul D. Hanson, Marie-Theres Wacker, and Rudolf Weth, eds., 	extit{Gottes Kinder}, Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie 17 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2002); Andreas Kunz-Lübcke and Rüdiger Lux, eds., “Schaffe mir Kinder...”: Beiträge zur Kindheit im Alten Israel und in seinen Nachbarkulturen, Arbeiten zur Bibel und ihrer Geschichte 21 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2006); and Naomi Steinberg, 	extit{The World of the Child in the Hebrew Bible}, HBM 51 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013).}

אבות (“fathers”) and בני (“sons”) are both masculine nouns and are usually translated as such. The NRSV and GWN read these as inclusive categories (“parents … children”), and several English versions, along with the LXX, take the second term as such (“fathers … children”). Would a distinct masculine sense of “fathers” and “sons” in this passage have been clear and significant to ancient Israelite hearers?

Johnstone, among others, argues from internal evidence that the primary addressee of the Decalogue is

a responsible adult head of a household. A married man, he belongs to the ‘middle generation.’ Living with him are his father and mother, as well as his son and daughter. He is a livestock owner … possessing donkey, sheep, and cattle. He owns male and female slaves. He is wealthy enough to support the sojourner. This privileged householder is responsible for maintaining the exclusive worship of YHWH.
in all activities, and thus for ensuring for generations to come the welfare of the community.\textsuperscript{114}

This is consistent with broader dynamics in their patriarchal society, in which the well-being of household and community was especially associated with fathers. Garroway concludes that the biblical legal category of orphan (יתום) refers to a child who is fatherless, even if the mother is still living.\textsuperscript{115} Material well-being was tied to patrilineal inheritance, and the relatively late age of marriage for a man in ancient Israel “coincides with the realization of his inheritance upon the death of his father and with having the means to support his new family and household.”\textsuperscript{116} Ohler speaks in vivid terms of father after father securing the means of life: “Only because the ‘fathers’ had developed [the inheritance] and cared for it could he now live from it. The graves of the fathers, located on hereditary property, remind him, too, to keep it in order for his descendants.”\textsuperscript{117} In a general sense, the whole flow of Israel’s history is portrayed as events carried forward by fathers and sons…. \textit{A father is one in a chain of fathers}. In the Old Testament as in the New, lists of fathers’ and sons’ names show that God’s blessings persist through generations. Mothers seldom appear in them, and daughters never do. In these ranks of men’s names are reflected experiences of a people whose life was protected by the heavy work of mountain farmers and the masculine strength of warriors.\textsuperscript{118}

Koepf-Taylor has argued that in ancient Israel, the lack of children due to infertility or the loss of children due to premature death was not merely an emotional but especially an economic


\textsuperscript{118} Ohler, \textit{Bible Looks at Fathers}, 89, 81 (emphasis in original).
catastrophe, leaving the parent without provision in old age and perhaps even endangering the future survival of the community.\textsuperscript{119} Against this social backdrop, a threat of sanctions involving “fathers” and “sons” makes sense.

Other factors, however, qualify this male-only focus to the “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” dynamic. In Exodus, the future and well-being of God’s entire people is in view, which includes “young and old, sons and daughters” (10:9). Sabbath rest is protected for both sons and daughters (20:10), and the wealth plundered from the Egyptians adorns both sons and daughters (3:22)—at least until these same sons and daughters (and their mothers) are plundered by apostatizing fathers to make a golden calf (32:2). In the midst of such dynamics, the threat in Exod 20:5 made in reference to בְּנֵי (“sons”) can be heard as threatening repercussions also for daughters and female descendants as well—themselves dear to and valued by fathers.\textsuperscript{120} Because Exod 20:5 extends “sons” across generations (“upon members of third and fourth generations”), the extension across genders with the additional expression “and upon daughters” would have been unwieldy, and so is likely omitted but implied.

Also, while acknowledging that the implied addressee may in some sense be the male head of a family, the Decalogue “includes in its address by implication all members of society with due allowance for differences of role.”\textsuperscript{121} It is explicitly addressed, after all, to the “you” whom Yahweh “brought out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves” (20:2)—to Israel as a


\textsuperscript{120} Houtman, \textit{Exodus}, 1:13, reads בְּנֵי in Exod 20:5 in the sense of “descendants in a general sense” and in 34:7 as the equivalent of (one’s own) sons and daughters, both encompassing male and female descendants. Johanna Stiebert, \textit{Fathers and Daughters in the Hebrew Bible} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 37, critiques some of the more extreme feminist readings of the OT which suggest that daughters were invisible and unvalued in ancient Israel. In a cumulative reading of the biblical evidence, she concludes that, while sons were preferred, daughters were also valued. See also Joan C. Campbell, “God: The Model Patron,” in \textit{Exploring Biblical Kinship: Festschrift in Honor of John J. Pilch}, ed. Joan C. Campbell and Patrick J. Hartin, CBQMS 55 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2016), 16–22, who offers a social-scientific analysis of fathers and sons, fathers and daughters, and mothers and sons in the OT and in Mediterranean cultures, reaching similar conclusions.

\textsuperscript{121} Johnstone, \textit{Exodus}, 2:27.
corporate whole and to every individual within it.\textsuperscript{122} The “iniquity of fathers” which would imperil the descendants particularly involves the sin of idolatry, with the implication that the “fathers” have a key role in leading their children into the right knowledge and worship of Yahweh. That this is a responsibility also shared by mothers seems to be implied by the protection of the honor and dignity of both father and mother in the Decalogue (20:12) and in the later ordinances (Exod 21:15, 17; cf. Deut 21:18–19; 27:16). Thus, while the masculine terminology in the threat of visiting “iniquity of fathers” upon “sons” has some contextual rationale and distinctiveness, this warning is to be appropriated by mothers as well, with concern for the well-being of both male and female progeny.\textsuperscript{123}

4.2.8. לעל-שלושים ועל-רבעים, Against Members of the Third and Fourth Generations

The numerical roots שלישים (three) andربعים (four) are employed here as plural nouns. The morphology of these nouns is unusual,\textsuperscript{124} although they are clearly related to the ordinal numbers third and fourth in the sense of “a descendant of the third generation,”\textsuperscript{125} “those belonging to the 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} generations.”\textsuperscript{126} Except for the precise parallels of Exod 20:5 in Exod 34:7, Num 14:18, and Deut 5:9, this form appears in only one other OT passage: in Gen 50:23, Joseph is said to

\textsuperscript{122} David L. Baker, “The Finger of God and the Forming of a Nation: The Origin and Purpose of the Decalogue,” \textit{TynBul} 56 (2005): 17, “The Decalogue is addressed to the whole people of Israel, both as individuals and as a community…. The two are not mutually exclusive, for the actions of individuals affect the community and vice-versa…. The use of the singular ‘thou’ is consistent with this, since it is used in the Old Testament to address individual Israelites and also the people as a corporate entity.” Walther Zimmerli, \textit{Old Testament Theology in Outline}, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978), 138, stresses the address “first and foremost to Israel as a nation…., the community affected by Yahweh’s call.” Weinfeld, \textit{Deuteronomy 1–11}, 249, on the other hand, stresses the direct personal address of the Decalogue to each individual Israelite.

\textsuperscript{123} Note also the implied transgenerational consequences of the “sin of his mother” which is paralleled with “the iniquity of his fathers” in the imprecatory prayer of Ps 109:14.

\textsuperscript{124} Propp, \textit{Exodus} 19–40, 172. The noun pattern exhibited here שלישים (three) andربعים (four) is that usually used for bodily defects (רumbnail, blind; כף, lame), although these defect words do not generally maintain the dagesh forte when plural.

\textsuperscript{125} HALOT, "שלישים.

\textsuperscript{126} BDB, "רבעים."
have lived to see בְנֵי שִׁלֵשִׁים (“third generation sons”) belonging to Ephraim.\textsuperscript{127} Two passages in Kings (2 Kgs 10:30 and 15:12) use a similar expression, but employ the ordinal form: בְנֵי רְבִיעִים (רִבֵעִים), “sons of the fourth (generation).” In 20:5 and parallels, שִׁלֵשִׁים and רְבִיעִים do not require a prefatory “sons of” because these unique forms carry the substantive meaning: “members of the third/fourth generation.”\textsuperscript{128} Also, the addition of the Hebrew word דּוֹר is unnecessary with these nouns, since שִׁלֵשִׁים and רְבִיעִים express “members of the third/fourth generation.”\textsuperscript{129}

The lexical meaning of the terms is therefore straightforward. However, certain cultural assumptions may be in play which would shape the force and function of the phrase “members of the third or the fourth generation” here. A number of commentators have proposed that “third” and “fourth” here envision Yahweh’s punishment impacting “all who live under the same roof.”\textsuperscript{130} Archaelogical insights regarding the configuration of ancient homes and studies regarding the social concept of the בית אב (”house of the father”) can serve to support the idea of extended families living together or in close proximity as the ancient norm.\textsuperscript{131} While this

\textsuperscript{127} The parallelism with the descendants through Manasseh in the second half of Gen 50:23 favors reading the שִׁלֵשִׁים in Ephraim’s line as the third generation reckoned after Joseph rather than after Ephraim (that is, as Joseph’s great-grandsons), since the latter statement speaks of great-grandchildren of Manasseh’s line, too, on Joseph’s knees (the sons of Makim, the son of Manasseh, the son of Joseph).

\textsuperscript{128} Stanislav Segert, “Bis in das dritte und vierte Glied (Ex 20,5),” CV 1 (1958): 37, “Im Dekalog kommt im hebräischen Original kein Zahlwort vor, sondern die von Zahlwörtern abgeleiteten Nomina zur Bezeichnung von Nachkommen des dritten und vierten Grades.”

\textsuperscript{129} The LXX (γενεά), the Vulg. (generation), and other versions are uniform in assuming the sense of third and fourth generation here. In contrast, passages which speak of “third/fourth generation” using the ordinal number adjective regularly use דּוֹר (“generation”) with the number in attributive position: דּוֹר שְׁלִישִׁי (“in the third generation,” Deut 23:8), דּוֹר רְבִיעִי (“in the fourth generation,” Gen 15:16). See also ארבעה דרות (“four generations,” Job 42:16).

\textsuperscript{130} Ian Cains, Word and Presence: A Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy, ITC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 72. So also George A. F. Knight, Theology as Narration: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 137, “In Moses’ day, as in ours throughout the Third World, all four generations of one family lived together in the one village, even under one roof. Thus it is inevitable that if the headman ‘commits adultery’ with a foreign god... his grandchildren and even his great-grandchildren living with him are bound to experience the penalty of his disloyalty.... There is therefore no question of God’s punishing children as yet unborn, as some people read this.”

\textsuperscript{131} Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Household in Ancient Israel and Early Judaism,” in The Blackwell Companion
assumption allows the “simultaneous punishment” interpretation of the third and fourth generation language in Exod 20:5, however, it does not require it. Such cultural observations do, however, heighten the sense of a father’s inevitable influence upon these near generations.

Similarly, the third and fourth generations here indicate “what is generally the largest number of generations alive at one time.”

Living to see three or four generations of descendants is as long as one could naturally live. Thus God extends punishment only to descendants the guilty are likely to see in their own lifetimes. This indicates that the suffering of the descendants is intended as a deterrent to, and punishment of, their ancestors, not a transfer of guilt to the descendants in their own right.

Because the husband in a Mediterranean household was often a decade or more older than his wife, and because life expectancy was short, many fathers did not survive into the days of their grandchildren. Yet, Milton Eng emphasizes:

There is a difference between life expectancy and life span. Whether in Mesopotamia, Egypt or ancient Israel, the vision of these cultures was for a normal life span not much different from ours today, although actual life expectancy was much shorter. If one could survive infancy and early childhood (for mortality was high at these stages of life in antiquity), one could expect to live a normal life span barring, of course, war and pestilence…. Thus, the problem that short life expectancy poses for the conception of the life-cycle is only a superficial one. Though life expectancy in ancient Israel may only have been around the mid-thirties, the expected life span, barring unforeseen circumstances, would certainly have been in the fifties or sixties, and we have plenty of evidence for people of antiquity living much longer.

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132 Larsson, Bound for Freedom, 144.

133 Tigay, Deuteronomy, 66. Jacob, Second Book of the Bible, 555, also takes “third and fourth” as indicating that sufferings of descendants are really punishment upon the father: “People have always seen their life continued through their children, so even if they did not suffer, the problems of their children would affect them.”


135 Eng, Days of Our Years, 44.
Thus, for the ancients as for people today, three or four generations correlates with the potential range of a family alive at one time. In fact, to live to see the third and fourth generation is a common expression in the OT for the ideal, blessed life: “And after this Job lived 140 years, and he saw his sons and his sons’ sons, four generations” (Job 42:16; cf. Gen 50:23; 2 Kgs 10:30).136

Such correlations with the extent of a lineage alive at one time, and perhaps also as those bound together in a large household (בֵית אב), assume that the terms third and fourth function as precise numbers. Others, however, have suggested that these numbers should not be taken literally (arithmetically) but rather as an example of the typical Semitic idiom “$x$ or $x+1$,” meaning “whatever number” or “plenty of” and thus indicating here “a very large number of descendants.”137 Such an understanding would preclude reading “third and/or fourth” in Exod 20:5 as a limitation138 upon Yahweh’s punishing visitation, as an implied extermination139 of a family line (in the span of three or four generations), or as a contrast140 with “steadfast love to

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136 Sarna, *Exodus*, 111, observes this and cites examples of similar passages from Aramaic inscriptions. See also Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, 296–97.


138 Contra, e.g., Durham, *Exodus*, 287, who speaks of the third and fourth generation in v. 5 as “a specific limitation of judgment” compared to the unlimited love promised in v. 6. The LXX reads such a limitation in Exod 20:5, rendering ἐπὶ τέκνα ἔως τρίτης καὶ τετάρτης γενεᾶς (“upon sons as far as the third and fourth generation”). John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus*, SCS 30 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 310, notes that here, “the second phrase … [is] not in apposition to ἐπὶ τέκνα, but describes the extent of the repayment upon the sons.” (In the parallel passage in Deut 5:9, however, the LXX does not use ἔως, instead repeating ἐπὶ (ἐπὶ τέκνα ἐπὶ τρίτην καὶ τετάρτην γενεάν).

139 Contra, e.g., Josef Scharbert, “Formgeschichte und Exegese von Ex 34, 6f und seiner Parallelen,” *Bib* 38 (1957): 144; Franz, *Barmherzige und gnädige Gott*, 143; Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster, 1974), 405; Zimmerli, *The Law and the Prophets*, 58. Scharbert and Franz speak in terms of Yahweh’s threat to bring a family line to an end within three or four generations. Childs implies the sudden extermination of the generations by characterizing the formula in Exod 20:5 as “the set terminology of the ban.” Zimmerli asserts that “inflicting punishment to the third and fourth generations means the total destruction of an entire family … [as if] placed under Yahweh’s ban (Heb. herem).”

thousands” in the following verse. Rather, according to this view, the “great number of descendants” indicated by the idiom “third or fourth” \((x \text{ or } x+1)\) “actually parallels the corresponding clause.”\(^{141}\) That is, both v. 5 and v. 6 express the same thought: the long duration of both Yahweh’s punishment and his steadfast love.

In his study *Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel*, Stanley Gevirtz devotes significant attention to the numerical idiom \(x \text{ or } x+1\).\(^{142}\) Gevirtz, who is sometimes cited in relation to the above-mentioned understanding of “third or fourth generation” in Exod 20:5, argues that in ascending-number parallelism, Hebrew poetry uses such numbers in an indefinite (imprecise) sense to establish a “parallelism of equivalents” (never a contrast) between two expressions.\(^{143}\)

However, Gevirtz’s conclusions can be applied to Exod 20:5–6 in the manner noted above only by overlooking a number of points. First, Gevirtz does not discuss this passage (or 34:6–7) in his study. Second, Gevirtz’s examples of \(x / x+1\) are all instances in which the two numbers are parallel members across two lines of poetry, which does not apply to the relation of “third” and “fourth” in Exod 20:5 and 34:7, where they are in the same line. In a separate study on “The Numerical Sequence \(X / X+1\) in the Old Testament,” Roth makes precisely this distinction, concluding that when “the sequence \(x / x+1\) is found as one phrase in one sentence” (as in Exod

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\(^{141}\) Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, 296, who draws upon the work of Meir Weiss, “Some Problems in the Biblical Doctrine of Retribution,” *Tarbiz* 31 (1961–1962): 236–63; 32 (1962–1963): 1–18 (Hebrew). See also Peter Enns, *Exodus*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 417, who suggests that the “threat of punishment may be more severe than a surface reading of verse 5 lets on,” since in biblical idiom third and fourth may simply mean many. “In view of this, [Exod 20] is teaching that both obedience and disobedience have far-reaching implications for Israel’s life as God’s covenant people. If they disobey, the effects will be felt for a long, long time.”

\(^{142}\) Stanley Gevirtz, *Patterns of Poetry in Ancient Israel*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 32 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 15–34. Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Topped Triad in the Hebrew Bible and the Ascending Numerical Pattern,” in *Literary Motifs and Patterns in the Hebrew Bible: Collected Studies* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 77–123, presents a distinct and stimulating analysis of dozens of OT passages involving three/thirds and four/fourths, arguing that in these cases “three” is a generalization for “some” in a common or unremarkable grouping, while “four” designates the notable or exceptional case. While his analysis fits Yahweh’s promise in Gen 15:16 that Abraham’s descendants will return to Canaan “in the fourth generation,” it applies more awkwardly to Exod 20:5 and especially 34:7: “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons and against sons of sons, against members of the third and fourth generations.”

\(^{143}\) Gevirtz, *Patterns of Poetry*, 18.
20:5), the numbers always refer to “a somewhat indefinite numerical value.” It is significant that Roth later restates this as “a *slightly* indefinite numerical value.” The point is that “third or fourth generation” may, indeed, be an approximate term (“upon the third and the fourth generation *or so*”), but this does not mean “whatever number,” “plenty of,” or “a great number.” While the rhetoric of “for three sins … for four” in the opening chapters of Amos might seem to push in this direction, this construction is better accounted for there as related to a larger concern with the number seven (three … and four) and as anticipating the delineation of the *four* transgressions of Israel in Amos 2:6–8. Thus, while the language of “third” and “fourth” may suggest a *slight* indefiniteness or approximation, there is no ground for reading “third and fourth generation” as a Hebrew idiom indicating a *great number* of generations.

Finally, Gevirtz’s conclusion that number parallelism is always synonymous or synthetic (equivalent) and never antithetical (contrastive) is overdrawn and should not be applied to the relation between Exod 20:5 and Exod 20:6. The OT numerical parallels which he discusses

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145 Roth, “Numerical Sequence X / X+1,” 309.

146 In the same way, every legal matter must be established by two or three (or so) witnesses, not by “whatever number” or “a great number” of witnesses (Deut 17:6). When Jehu shouted up to the window of Jezebel’s tower and “two or three eunuchs” looked out at him, this means two or three (or so) eunuchs, not whatever number or a great number of eunuchs (2 Kgs 9:32). When Yahweh’s judgment comes upon the Northern Kingdom like the shaking of an olive tree, two or three (or so) olives will remain in the tree tops and four or five (or so) on the other branches, not just whatever number and certainly not “a great number” (Isa 17:6).


148 Gevirtz, *Patterns of Poetry*, 23–24, offers a creative interpretation of the women’s praise of Saul and David in 1 Kgs 18:7: “Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.” Gevirtz stresses that the women and the crowds were not exalting David at the expense of Saul—the ascending parallel numbers express an *equivalency not a contrast*, according to Gevirtz’s rule: “It is a lavish praise of both Saul and David…. The implication … that David’s military prowess was being lauded over that of Saul’s appears poorly founded.” In contrast, Roth, “The Numerical Sequence X / X+1,” 303, labels 1 Sam 18:7 as “antithetical parallelism” and asserts, “It is obvious that here the two numbers are contrasted with each other in accordance with the intention of the verse, that is, the exaltation of David over Saul.” On p. 34, Gevirtz discusses the boast of Lamech in Gen 4:24: “If Cain is avenged seven-fold, then Lamech’s [vengeance] is seventy-sevenfold.” In order to account for this second apparent exception to his rule that numerical parallelism is never antithetical, Gevirtz has to characterize Lamech’s lyrical boast as a deliberate break-down of convention for the sake of impact. Seven/seventy-seven heights his boast, according to Gevirtz, since the expected parallel (of indefinite equivalency) would have been either seven/eight or
never pair “thousands” with a low number like three or four, but rather with “tens of thousands.” Thus, it is a misapplication of the conventions of Hebrew poetry to read “third and fourth” in 20:5 as equivalently paralleling, rather than standing in starkly diminished contrast to, the “thousands” in 20:6.

There has also been debate regarding the way in which the generations are being counted in this passage. How are “members of the third/fourth generation” reckoned? According to Jacob, and are ways of indicating “descendants for whom one would say ben three or four times,” since Hebrew usage only permitted ben b’no and not ben ben b’no, etc. That is to say, the “first” generation refers to the sons, not to the fathers, apparently being reckoned from the father’s perspective (the first generation of my offspring, the second, etc.). Thus, in Exod 20:5, the sense would be “visiting iniquity of fathers in punishment against descendants (כנים), against the great-grandsons (שנים) and great-great-grandsons (רבעים), for those who hate me.” This meaning matches the expanded expression in Exod 34:7: “against sons and grandsons (על־בנים), against great-grandsons (שנים) and great-great-grandsons (רבעים).” While some suggest that the listing in ch. 34 adds one generation to the series given in ch. 20, it is more reasonable to read Exod 34 as a fuller but equivalent expression. An extra generation in the ch. 34 listing might seem to fit with Yahweh’s slowness to anger there, but it demands that and bear a different meaning in ch. 34 than they had in ch. 20. Further evidence that 34:7 describes a series of generations more fully expressed than but equivalent to 20:5 is provided by Moses’ prayer in Num 14:18; he paraphrases Exod 34:7 but uses the more abbreviated

sixty-six/seventy-seven.

149 Stuart, Exodus, 454n35, highlights the uniqueness of this comparison when he describes Exod 20:5–6 as “the greatest numerical contrast in the Bible (three/four to thousands).”


generational expression found in Exod 20:5.

Hossfeld dates the Deuteronomy version of this formula earlier than Exod 20 or 34 and reads the additional ה ("and") in Deut 5:9 to indicate an earlier and inclusive way of numbering generations in which שְׁלִישִׁים indicates grandsons rather than great-grandsons. Weinfeld rightly dismisses such a scheme as "highly hypothetical" and as an over-reading of the slight ה variation, which in fact is missing in the Qumran texts of Deuteronomy and in several other versions. In any case, Hossfeld’s theory does not impact the counting of the generations in Exodus, as described above. Furthermore, the OT use of x / x+1 constructions to indicate slight approximations—"against members of the third and fourth (or so) generations"—renders the exact reckoning of the generations here a moot point.

4.2.9. עָשֶׂה חָסֶד, Acting in Lovingkindness To/For

חָסֶד is one of the most theologically rich and discussed words in the OT. It is used of both human and divine kindness and faithfulness in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis (e.g., 21:23; 24:12, 14, 27, 29; 32:11; 47:29). In Exodus, it first occurs in the Song of the Sea: Yahweh has destroyed his enemies (15:3–12) but has led his redeemed people in his lovingkindness (חסד, 15:13). The only other occurrences of חָסֶד in Exodus are 20:5 and twice in the related passage in 34:6–7.

The traditional renderings of ἔλεος (LXX), misericordia (Vulg.), mercy (KJV), lovingkindness (ASV), Barmherzigkeit and Gnade (Luther Bibel in Exod 20:6 and 34:6–7, respectively), etc., were qualified in the twentieth century under the influence of Nelson Glueck.

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152 Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, Der Dekalog: Seine späten Fassungen, die originale Komposition und seine Vorstufen, OBO 45 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 26–32. For an English summary of Hossfeld on this point, see Nathan C. Lane, The Compassionate but Punishing God: A Canonical Analysis of Exodus 34:6–7 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 38.

153 Weinfeld, Deuteronomy 1–11, 297.
who in his 1927 dissertation on הֵסֶד related the term closely with the idea of covenant and stressed its obligatory and reciprocal dimensions. “God’s hesed was not basically mercy, but loyalty to his covenant obligations, a loyalty which the Israelites should also show.” The definitions for הֵסֶד in HALOT bear this emphasis, glossing the noun as “joint obligation,” “loyalty,” and “faithfulness” when ascribed to human relationships, and prioritizing the meaning “faithfulness” (followed by “goodness” and “graciousness”) when God is the subject. Glueck’s emphasis also continues to influence the commentaries on this passage. Hamilton translates this phrase in Exod 20:6 as “keeping faith even to the thousandth generation.” Stuart reads 20:6 as expressing God’s desire “to have his people remain loyal forever so that he might in turn show them the rich blessings of his resulting loyalty to them.” The NET renders the phrase in Exod 20:6 as “showing covenant faithfulness” and in 34:7 as “keeping loyal love.”

Katherine Sakenfeld’s study, The Meaning of Ḥesed in the Hebrew Bible, initiated a partial shift away from Glueck. She stressed that acts of הֵסֶד are not obligatory, that the one performing הֵסֶד is “always quite free not to,” and that it refers to help rendered to those in great need or desperation. Yet Sakenfeld also continued to speak of the “recognized responsibility” of the

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155 R. Laird Harris, “חסד (ḥsd),” TWOT 1:698, summarizing Glueck.
156 Victor P. Hamilton, Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 322. For Exod 34:7, however, he translates הֵסֶד as “benevolence” (p. 572), which aligns not with Glueck’s proposal, but with the more traditional sense of mercy or undeserved kindness which will be advocated below.
158 Katherine D. Sakenfeld, The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible, HSM 17 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1978), 24. Gordon R. Clark, The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible, JSOTSup 157 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 267, arrives at a definition much like Sakenfeld’s, highlighting divine הֵסֶד as free and unmerited but maintaining an emphasis on commitment: “The הֵסֶד act … may be described as a beneficent action performed, in the context of a deep and enduring commitment between two persons or parties, by one who is able to render assistance to the needy party who in the circumstances is unable to help him- or herself…. הֵסֶד is characteristic of God rather than human beings; it is rooted in the divine nature, and it is expressed because of who he is, not because
one performing חסד for the one receiving his help, prompting the critical query from Francis Andersen, “How can a person have a responsibility that they are free not to perform?”

Providing his own passage by passage analysis of the contextual meanings of חסד, Andersen locates it “outside the domain of duty and obligation.” He views the expressions of God’s self-revelation in Exod 20:5 and 34:6–7 (along with their parallels, Num 14:18–19; Deut 5:9–10; and Deut 7:9–10) as the necessary center for the study of חסד in the OT. These passages highlight Yahweh’s חסד as “primal, elemental, enduring, and associated with his love, grace, compassion.” Similarly, Feldmeier and Spieckermann hold that “the concepts of love, grace, and kindness best outline the semantic focus of hesed as implied by its contexts,” so much so that in the Psalms, the term חסד comes to function as an allusion or a “crystallization point” for the longer grace-formula from Exod 34:6: merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in חסד. Raitt stresses the way in which the terms “gracious” and “merciful” in v. 6 shape the understanding of חסד in 34:6–7: “Raḥûm and hannûn are words which help to explain a free and generous gift. We can’t say, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God of parental mercy, gracious generosity, slow to anger and abounding in contractual obligation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin….‘ Kindness in a relationship and obligation are not the same thing.”

Harris distinguishes between the covenantal context of Exod 20 versus the presumed context of what humanity is or needs or desires or deserves.”


161 Andersen, “Yahweh, the Kind,” 81. On p. 82, Andersen elaborates: “The LXX was still close to the mark when it used eleos (mercy) as its preferred translation of hesed. The modern preference for words like ‘duty,’ ‘obligation,’ ‘loyalty,’ ‘solidarity’, has the picture completely out of focus. Its worst effect has been to obscure the primal perpetual revelation of the Bible that God in his ultimate and eternal being is ‘gracious and sensitive, abundant in hesed’—‘lovingkindness.’”

162 Feldmeier and Spieckermann, God of the Living, 131.

covenantal *motivation* of the divine גשוד expressed there:

The text itself of Exod 20 and Deut 5 simply says that God’s love (*hesed*) to those who love him is the opposite of what he will show to those who hate him. The context of these commands is surely God’s will for all mankind, although his special care, indeed his covenant, is with Israel. That *hesed* refers only to this covenant and not to the eternal divine kindness back of it, however, is a fallacious assumption.¹⁶⁴

Zobel acknowledges that when attributed to humans in familial and societal contexts, גשוד has overtones of obligated mutuality and rigid social norms, but these aspects are “pushed into the background” when the word is transferred to Yahweh. He, too, distances גשוד from a semantic dependence on ideas of covenant:

> Extraordinary emphasis is placed on the element of divine mercy, grace, forbearance…. God’s kindness finds expression in his endless reconciling love, always ready to forgive…. When *b*rît appears in the semantic field of *hesed*, it takes second place after *hesed* and is used to express the permanence and constancy of Yahweh’s kindness, its inviolability and trustworthiness…. In [*hesed*] we hear overtones of promise and grace, mercy, and unexpected kindness, not of law and obligation.¹⁶⁵

As merciful, undeserved, often unexpected kindness, Yahweh’s גשוד is often closely tied to his forgiveness of sin. The tie between גשוד and forgiveness is a major emphasis in Exod 34:6–7 and in several other passages as well. In Ps 103:11–14, for example, T. M. Willis observes that the “abstract notions of the Lord’s ‘steadfast love’ [*חסד*] (v. 11) and ‘mercy’ [*רחם*] (v. 13), which appear to be the central ideas of vv. 6–10, are shown to be concretely exemplified when the Lord ‘distances from us our transgressions’ (v. 12).”¹⁶⁶ In their article on גשוד, Baer and Gordon note, “At times … God’s *hesed* exercises an ameliorating or limiting role upon his wrath.”¹⁶⁷ For this reason, Yahweh’s גשוד is the basis upon which sinners seek forgiveness, and “certain pleas for

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¹⁶⁴ R. Laird Harris, “חסד (*ḥsd*),” *TWOT* 1:698.


forgiveness encourage the view that God can choose to remember either sin or his hesed, but not both (Pss 25:7; 51:1[3]).”

This does not mean, however, that hesed always indicates forgiveness, even when it is Yahweh’s hesed. Here in Exod 20:6, for example, Yahweh’s free, gracious, and undeserved kindness (חסד) is promised “to thousands, to those love me and keep my commandments.” This does not imply that Yahweh’s performance of hesed is precipitated or deserved because the recipients have shown love and covenant faithfulness. Raabe’s description of the “asymmetry” between the righteous and the wicked in the Psalms applies equally to Exod 20:6:

The Psalms generally do not portray the righteous as active doers of righteous works, as the symmetrical opposite of the wicked. Rather, they speak of the righteous as the helpless and needy who take refuge in Yahweh, who trust in the God of Israel, who pray to him and seek his protection and intervention, who sing praises to him….The psalmists … do not pray that their own good deeds would return to them to their benefit. Rather, they pray that God would put into action his steadfast love and righteousness.

At the same time, while hesed is not earned or deserved by love or obedience, neither does hesed here address or imply the forgiveness of sins. Those experiencing Yahweh’s hesed in 20:6 are not described as sinners who have offended Yahweh, but rather as friends of Yahweh (לאהבי), as his faithful people (לשמרי מצותי). This situation changes drastically within the Exodus narrative in chs. 32–34, but the gracious kindness (חסד) in 20:6 is not yet specifically focused on forgiveness. It simply declares Yahweh’s gracious and undeserved help, provision, and protection for his people in need.

In Exod 20:6, Yahweh is described as עשה חסד לאלפים, where hesed is the direct object of the verb עשה (“to do”) and the preposition ל marks the recipient or beneficiary of the gracious act.

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The root חסד is rarely used as a verb; rather, “behaving with חסד” is normally expressed, as here, with some other verb governing the object noun חסד. Most common is עשה, occurring with over 40x with the sense of “acting in lovingkindness,” “showing mercy,” “dealing kindly with,” etc. A great many other verbs are substituted for the default עשה on an ad hoc basis: can be something that Yahweh “gives” (נתן), “sends” (שלח), “remembers” (זכור), “continues” (משים), “commands” (צוה), “magnifies” (גבר), “guards” (נצר, שמאר), “surrounds” with (שוכב), “crowns” with (עטר), “satisfies” with (שבע), etc. Each of these uses occurs once or twice in the OT, and each bears a particular nuance. The construction עשה חסד, on the other hand, occurring over 40x, is the basic, unmarked, unnuanced formula, indicating simply that the subject is acting in or showing חסד to someone.

The formula עשה חסד is standard both when predicated of humans and when predicated of God, and is usually followed by the prepositions עם (25x of humans, 8x of God), את (1x of humans, 1x of God), or ל (1x of humans, 5x of God). The prevalence of עם (“with”) may arise from the highly relational sense of חסד, which Clark describes as “a beneficent action performed in the context of a deep and enduring commitment between two persons or parties.” However, it would be a misreading (or over-reading) of the prepositions to see a heightened sense of mutuality or reciprocity with עשה or to posit a greater emphasis on unilateral, gracious action here in Exod 20:6 with ל. Such a hypothesis might seem to fit the most common senses of the prepositions (“with” over against “toward”). It would also seem to correspond with the observation of Andersen, Harris, and Zobel that with divine instances of חסד there is a greater focus on the free, gracious, unmerited nature of the act, since a strong preference for עשה חסד עם

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within human-to-human contexts (25x with ל to 1x with ל כ ) gives way to a more frequent occurrence of ל חסד כ in divine-to-human contexts (8x ל with 5x ל כ ). However, the single human-to-human use with ל כ —David’s death-bed charge to Solomon to ל חסד כ the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite (1 Kgs 2:7)—specifically frames this as a reciprocation for the aid they gave to David in time of need. Thus, the preposition ל כ in ל חסד כ ל אלפים here in Exod 20:6 simply marks the recipient or beneficiary of Yahweh’s חסד-act, with no additional nuance, that is, with no semantic distinction from ל חסד כ. The sense is “acting in lovingkindness to/for thousands.”

Not only is ל חסד כ a typical construction for “act in lovingkindness to/for,” but the preposition ל also consistently marks the recipient or beneficiary when Yahweh is the subject of other verbs with חסד as object. Yahweh gives חסד to Abraham (Mic 7:20), remembers חסד for the house of Israel (Ps 98:3), continues חסד to those who know him (Ps 36:11 [Eng 36:10]), makes חסד marvelous for David (Ps 31:22 [Eng 31:21]), keeps חסד for David (1 Kgs 3:6), and so forth, all with ל כ. Thus, not only with ל חסד כ ל אלפים in Exod 20:6 but also with נצר חסד ל אלפים in Exod 34:7, the preposition ל is most naturally read as marking the beneficiary of Yahweh’s lovingkindness. It is not likely, therefore, that לאלפים (“to/for thousands”) carries a temporal sense in these passages—whether temporally durative173 (“throughout thousands of generations”) or temporally terminative (“up to thousands of generations”)174—as is often assumed. In any case, the plural form of לאלפים would seem to rule out the terminative reading. In the discussion of “thousands” which follows, the ל will be read as marking לאלפים as the recipient or beneficiary of Yahweh’s חסד: “to/for thousands.”

4.2.10. לאלפים, To/For Thousands

Most scholars and all modern versions read לאלפים here in its common sense of “thousand”

173 Williams, §268b; Arnold and Choi, §4.1.10(c).
174 Williams, §266b.
(HALOT מָשָּׁפָה scen II), but others have suggested that the meaning of “family” or “clan” (HALOT מְשָׁפָה scen III; cf. DCH, 1:299–300) is better suited to the contexts of Exod 20:6 and 34:7. According to Pedersen, אלֹּף is the “old denomination of community” which was later replaced by משָׁפָה (family, clan).¹⁷⁵ Lang posits this sense for לאלֹּפים here in the Decalogue, explaining:

The parallelism with ‘the children of the third and fourth generation’ seems to be a synonymous one, and so one would expect something like ‘the whole family,’ an idea presumably implied in the ‘thousands’; in fact, recent lexicography actually assumes the existence of אלֹּף III ‘tribe, clan, family’… Far from referring to ‘a thousand generations,’ … both divine punishment and blessing are seen as affecting one social unit: the father’s household of three or (at most) four generations.¹⁷⁶

Johnstone advocates a similar interpretation as a “strong possibility,” also on the basis of a presumed parallelism with the “household” language in v. 5.¹⁷⁷

Neither Lang nor Johnstone, however, offers a contextual or theological rationale for assuming “synonymous” parallelism between Yahweh’s punishing judgment and his gracious love. Most commentators see a contrast between “third … fourth” and “thousands” in Exod 20:5–6. And synonymy can hardly be ascribed between the lovingkindness and punishment in Exod 34:7, where the reference to חסד לאלֹּפים in Exod 34:7 is immediately preceded by the implied contrast: “slow to anger” but “abounding in חסד.”¹⁷⁸ In fact, I am not aware of a single OT passage that treats Yahweh’s judgment and mercy as equivalent; whereas there are several passages which set their respective magnitudes in stark contrast. Raabe speaks of the common

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OT “contrast between the temporary ‘penultimate’ wrath and the eternal mercy” of God. In fact, Ps 103:8–11 emphasizes this contrast through allusion to Exod 34:6–7.

The question of the meaning of אֵלֶּף in Exodus also extends to the literature discussing the very large numbers ascribed to Israel’s population throughout the Pentateuch. Does the estimate of לְשׁנֵיםָּמֵאת אֵלֶּף (Exod 12:37) indicate “about 600 thousand” or “about 600 troops of” men on foot? This debate becomes highly complex and lies beyond the scope of the present study, but I am not convinced that any model currently proposed can account for all of the relevant passages by reading אֵלֶּף as a small family or military grouping.

However, even granting the possibility that לְשׁנֵיםָּמֵאת אֵלֶּף in Exod 12:37 may mean something like 600 “troops” or “clans,” this does not preclude reading לאלפים in 20:6 in the numerical sense of “thousands.” Those who suggest “600 troops/clans” in 12:37 offer calculations of Israel’s total population on that basis in the range of 20,000, 72,000, or even 140,000. Thus, whichever reading of אֵלֶּף is adopted in 12:37, Exod 20:6 may employ לאלפים to evoke Yahweh’s חָסְדָּה to the (numerical) thousands of Israel (cf. Exod 15:13). Furthermore, the

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179 Raabe, “Two ‘Faces’ of Yahweh,” 293. As examples, Raabe cites Isa 54:7–8; Pss 30:6; 103:8–11; along with Exod 20:6; 34:7; and parallels.


181 Other numerically disputed passages include the number of Israelites struck down by the Levites in Exod 32:28 and the enumeration of people and shekels in Exod 38:25–29.

182 Philip P. Jenson, אֶלֶּף, NIDOTTE 1:416–17, “The unlikely size of the numbers in these lists has meant that scholars have sought alternative readings and explanations, but none has proved persuasive…. No theory has been able to explain all the numbers in the lists, and consistency has to be achieved by emendation or more radical means.” At the same time, it must be recognized that the challenges to the traditional reading of very large numbers go beyond the question of the historical plausibility of millions of Israelites and involve tensions with specific Pentateuch passages (e.g., those stating or implying that the Israelites were not especially numerous at that time: Exod 23:29–30; Deut 7:7).

183 These are the calculations of Humphreys, Wenham, and Clark, respectively, cited by Humphreys, “The Number of People in the Exodus,” 198. Wenham is cited above. See also R. E. D. Clark, “The Large Numbers of the Old Testament,” JTVI 87 (1955): 82–92.
nearest Exodus use of אלפים prior to ch. 20 comes when Moses appoints men to help him judge the people: “officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens” (Exod 18:21, 25). In this construction, אלפים cannot refer to a small grouping but must mean numerical “thousands.” Thus, based on the contrasting parallelism of the passages and on the use of אלפים elsewhere in Exodus, the minority view that אלפים in Exod 20:6 and 34:7 refers to “families” can be excluded.

The more widely debated question regarding אלפים in these contexts is whether it implies “generations,” particularly in light of the references to the third and fourth generations within the context. Childs frames the issue as a translational choice between thousandth generation or thousands “with an unrestricted sense,” and he notes that “the issue is exegetical rather than strictly grammatical.”

English translations are divided on the question, with perhaps a slim majority translating אלפים as “to thousands.” So also the LXX (εἰς χιλιάδας) and the Vulgate (in milia). A number of other English versions supply the term “generation(s)” in slightly differing formulations, which fall into three categories:

1. “to thousands of generations”
2. “to a thousand generations”

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184 Childs, Exodus, 388.
185 Thus, the ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB, NCV, NKJV, OJB and the NIV at 34:7 (but not 20:6). Few commentators seem to read this as “thousands” without assuming that “generations” is at least implied. Among those who do take אלפים simply as “thousands” are Duane A. Garrett, A Commentary on Exodus, KEL (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 470, 640, 653; Johnstone, Exodus, 2:31–32, 405; Enns, Exodus, 584.
186 Wevers, Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus, 310, commenting on the LXX text of Exod 20:6, opines: “What is meant is thousands of generations… That this is how [LXX] Exod interprets it is clear from v.5 where γενεάς was added; here it is unnecessary since it has already been specified.” Wevers’ reading of the LXX Exodus here seems improbable for two reasons. First, the Greek text does not take the opportunity to directly parallel the numerical terms, translating “up to (ἕως) the third … fourth generation” but then “εἰς (not ἕως) χιλιάδας.” Also, in both 20:6 and 34:7, the LXX adds γενεά to “third and fourth” but not to thousands. Wevers’ stated rationale does not fit 34:6–7, since there “thousands” precedes “third and fourth generation.”
187 Reading “to thousands of generations” are CEV and GWN. See Cassuto, Commentary on Exodus, 243, 440; Stuart, Exodus, 716; Enns, Exodus, 416 (later speaks only of “thousands”); Noel D. Osborn and Howard A. Hatton, A Handbook on Exodus, UBSHS (New York: United Bible Societies, 1999), 475.
3. “to the thousandth generation”\textsuperscript{189}

The chief argument for supplying “generation(s)” in Exod 20:6 and 34:7 is the parallel logic between v. 5 and v. 6. If the terms שֶׁלשֶׁים and רבעים in v. 5 indicate, by a single numerical lexeme, “third generation” and “fourth generation,” this suggests some sense of “generations” for אלפים. Thus, Childs prefers to understand “thousandth generation” because it “better provides the intended contrast of the commandment.”\textsuperscript{190} The argument here is stronger for Exod 20:5–6, where the third and fourth generations are mentioned first, than for 34:6–7 where “thousands” precedes any explicit sense of generations; however, even in 34:6–7, many see the following formula with third and fourth generation as confirming a sense of “thousands of generations” for the ambiguous אלפים which precedes it.\textsuperscript{191} Plaut also sees this reading as securing the text’s argument: “Love by far outlasts the judgment of evil: a thousand generations for the former are compared to three or four of the latter.”\textsuperscript{192}

The assumption of “generations” in v. 6 does fit the logic of the passage; however, the contrastive logic here does not demand this assumption. The numerical sense of “three or four” versus “thousands” achieves this contrast whether or not the thousands are specified as generations. Furthermore, there are key differences between אלפים in v. 6 and the terms in v. 5.

\textsuperscript{188} Reading “to a thousand generations” are NET, NLT, NIV (Exod 20:6 only). See J. Gerald Janzen, Exodus, WestBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 147; James K. Bruckner, Exodus, NIBCOT 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 303, 307; Scharbert, Exodus, 129n6f.

\textsuperscript{189} Reading “to the thousandth generation” are NJPS and NRSV. See Propp, Exodus 19–40, 102, 173, 584; Dozeman, Exodus, 465, 732; Houtman, Exodus, 3:707; Childs, Exodus, 388; Hamilton, Exodus, 322; Ashby, Go Out and Meet God, 89.

\textsuperscript{190} Childs, Exodus, 388.

\textsuperscript{191} James L. Kugel, The Bible As It Was (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 431, “This catalog of traits … contained some points in need of further clarification. For example, what did it mean to say that God kept ‘steadfast love for thousands’? In context, it seemed that ‘thousands’ meant thousands of generations. After all the text continues: ‘…visiting iniquity of fathers upon the children and the children’s children to the third and the fourth [generations]’” (emphasis in original).

The words שלשים andربعים are morphologically unique and semantically specialized: they always mean “members of the third/fourth generation,” that is, “third/fourth-generation descendants” (see §4.2.8. above). In contrast, אלפים is not unique morphologically;\(^{193}\) it is the ordinary plural form of the number אלף and has been used as such (“thousands”) previously within the Exodus narrative (Exod 12:37; 18:21, 25). Lastly, if the contrast was to be between “third/fourth” and “thousandth” generation, the plural form of אלפים must be explained, since the ordinal sense of “thousandth” should be expressed by the cardinal, singular form: אלף.\(^ {194}\)

A secondary argument for assuming “generations” in Exod 20:6 is the parallel passage in Deut 7:9. Here, Yahweh “preserves the covenant and lovingkindness (חסד) for those who love him and keep his commandments—לאלף דור (“to a thousand generations” or “to the thousandth generation”).\(^ {195}\) Here “generation” is explicitly connected with “thousand” in a passage with undisputed allusion to Exod 20:5–6 and 34:6–7. What is unclear, however, is why this modification of the Exodus formula should be decisive for determining the sense of אלפים in its Exodus occurrences. In fact, appeal can also be made to Deut 7:9 to argue against such a reading in Exod 20:6 and 34:7. If “thousand(th) generation” is intended, why do the Exodus texts not include the word דור or at least the singular form of אלף as in Deut 7:9? (Or, conversely, if “thousand generations” is the plain sense of Exod 20:6 and 34:7, why does Deut 5:9 need to supply דור?) Most important, however, is the observation that Deut 7:9–10 does not seek to

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\(^{193}\) Contra the claim of Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam, c. 1085–1174). See Martin L. Lockshin, ed., Rashbam’s Commentary on Exodus: An Annotated Translation, BJS 310 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 213, who explains Rashbam’s reading of ולאלפים in Exod 20:6 as “to the thousandth generation” as follows: “Rashbam is saying that אלף should not be understood in the standard sense of meaning ‘thousands,’ but as a technical word for ‘the thousandth generation’—just like the words שלשים (‘the third generation’) andربعים (‘the fourth generation’) in this verse.” This is an interesting speculation, and a sensible hypothesis, but no further explanation or justification is given. In the end, the claim seems to be groundless both in terms of morphology and OT usage.

\(^{194}\) Choon-Leong Seow, A Grammar for Biblical Hebrew, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 272, “Beyond the first ten numbers, Hebrew uses the cardinals to serve the function of ordinals. Thus one cannot tell the difference, save for context, between ‘thousand’ and ‘thousandth.’” I am indebted to Joe Sprinkle for this reference. See also GKC §134ο.

\(^{195}\) See previous note.
merely explicate Exod 20:5–6 or 34:6–7. This is S. R. Driver’s contention in his commentary on Exod 20:6: “It is not apparent here how it can mean ‘a thousand generations’: Deut 7:9 is a rhetorical amplification, not an exact interpretation, of the present passage.”

Before coming down on the side of “thousands” rather than “thousand(th) generation” or “thousands of generations,” however, a clarification is in order. Above, the debate was framed as a translational choice between “thousandth generation,” on the one hand, or “thousands,” with an unrestricted sense, on the other. It is true that this has been the dominant translational question. But the line between translation and interpretation is jagged here. The text itself contains only the “unrestricted” term “thousands.” However, the unrestricted concept of “thousands” is basically meaningless within the syntagm “Yahweh acts in lovingkindness to thousands-of-something.” I suspect that the two-sided translational debate between “thousands” and “thousand(th) generation(s)” has actually contained three major positions. The first position, probably reflected in many of the English versions, is that “thousands” should be rendered in the most unrestricted and literal sense, with the least “interpretation,” so that the reader is tasked with answering the interpretive question—“thousands of what?”—based on contextual factors. The second and third translational positions both press forward to resolve this interpretive question, each heeding

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196 A comparison of the “punishing” formulas clearly establishes that Deut 7:9–10 is a rhetorical transformation, not a mere paraphrase or attempted explanation of Exod 20:5–6. Exodus 20:5 warns that Yahweh “visits-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against the sons, against members of the third and fourth generation, to those who hate him.” In Deut 7:10, he “recompenses the one who hates him, to his face, so that he destroys him; he may not delay with respect to him who hates him—he may repay him to his face.”


198 Childs, Exodus, 388.

199 This is conjectural in terms of the rationale behind various English versions; however, in the commentaries the lines between translation and explanation are more easily traced. Cassuto, Commentary on Exodus, 243, 440, is a good example of this first translational approach. He chooses to translate יאשׁה in both Exod 20:6 and 34:7, and in both places indicates that he understands this to refer to “thousands of generations.” Similarly, Osborn and Hatton, A Handbook on Exodus, 475, “The Hebrew punctuation shows a pause after thousands. Therefore, it is not certain what thousands refers to. In RSV, it means ‘thousands of lovers,’ but TEV has ‘thousands of generations…” and this is more likely the intended meaning.”
different contextual clues. The second position answers, “thousands of generations,” and translates accordingly (or, with some transformation, as “a thousand generations” or “the thousandth generation”). The third position decides on a translation formally identical to the first—“thousands”—but materially this is not an unrestricted number but an implied “thousands of people.” Like the second, the third position has settled on an answer to the interpretive question “thousands of what?” and advocates for its translation based on the contextual soundness of that answer.

A brief mention of two creative, fringe interpretations of לאלפים in these Exodus passages will help to demonstrate that “thousands of what?” is the foundational interpretive question here. Victor Hamilton translates לאלפים in Exod 20:6 along conventional lines: “to the thousandth generation” but renders 34:7 with the expression, “prolongs benevolence for millennia.” While he gives no explanation of his unique rendering, either in the translation notes or the commentary, Hamilton seems to have taken his cue from the rhetorical switch from עשה חסד in 20:6 to שד נצר ח in 34:7, translating the latter as “prolongs benevolence.” Based on this temporal accent, he answers the question “thousands of what?” with “thousands of years”—millennia. A second unique interpretation also focuses on Exod 34:7. In The Bible as It Was, James Kugel conducts a guided tour of rabbinic and early Christian interpretations of various Pentateuch texts. In discussing approaches to the ambiguous expression “to thousands” in 34:7, Kugel writes,

Another solution to the problem was to understand ‘thousands’ in this passage as referring to thousands of sins. In that case, the sentence of Exod. 34:6–7 ought perhaps to be redivided as follows: ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and compassionate, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love; for [or “by”] thousands forgiving iniquity and transgression and sins…’ The assertion that God forgives ‘for’ or ‘by’ thousands would then

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200 Propp, Exodus 19–40, 173, sees something similar in this verb, noting that “urances” in 34:7 arguably implies the passage of time.” For Propp, this serves to support his conclusion that “most likely, אלפים refers to generations.”

201 Hamilton, Exodus, 572.
appear to mean that God does not count up or reckon each and every sin, but forgives them by the thousands, without strict accounting.  

Reading אָלָפִים as thousands of sins requires unlikely syntactic rearrangements, and Hamilton’s “for thousands of years” ignores the regular function of ל as indirect object or dative of advantage in the construction נֶאְרוּ הָאָלָפִים וּתְשׁוּאָה. Nevertheless, these readings illustrate the point that אָלָפִים is an unrestricted numerical concept requiring specification on the basis of contextual clues.

Those who translate לאלפים as indicating “to thousands (of people)” rather than “to thousands of generations” must then consider the interpretive question, “Thousands of what people?” Some take “thousands (of people)” as a generic reference to the ways of God with all people. Others see this as a specific reference to the community of Israel. In Exod 34:7, Johnstone finds significance in the “subtlety” of the definite article (לָאֲלָפִים, “to the thousands”), which is lacking in 20:6 (לָאֲלָפִים, “to thousands”). While ch. 20 bifurcated the people, at least hypothetically, as those who hate/love Yahweh, ch. 34 “suppresses that distinction between the two classes and refers to the whole community as ‘the thousands.’” Göran Larsson, in contrast, suggests that “to thousands (of people)” in 34:7, in referring to a great multitude, cannot have Israel in consideration since they are a minority people in the world (Deut 7:7). Instead, Larsson sees this as, perhaps, an oblique reference to the Gentiles, an indication that God, when giving the Torah to Israel, at the same time promises grace … for many nations.

In my view, a more profitable take on the question “Thousands of what people?” would

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202 Kugel, *Bible as It Was*, 434.

203 Johnstone, *Exodus*, 2:405. This contrast would be heightened if לאלפים לאהבי in Exod 20:6 were read as if לאהבי stood in genitive relation to לאלפים, “to thousands of those who love me…” This reading would also provide a unique answer, only for 20:6 and not applicable to the construction in 34:7, to the question, “Thousands of what people?”—giving the answer: the people who love Yahweh. I argue below, however, that the genitive sense of the ל in לאלפים is very unlikely (see §4.2.11).

attend both to the broader use of “thousands” in the Exodus narrative and to considerations in the immediate context. The preceding narrative has accented the vast fertility of the sons of Israel and their “thousands” who exit Egypt (Exod 12:37) and require governance (18:21, 25). In the immediate context, the paralleled expression “members of the third and fourth generation” as well as the collocation נצר חסד (preserve/prolong lovingkindness) in 34:7 carry notes of extension across a group of individuals and across time. In such a context, a fitting answer to the interpretive question “thousands of what people?” might be descendants. This agrees with the Durham, who translates as “thousands” but later explains, “‘Thousands’ might better be read as ‘an innumerable descendancy,’ as the emphasis is upon the progeny of faithfulness and Yahweh’s unending goodness to them all.” 205 In a context of Yahweh’s covenant with Israel, his long-term intentions for Israel in the land (e.g., Exod 20:12; 34:8–16, 24), and a narrative line which has emphasized their great fruitfulness, it is natural to understand Yahweh’s lovingkindness “to thousands of descendants” as promised here to the prospective progeny of Israel. At the same time, it is important to recognize this as an interpretation of the phrase, rather than as an equivalent translation. “Thousands” remains the best translational choice for אלפים, since it reflects the Hebrew word most transparently and leaves open all possible narratival and rhetorical associations with אלפים.

4.2.11. To Those Who Hate Me … To Those Who Love Me

The pairing of the substantive participles שנאי (“those who hate me”) and אהבי (“those who love me”) in Exod 20:5–6 distinguishes between two groups of people with whom Yahweh deals in distinct ways. These verbs are intensely personal. The nearby references to Yahweh’s jealousy and his prohibition of all other gods, as well as the additional qualification of “those who love

205 Durham, Exodus, 287.
me” with “keep my commandments,” heighten and contextualize this focus on personal enmity and disloyalty (hate), or personal affection and allegiance (love), toward Yahweh’s own person. As Kürle observes, “By casting these verses in the form of direct (apodictic) prohibitions and a direct characterization of Yhwh, the author colours the entire picture of the following Yhwh-speeches with loyalty.”

206 Fretheim speaks of the “fundamentally personal and interrelational character” of the Sinai law and covenant:

By casting these verses in the form of direct (apodictic) prohibitions and a direct characterization of Yhwh, the author colours the entire picture of the following Yhwh-speeches with loyalty.


209 Stuart, Exodus, 454.

More recent studies by Ackerman, Lapsley, Arnold, and Jauss have questioned this dichotomy. Arnold concludes that “the emotive significance of ’ḥb is primary and is not negated by its political usage in the ancient Near East, whether used to describe God’s love for humanity or in the command for humans to love God. Love for YHWH in these contexts is certainly more than affection, but not less than affection.” Dozeman, commenting on Exod 20:5–6, agrees: “Hebrew ’āhab continues the imagery of marriage. Love describes the passion of marriage (Gen 24:67; 29:18).” Dozeman also embraces Moran’s insights regarding love as

211 Susan Ackerman, “The Personal is Political: Covenantal and Affectionate Love (āhēb, āhăbâ) in the Hebrew Bible,” VT 52 (2002): 437–58; Jacqueline E. Lapsley, “Feeling Our Way: Love for God in Deuteronomy,” CBQ 65 (2003): 350–69; Bill T. Arnold, “The Love-Fear Antinomy in Deuteronomy 5–11,” VT 61 (2011): 551–69; Hannelore Jauss, Der liebebedürftige Gott und die gottbedürftige Liebe des Menschen: Ursprung und Funktion der Rede von der Liebe des Menschen zu Gott als alttestamentlicher Beitrag zur Gotteslehre. BVB 25 (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2014). In Lapsley’s reassessment, she points out the limitations of Moran’s form-critical approach, which emphasized the parallels between isolated elements of Deuteronomy and ANE treaty language, but which does not take into consideration all of the occurrences of爱你 and other terms connoting love and their function within the overall narrative framework of Deuteronomy, and within the Hebrew Scriptures more broadly. Arnold’s article contains an excellent summary of the scholarship on this question on pp. 553–59. Even before these three studies, however, others were suggesting that Moran’s valuable study was perhaps overstated. R. E. Clements, God’s Chosen People: A Theological Interpretation of the Book of Deuteronomy (London: SCM, 1968), 83–84, 88, “Certainly [the demand for love to God] was no mere imitation of an existing covenant formulation, but represents a basic feature of the Deuteronomic desire to awaken a deepened sense of religious obligation. As a result of it Israel’s religion was given a warmth and a humanity which it may otherwise never have possessed. It marks an important step in the personalizing of worship…. The whole cult is set within a context of personal communion with God. The cult becomes an aid in worship, rather than that worship itself, for this latter lies hidden in the secret places of the human heart.” R. Laird Harris, “חסד (ḥsd),” TWOT, 1:698, without naming Moran, critiques the dependence of Katherine Sakenfeld’s dependence on him in her study of חסד: “This view forgets that love is a covenant word because kings borrowed it from general use to try to render covenants effective. They tried to make the vassal promise to act like a brother, friend, and husband.” See also R. W. L. Moberly, “Toward an Interpretation of the Shema,” in Theological Essays: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs, ed. Christopher R. Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 134n19.

212 Arnold, “Love-Fear Antinomy,” 560. On the following page, Arnold suggests that it is modern bias which posits “too fine a distinction between the cognitive and the affective”—that is, between loyal obedience and loving affection.

213 Dozeman, Exodus, 485. Similarly Larsson, Bound for Freedom, 151–52, speaks of the Sinai covenant as a “collective wedding act” and observes: “No wonder, therefore, that deviation … is labeled as ‘prostituting’ or ‘whoring’ in Num 15:39…. In other words, law and love, commandments and covenant, are inseparable.” Seock-Tae Sohn, “‘I Will Be Your God and You Will Be My People’: The Origin and Background of the Covenant Formula,” in Ki Baruch Hu: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine, ed. Robert Chazan, William H. Hallo, and Lawrence H. Schiffman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 355–72, convincingly argues that “the formula of marriage and adoption used both in ancient Israel and in Mesopotamia provides the origin and background of covenant formulas [between Yahweh and Israel].” Specifically, the broadly attested marriage proclamation “you are my wife, and I am your husband” and the descriptive formulae “X took (נָבֵא) Y for (ַּ) his wife” and “X took (נָבֵא) Y, and she became X’s wife” stand behind key Biblical covenant formulations such as Gen 17:7; Exod 6:7; 19:5–6; Lev 26:12; Deut 4:20; 26:19–19; 29:13.
treaty language, asserting that “the rationale *intermingles* imagery of marriage and treaty relations by outlining God’s reaction to idolatry with the contrasting language of love and hate.”

Dozeman’s assessment of “intermingled imagery of marriage and treaty relations” seems fitting for the Pentateuch’s use of שָנָא (“hate,” “hater”) as well. Both Exod 1:10 and 23:5 use the participle of שָנָא plus a pronoun suffix, the same construction used here in 20:5 (שָנַא, “those who hate me”), to indicate a political or personal adversary. In 1:10, Pharaoh expresses his fear that the numerous Israelites might join “those who hate us (שָנַאֲנֵה, that is, our enemies) and fight against us.” In 23:5, Yahweh enjoins every Israelite to come alongside “your hater” (שָנָא, that is your enemy) to help him with his fallen donkey. This use of שָנָא to indicate hostile enmity (or a hostile enemy) is common throughout the Pentateuch (Gen 24:60; 26:27; 37:4, 5, 8; Lev 26:17; Num 10:35; Deut 7:15; 19:4; 30:7; 32:41; 33:11). It is often paralleled with אָב (“enemy,” Exod 23:4–5; Lev 26:17; Num 10:35; Deut 30:7; cf. Exod 15:6, 9), צָר (“foe, adversary,” Deut 32:41), or the substantive participle of עָנָי (“one who arises against,” Deut 33:11; cf. Deut 19:11; cf. Exod 15:7). However, שָנָא is also frequently used in the context of marriage to indicate the withholding of due affection and love: “When Yahweh saw that Leah was “hated” (שָנָא), he opened her womb. But Rachel was barren” (Gen 29:31; cf. Gen 29:33; Deut 21:15–17; 22:13–16; 24:3). Thus, the hate and love spoken of in Exod 20:5–6 carry associations of external covenant violation as well as more internal connotations of personal rejection or affectionate devotion.

Yet while treaty and marriage metaphors are both appropriate here, in the *theological* context of *Yahweh’s covenant with Israel* the actual (non-metaphorical) situation is the relation 214 Dozeman, *Exodus*, 485–86 (my emphasis). Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2004), 430, also captures the dual sense of external (dis)loyalty with internal (dis)affection by translating: “for My foes” and “for My friends.”
between God and a people. Like a marriage covenant or a treaty between suzerain and vassal kings, this is a deeply personal bond: “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your own God” (Exod 6:7a). Within this *theological* (and not merely marital or political) relationship, “love” of the people for their God includes exclusive trust and a sense of confident dependence.215 As Wolfram Herrmann concludes in his article on Israel’s love for God, this is “einer Liebe, die keine anderen Sicherungen sucht, nur von Jahwe alle Lebensmöglichkeiten erwartet und ihm dankbar zugekehrt bleibt.”216 In this regard, the close association of loving Yahweh with the language of “holding fast to” (דבק) is significant. Like אַהֲבָּה (“love”),דבק (“hold fast to”) is first used in marital contexts in the Pentateuch (e.g., Gen 2:24; 34:3), and is often used of Israel’s devotion to and dependence upon Yahweh, especially in Deuteronomy (e.g., Deut 4:4; 10:20; 11:22; 13:4). In Deut 30:19b–20a, for example, Moses exhorts the people: “Choose life, so that you and your offspring may live, loving Yahweh your God, obeying his voice, and holding fast (דבק) to him, for he is your life and length of days.”

This intrinsic connection between affection, obedience, and trust explains the close connection between *idolatry* and “loving” or “hating” Yahweh. In the context of Exod 20, having other gods and making and worshipping idols is the primary offense involved in the “iniquity of fathers” and in the “hating” of Yahweh (v.5). Tigay comments:

> It is unlikely that a polytheistic Israel would literally hate, or even reject, the Lord; at worst one might worship Him together with other gods or ignore Him. However, since the Lord demands exclusive fidelity, the Bible views the worship of another god alongside Him as tantamount to rejecting him.217

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215 This theological focus shifts the equations somewhat not only for the human orientation toward God (“love” as trust and dependence) but also for the divine orientation toward man. Raitt, “Why Does God Forgive?”, 47, notes, “Yahweh is not merely analogous to a Hittite Suzerain…. Yahweh’s freedom and sovereignty are not limited to what is possible inside the Sinai covenant. God is the God of the covenant, and he is also the God above the covenant.” This observation has relevance for the understanding of Yahweh’s lovingkindness (חסד, see discussion above, §4.2.9).


217 Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 66.
Turning to other gods can be described in the OT as “love” for these idols, as in Hos 9:10: “Your fathers … dedicated themselves to the thing of shame [בֵּשַׁת = Baal]. They became detestable like the thing they loved.” Conversely, “proper Yhwh-worship” expresses love for him.\textsuperscript{218} Hate and love in Exod 20:5–6, then, are rich verbs encompassing matters of personal affection (as in marriage), outward obedience (as in a political treaty), and most especially exclusive trust, dependence, and worship (as befits a people and their God). The phrase in v. 5 carries the sense of “those who hate me,” “my enemies,” and “those who refuse to trust and worship me.” The phrase in v. 6 carries the sense of “those who love me,” “my allies,” and “those who trust and worship me alone.”

The phrase in v. 6 is further qualified by the addition of \(ולשׁמרי מצותי\) (“and to those who keep my commandments”). “My commandments” recalls the exclusive worship and avoidance of idolatry which Yahweh has just demanded in vv. 3–5a. “My commandments” is also anticipatory here (as it is in Exod 15:26; 16:28), looking ahead to the stipulations which will immediately follow in the remainder of the Decalogue and in the rest of Yahweh’s Sinai instruction,\textsuperscript{219} so that “the reader perceives the entire legislation … as an expression of a life which befits a ‘God-lover.’”\textsuperscript{220}

Beyond the semantic content of loving and hating, the exegetical crux with these phrases involves whether \(שָנָאי\) in v. 5 refers to “fathers” or “sons” or both: are sons visited-in-punishment for the sins of fathers only when they themselves prove to be idolatrous haters and enemies of

\textsuperscript{218} Kürle, \textit{Appeal of Exodus}, 49–50.

\textsuperscript{219} While the Decalogue is often described as “words” (דְּבָרִים, Exod 20:1; 24:3; 34:1, 28; Deut 9:10; 10:4)—and the Book of Covenant as “ordinances” (מִשׁפְּטִים, Exod 21:1; 24:3)—rather than as “commandments” (מִצְוָה), their standing as “commandments” is made clear in other passages. Yahweh describes the stipulations on the stone tablets as “the law (תֵּורָה) and the commandment (מִצְוָה) which I have written for their instruction” (Exod 24:12), and several passages use the verb “command” (צוה) in describing the Decalogue and other Sinai instructions as that which Yahweh “commanded” (Exod 23:15; 32:8; 35:1; Deut 4:13).

\textsuperscript{220} Kürle, \textit{Appeal of Exodus}, 50.
Yahweh? Less commonly discussed but also at issue is the implied referent of אֵל in v. 6. This debate involves, in part, the precise grammatical function of the preposition ל in these constructions. I will take up this latter question first, the meaning and function of the preposition ל in אֵל and לְשׂנָיָהּ.

In Exod 20:5, most English translations render, “the fourth generation of those who hate me,” reading the ל as indicating a genitive relationship. This is a syntactical alternative to a construct noun chain. Gesenius suggests that it was impossible to employ a construct chain here because רבעים had to remain in absolute form to conform to the preceding שׁלשׂים. A second possibility is that ל indicates the indirect object or a dative of (dis)advantage, modifying Yahweh’s “visiting-in-punishment” and indicating “those who hate me” as the intended recipient of this action. This is highly unlikely in v. 5, however, because the recipients of Yahweh’s act of פָּקַד have already been indicated in the preceding context using the preposition עַל, and, as the next chapter will argue, the OT consistently uses עַל (and never ל) to mark the recipient of visitation-in-punishment (פקד). The third possibility is that ל has a specification function here, qualifying the dynamic of transgenerational punishment in the passage as taking place with respect to those who hate me. Such a use of ל is basically equivalent to a casus pendens at the beginning of a sentence. In English, this would run something like, “As for those who hate me,

221 Thus GKC, §129e; Joüon, §130b; Durham, Exodus, 277; Dozeman, Exodus, 465; Cassuto, Commentary on Exodus, 243.
222 Wevers, Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus, 310, explains the LXX rendering of τοῖς μισοῦσιν με in this sense, as an indirect object modifying ἀποδίδος (“recompensing” = פָּקַד, assuming that its function is the same as the parallel construction in v. 6 (τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν με). However, the syntax of v. 5 is distinct from that of v. 6 in both the MT and the LXX, and it is seems just as likely that τοῖς μισοῦσιν με in the LXX is a dative of reference/respect. See Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 144–46.
223 Arnold and Choi, §4.1.10(h); Williams §273a.
225 GKC, §143e; cf. §119u.
visiting iniquity of fathers against sons, against members of the third and fourth generations.”

The ל in the expression לאהבי in v. 6 has the same three possible functions. The genitive function would create a sensible reading (“to thousands of those who love me”), but here, unlike v. 5, the syntax would not have prevented the more usual construct chain (לאפים לאהבי). However, this is more plausible for the phrases in v. 5, as paired objects of the preposition על, than for לאפים in v. 6, which stands in a very different syntactical structure than שלשים and רבעים and is governed by a different preposition. The second option, ل as indirect object or dative of advantage, is much more likely for לאהבי in v. 6 than for לשנאי in v. 5, since this is the most natural meaning for the ל on the immediately preceding word, לאלפים, “to/for thousands.” The sense of לאהבי would thus be “(acting in steadfast love) … to/for those who love me.” Reading the same function of ל in the following expression לשמרי מצותי would yield the appositional series “to/for thousands, to/for those who love me, that is, to/for those who keep my commandments”—here the thousands are those who love Yahweh, who are those who keep his commands. Third, the ל in v. 6 can very plausibly be taken as a ל of specification, indicating with respect to whom Yahweh will show his extensive (“to/for thousands”) steadfast love: “with respect to those who love him, etc.”

Since לאהבי and לשנאי are closely paired semantically and morphologically, it is attractive

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226 This is the sense of the German translation of Exod 20:5–6 in Josef Scharbert, Exodus, NEchtB (Würzburg: Echter, 1989), 84: “Bei denen, die mir feind sind, verfolge ich die Schuld der Väter and den Söhnen, an der dritten und vierten Generation; bei denen, die mich lieben und auf meine Gebote achten, erweise ich Tausenden meine Huld.” In a previous work, Scharbert, “Formgeschichte,” 146, had translated the passage: “Denn ich, Jahwe, dein Gott, bin denjenigen, die mich hassen, ein eifernder Gott, der Väterschuld an den Söhnen … heimsucht, denjenigen, die mich lieben und meine Gebote halten, aber einer, der Gnade übt an Tausenden.” In this previous rendering, Scharbert takes ل as a dative of specification, but reads לשנאי as modifying “I am … a jealous God who visits,” and לאהבי as modifying “I am … one who shows lovingkindness.”

227 Thus the ESV (“to thousands of those who love me”) and NIV (“to a thousand generations of those who love me”).

228 Thus, perhaps, NASB and NKJV (“to thousands, to those who love me”), although the rendering of “to” here is ambiguous and might also indicate a shortened expression of “with respect to.”
to read a consistent usage for ָל. The first option, the genitive use, is less plausible in v. 6. The second option, indirect object or dative of (dis)advantage, is impossible for v. 5. Thus, the third option is preferable for both לָאָב in v.5 and לָאָבֵי in v. 6. “with regard to those who hate me … with regard to those who love me and keep my commandments.”

The question remains regarding the referent of these substantives, especially in v. 5. Does Yahweh threaten here to visit-in-punishment transgenerationally upon sons with respect to fathers who hate, with respect to sons who hate him, or with respect to situations in which fathers and their progeny hate him? The scholarly discussion of this question is extensive (see 3.1.1.b. above), and assumptions about textual history and the evolution of Israel’s ideas of collective punishment have often played a larger role in the discussion than matters of syntax. Keil and Delitzsch argue that לָשׂנֵי cannot refer only to fathers on the basis of its position: “If it referred to the fathers alone, it would necessarily stand after אבות.”229 This seems reasonable but has not been universally persuasive.

Another factor which may suggest associating those who hate me with sons (or with fathers and sons) is the mention of the iniquity of fathers, which would render “for those who hate me” redundant if it were intended to refer only to fathers. On the other hand, Levinson reverses the charges of redundancy. In his view, to associate those who hate me with sons “makes the original text redundant,” and he asks, “What is the logic for even mentioning generations if it is only individual retribution that operates, no longer transgenerational punishment?”230

The prevailing view considers these phrases to be later additions intended to soften the text’s stance on transgenerational punishment by applying it only to sons who are themselves sinful. For this view, the “plain sense” here associates those who hate me with the sons. On the

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230 Levinson, Legal Revision, 87.
other hand, others characterize readings that associate the phrase with sons as being driven by a need for theodicy “against the plain sense,” and they instead consider fathers as the most obvious referent of those who hate me.\textsuperscript{231} Thus, lexical and syntactical arguments are not decisive in resolving this question. The narrative and rhetorical dimensions of this passage, to be examined in the next chapter, will offer additional considerations.

4.2.12. Summary Translation of Exodus 20:5b–6

The following translations of Exod 20:5b–6 attempt to draw together these lengthy lexical and syntactical discussions. The first is weighed down heavily with amplifications. The second is more direct, though still in stilted English.

\textit{For} (this reason you shall have no other gods and avoid idolatry:) \textit{I am Yahweh, your God, a jealous God} (that is, moved by fiery love for my own people and concern for my reputation, intolerant of rivals), \textit{who (thus)—with respect to those who hate me} (by the coldness of their affection, their disobedient enmity, and their lack of trust and exclusive worship)—\textit{visits-in-punishment the iniquity} (sinful offense against me, guilt before me) \textit{of fathers against sons,} (even) \textit{against members of the third and fourth generations, but who (also as Yahweh, your God)—with respect to those who love me} (by their heartfelt affection, their obedient loyalty, and their dependent trust and exclusive worship) \textit{and keep my commandments—acts in} (gracious) \textit{lovingkindness to thousands} (of the progeny of my people).

\textit{For} \textit{I am Yahweh, your God, a jealous God who, with respect to those who hate me, visits-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons, even against members of the third and fourth generations, but who, with respect to those who love me and keep my commandments, acts in lovingkindness to thousands (of descendants).}

\textsuperscript{231} Propp, \textit{Exodus 19–40}, 173, “Those who find a reference to the sons (e.g. Targum Onkelos) are trying to make it out that only guilty sons are punished for their fathers’ faults, against the plain sense.”
4.3. Lexical-Syntactical Analysis of Exodus 34:6b–7

יהוה יהוה אל רחום וחנון ארך אפים ורב‑חסד ואמת׃
נצר חסד לאלפים נשׂא עון ופשׁע וחטא֑
ונקה לא ינקה פקד עון אבות על‑בנים ועל‑בני בנים על‑שׁלשׂים ועל‑רבעים׃

4.3.1. Elements Discussed Above and Elements Not Requiring Elaboration

The extended terminology for Yahweh’s gracious and merciful character in Exod 34:6 is straightforward. Yahweh is a רחום (“merciful”) and חנון (“gracious”) God. Some speculation is required to describe the precise logic of the idiom ארך אפים (literally, “long of nostrils/anger”), but interpreters agree with its general meaning: Yahweh is “slow to anger.” It takes him “long” to become angry, or, at least, he is slow to act in anger. “It is as if He takes a long deep breath as He deals with sin and holds His anger in abeyance.” Widmer emphasizes that, within the narrative of Exod 32–34, this “patience” of Yahweh is presented as a divine “resolution” within Yahweh himself, “a result of Moses’ plea to turn from His burning anger and to ‘repent’ of His initial intention to consume the people.” Yahweh’s חסד (“lovingkindness”) is mentioned in Exod 20:6, and was discussed at length above (see §4.2.9). The adjective רב (“many, great, plentiful”) in construct with חסד ואמת (“lovingkindness and faithfulness”) indicates that he is “abounding in” these qualities. Often the phrase חסד רבירש is regarded as hendiadys. Cassuto, for


example, takes these two terms as “dual elements of a unitary quality,” that is, “true and faithful lovingkindness.”

Several of the elements in v. 7 have already been discussed above under Exod 20:5–6 (“lovingkindness”) in §4.2.9; נֵּזֶר כָּלֵד שְׁנֵי (“to thousands”) in §4.2.10; (“iniquity” and “iniquity of fathers”) in §4.2.6; “fathers and sons” or “parents and children” in §4.2.7; and נֵּזֶר לַאֲלָפִים (“members of the third generation … fourth generation”) in §4.2.8. The expansion of “against sons” with “and against sons of sons” in v. 7 does not require a separate discussion from §4.2.8 above: it is a fuller but equivalent expression. In what follows, then, attention will be given to the phrases נֵּזֶר חָסֶד (“preserving lovingkindness”), נֵּזֶר עון וָפֶשׁע וָחָטָא (“forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin”), and נֵּזֶר לֶא יַנָּקֵה (“yet he will certainly not neglect punishment”).

4.3.2. נֵּזֶר חָסֶד, Preserving Lovingkindness

The expression נֵּזֶר חָסֶד לַאֲלָפִים (“preserving lovingkindness for thousands”) in Exod 34:7 is nearly identical to the formula in 20:6, but the verb governing חָסֶד is now נֵּזֶר (“preserve, watch, protect”) rather than עָשָׂה (“act, perform”). The construction עָשָׂה חָסֶד has over 40 OT occurrences; נֵּזֶר חָסֶד appears only in Exod 34:7.

When considering what it means for Yahweh to نزار חסד, three senses of נزار might be suggested as possible within the Exod 34 context. First, נزار could describe Yahweh keeping, observing, or fulfilling חסד, in the sense of fidelity to a covenant or a divine obligation. Some contemporary English versions render 34:7 along these lines: “keeping loyal love” (NET), or

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236 Cassuto, Commentary on Exodus, 439.

237 In fact, David Noel Freedman and Shawna Dolansky Overton, “Omitting the Omissions: The Case for Haplography in the Transmission of Biblical Texts,” in “Imagining” Biblical Worlds: Studies in Spatial, Social and Historical Constructs in Honor of James W. Flanagan, ed. David M. Gunn and Paula M. McNutt, JSOTSup 359 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 104–5, suggest that Exod 20:5 and 34:7 both may have originally read “and against sons of sons,” but that by haplography this phrase was omitted from 20:5, where the scribe mistakenly skipped from the first בניֶהֶם to the second בניֶהֶם. This is not impossible, but neither is there any manuscript support for the suggestion. While the expansion does not alter the generational count of the expression, it may have a rhetorical effect, audibly drawing out the sense of transgenerational patience and punishment.
“keep my promise(s)” (GNT, CEV). Above I argued, however, that Yahweh’s חָסָד in Exod 20:6 does not carry a sense of divine obligation to a norm, of “covenant fidelity.” If that is so in Exod 20, then it is emphatically the case after the golden calf crisis in Exod 34. Yahweh’s חָסָד is non-obligatory and gracious (cf. Exod 33:19b). It is true that שָמַר, a semantic equivalent to נֶצֶר, is used 14x in Exodus for Israel’s “observing or keeping” of feast days, Sabbaths, commands, statutes, and the covenant. While נֶצֶר likewise bears this meaning elsewhere in the OT (e.g., 10x in Ps 119), Exodus consistently uses שָמַר rather than נֶצֶר to indicate this sense of observance and fidelity. The fact, then, that Exod 34:7 employs the distinct root נֶצֶר rather than שָמַר—the only passage in Exodus where נֶצֶר occurs—may signal a distinction in meaning. For these reasons, the meaning of keep, observe, fulfill for נֶצֶר should be excluded in 34:7.

A second meaning for נֶצֶר in combination with חָסָד could be Yahweh’s watching, guarding, protecting his lovingkindness. Johnstone speaks of the “vigorou connotations” of the verb נֶצֶר here, and mentions specifically the image of a watchman guarding a city (e.g., Jer 31:6).

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238 Keith N. Schoville, “נֶצֶר,” NIDOTTE 3:148, describes נֶצֶר as “equivalent in semantic value to šmr,” and notes that נֶצֶר is paralleled synonymously with שָמַר in six verses: Prov 2:8, 11; 4:6; 13:3; 16:17; and 27:18. To these Deut 33:9 should be added.


240 In contrast to this frequent use of שָמַר, the verb נֶצֶר is used only three times in the Pentateuch: here in Exod 34:7, in Deut 32:10 to indicate Yahweh finding Israel and “guarding him like the apple of his eye,” and in Deut 33:9, which parallels “keeping (שָמַר) my word” with “keeping (נֶצֶר) my covenant.” This final occurrence has the sense of fidelity to a command or obligation, but note that here it is paired with שָמַר, rather than replacing it. Jacob, Second Book of the Bible, 984, observes the distinction in usage between נֶצֶר and שָמַר in relation to חָסָד: “The verbs usually associated with he-sed are a-sah and sha-mar, and the stronger na-izar is used only in poetry (Pss [40]:12; 61:8; Prov 20:28).” Even in these three cases, however, the syntactical relation between נֶצֶר and שָמַר is different than in Exod 34:7, where Yahweh preserves חָסָד for the people. In the three poetic verses, נֶצֶר is the subject of the verb שָמַר (always paired with אֱלֹהָי, “faithfulness”) preserves the king.

241 The present argument has assumed that שָמַר in Exodus often denotes fidelity to commanded observances: “keeping.” Moshe Bar-Asher, Studies in Classical Hebrew, ed. Aaron Koller, SJ 71 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 51, suggests a different sense for שָמַר in such contexts. On the basis of the paradigmatic relation of שָמַר ("remember") in the otherwise parallel Sabbath commands of Exod 20:8 and Deut 5:12, Bar-Asher proposes that שָמַר can mean to “remember.” If this understanding were adopted, the close semantic relation between נֶצֶר and שָמַר might then support the third possible meaning of נֶצֶר חָסָד discussed below: maintaining lovingkindness over time, that is, preserving and prolonging it. This would, however, leave the apparently distinct usage patterns of שָמַר and נֶצֶר in Exodus unexplained.

242 Johnstone, Exodus, 2:408.
Elsewhere, Yahweh is described as watching over and guarding his people (Isa 27:3; Pss 31:24 [Eng 31:23]; 32:7). Here the picture is a little different: Yahweh vigilantly guarding and protecting his own lovingkindness—for the thousands of his people.243 This would make sense only if Yahweh’s חסד were somehow threatened. Because in Exod 32–34 the sin of the people and the anger of Yahweh thereby provoked do indeed imperil his gracious kindness toward them, here carries this note of Yahweh standing guard over his own lovingkindness.244

Third, נצר here could indicate Yahweh’s maintaining his lovingkindness over time, that is, preserving and prolonging it. Hamilton takes נצר in this third way, translating 34:7 as “who prolongs benevolence.”245 Osborn and Hatton paraphrase, “I will keep on loving my people for thousands of generations.”246 Larsson notes that נצר can mean “to store” and sees its use in Exod 34:7 as “a matter of a grace that is ‘kept’ for the future.”247 Because נצר חסד occurs only in 34:7, we cannot examine the contexts of other uses of the expression. However, its semantic equivalent שמר is used with חסד in three passages:

And so, know that Yahweh your God is God, the faithful God who preserves (שומר) the covenant and [his] lovingkindness (חסד) for those who love him and keep his commandments, for a thousand generations (לאלף דור). (Deut 7:9)

And Solomon said, “You have acted in great lovingkindness (חסד) to your servant David, my father, just as he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have preserved (שמר) for him this great

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243 Widmer, Moses, God, and the Dynamics, 189, reads נצר in Exod 34:7 as indicating that Yahweh “guards His (covenant) loyalty to thousands of generations,” but he then takes this largely in the sense of temporal preservation, the third semantic option outlined below: “This is a way of saying that His חסד lasts for an indefinite long time.”

244 Isa 27:3 presents an interesting parallel to this passage, and this dynamic. By the double use of נצר, it stresses the role of Yahweh as protector of his vineyard. The subtle references in the immediate context to wrath and to “punishing visitation” (פקד על), as well as the allusion to the vineyard song in Isa 5:1–7, suggest that the chief threat to the vineyard against which Yahweh now stands guard is his own wrath and punishment.

245 Hamilton, Exodus, 572. Unfortunately, Hamilton does not provide any argument or explanation for this unique translations of נצר.

246 Osborn and Hatton, Handbook on Exodus, 801.

247 Larsson, Bound for Freedom, 261.
lovingkindness (חָסְדָּם), in that you have given him a son who sits on his throne, as it is this day. (1 Kgs 3:6)

Forever, I will preserve (שָׁמֵר) my lovingkindness (חָסְדָּם) for him, and my covenant will stand firm for him. (Ps 89:28 [Eng 89:27])

Three texts form a small data set, but in these שָׁמֵר חָסְדָּם passages, the temporal dimension of Yahweh’s חסד is prominent. In Deut 7:9, his covenant and lovingkindness will be preserved (maintained, prolonged) for a thousand generations. In 1 Kgs 3:6, Yahweh has preserved (maintained, prolonged) his חסד from David’s day to Solomon’s. In Ps 89:28, he promises to preserve (maintain, prolong) his חסד and his covenant forever, for his anointed king. This temporal sense of שָׁמֵר חָסְד resonates with the larger OT emphasis on the “enduring, persistent, even eternal” character of divine חסד (e.g., Isa 54:10; Lam 3:22; Pss 100; 118; 136). It is this temporal dimension of שָׁמֵר which gives rise to Dentan’s observation that “God’s action in this respect is not occasional, or merely habitual, but is the result of the uniform direction of his will and purpose—or, in other words, is of the essence of his nature.”

Both the second and third meanings for שׁמר חסד discussed above are well-fitted to the context of Exod 34:7. These two meanings are closely related, and in terms of English translation, both can be encompassed under the translation “preserving lovingkindness” or further clarified with the translation “protecting and prolonging lovingkindness.” That is, the expression שׁמר חסד means to preserve חסד against threatening dangers (guarding, protecting) and also to preserve חסד against the threat of changing, fading away, or ceasing with time (prolonging).


250 In Prov 13:3a, these two senses of the synonyms שָׁמֵר and שׁמר are set in parallel: “He who guards (שָׁמֵר) his mouth / prolongs (שָׁמֵר) his life.” Transposing the two verbal roots here would not change the meaning; the distinct senses of שׁמר/שָׁמֵר here are determined by contextual factors rather than by a semantic distinction between verbs.
The participle נשׁא is usually translated as “forgiving” in Exod 34:7. A number of studies have suggested alternative meanings or significant qualifications, but I will argue that the translation “forgiving” is sound. The verb נשׁא usually means to carry or lift (up). The common construction נשׂא עון, “to bear iniquity,” functions in two distinct and seemingly opposite senses in the OT. It can indicate that a sinner will be responsible and must suffer the consequences for iniquity. In other contexts, נשׂא עון indicates the action of forgiving the iniquity of another. Baruch Schwartz makes the crucial observation that there is a “slight but critical difference in the precise, literal meaning of the verb נשׁא in each of these two uses of the phrase.” In the first case, נשׁא means “to carry iniquity about, to be laden with” iniquity, guilt, or punishment. In the second case, when the sinner is relieved of his burden, it means not ‘carry’ but ‘carry off, take away, remove’. This sense of נשׁא, widely attested in Biblical Hebrew as well as in Akkadian, is what makes the double usage so effective. The transgression ‘borne’ by the sinner remains upon him; that ‘borne away’ from him ceases to weigh upon him; both processes, the burden of guilt and its removal, are expressed by the same verbal usage.

However, a number of scholars explain Yahweh’s נשׂא עון in Exod 34:7 in ways which ignore this distinction, describing Yahweh as “carrying” iniquity rather than as “removing” it. Some describe Yahweh’s נשׂא עון as his bearing of the guilt or weight of iniquity on behalf of the people. G. Ernest Wright, for example, emphasizes the biblical view that the law cannot be broken with impunity; someone must bear the burden of sin. Thus, “in Exod 34:7 God himself, to maintain his covenant with Israel, bore the iniquity.”

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251 These are the first two definitions given in HALOT.


thing in this phrase is “daß Gott selbst den ‘āwōn von schuldigen Menschen an deren Stelle trägt.” Janzen reflects the same semantic logic when he explains, “In a real sense, the forgiver is the one who bears the sin of the forgiven.”

A second approach sees Yahweh “carrying” iniquity in the sense of bearing with, putting up with sin and a sinful people. Widmer glosses Yahweh’s נָשַׁא as “patient endurance of the people,” a sense which he roots within the surrounding context of Exod 34:6–7: “YHWH, out of his gracious, compassionate, and loyal being, is willing to נָשַׁא any sin for an indefinitely long period (to thousands of generations).” Widmer sees this dynamic illustrated in the history of the wilderness generation. Describing the meaning of יִנָּשֵׁא in Exod 34:7 as “to carry/bear Israel’s iniquities,” Widmer writes:

This line of argument would suggest, however, that the sin is not necessarily eradicated, but temporarily put off by a patient God. This interpretation of נָשַׁא is obviously compatible with YHWH’s forbearance. We shall see that this reading of נָשַׁא is enforced and exemplified in Numbers 14 where YHWH patiently ‘bears’ Israel’s sins until a time when He calls them to accountability. In other words, the terminology [of יִנָּשֵׁא] reflects both YHWH’s loving patience and His moral demand.

Yochanan Muffs has a similar view, reading יִנָּשֵׁא not in terms of divine forgiveness, but rather divine restraint and delay in punishment: “God does not destroy the generation in the desert immediately. He exacts punishment little by little, until the whole generation has died off. This act of kindness was called ‘bearing’ (nasa’) the sin.” For Muffs, the language of Yahweh’s

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255 Janzen, Exodus, 255.

256 Janzen, Exodus, 255. Janzen’s explanation of יִנָּשֵׁא thus incorporates both the first and second senses discussed here. In this respect, he represents a typical tendency among commentators to ascribe—consciously or unconsciously—multiple distinct meanings of “carry” to the verb נָשַׁא in Exod 34:7. The purpose of the present argument is to untangle these.


258 Widmer, Moses, God, and the Dynamics, 191.

259 Muffs, Love and Joy, 41.
visiting-in-punishment of iniquity (פקד עון) upon descendants is to be understood as a specific elaboration of this previous statement that Yahweh “patiently endures (נשׂא עון) iniquity.”

However, this understanding of פקד עון as a gradual and ongoing process is not consistent with the analysis of the idiom פקד על (“visiting-in-punishment against”) presented in the next chapter.

While Widmer and Muffs set the dynamic of נשׂא עון mainly under the rubric of patience and “bearing with,” their explanations also suggest a third sense of “carrying.” Franz notes that this idiom can connote a temporary storing up (einer vorläufigen Aufbewahrung) of iniquity. This third sense of נשׂא עון might be described with the accounting metaphor “carrying-over,” in terms of figures on a balance sheet, that is, keeping the iniquity on the books.

The issue at hand, of course, is not whether the above claims are theologically true, or biblical, or even whether the dynamics described are consistent with other elements in Exod 34. For example, few would dispute that Yahweh’s “bearing with” iniquity is implied by the leading descriptions in v. 6: merciful, gracious, slow to anger. The question is strictly lexical and semantic: does the phrase נשׂא עון ופשׁע וחטאה indicate that Yahweh “forgives and takes away” iniquity or that Yahweh “bears” iniquity, “bears with and endures” iniquity, or “stores up” iniquity?

Most English translations render נשׂא עון in Exod 34:7 as “forgive.” The LXX and the Vulgate both translate it as “taking away” (ἀφαιρῶν, aufers), as do German commentators Scharbert and Dohmen (wegnehmen). For Adrian Schenker, the primary sense of נשׂא עון in Exod 34:7 is that Yahweh removes (aufheben) guilt, transgression, and sin—that is, he cancels

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260 Franz, Barmherzige und gnädige Gott, 137.

261 On this point, a helpful caution is sounded by James Barr, The Semantics of Biblical Language (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 140, “It is surely because the themes of biblical thought, with which words are associated in such interpretations, are genuine biblical themes, that the inadequacy and often complete absurdity of the word-interpretations so easily escape notice. The reader may be puzzled or doubtful about the procedures used in the interpretation, but he feels that after all what comes out of it seems genuinely to represent something in which the Bible is interested. This is surely the reason why interpretations which make ludicrous departures from well-known and recorded word-meanings can nevertheless escape question so easily.”
(auflösen) and forgives (vergeben) it, so that it no longer exists. Osborn and Hatton note that
the verbal root means to lift or raise, and they explain, “In context it may be understood as
‘taking away the guilt or consequences’ of the three conditions listed.” Kleinig affirms this
view of נָשָׁא עון: “When God ‘bears’ their impurity, he removes it and so releases them from the
evil that they have brought on themselves (Exod 34:7; Num 14:18).” So also Propp: “When it
is Yahweh who assumes the guilt, the phrase simply connotes something like forgiveness: the
guilt is removed or absorbed by God (34:7; Num 14:18; Isa 33:24; Hos 14:3; Mic 7:18; Pss 32:5;
85:3).” Such descriptions of forgiveness are not uniquely derived from the Hebrew idiom of
 נשׁא עון as “lift, carry away, remove iniquity”—these ideas are inherent to the universal human
experience of interpersonal forgiveness. Miroslav Volf, for example, observes that “the heart of
forgiveness is the generous release of a genuine debt. The condemned wrongdoing has been
lifted from the wrongdoer’s shoulders.”

Some have attempted to fully fold both the senses—carrying and carrying away—into their
explanation of נשׁא עון. Freedman writes, “The verb means literally, to lift or raise, carry, bear.
The person who forgives is thus pictured as one who (a) bears or endures the injury which is
inflicted upon him, and (b) by accepting this injury without desire for revenge carries off or
removes the iniquity of the guilty person.” For Schenker, the phrase primarily means that God

262 Adrian Schenker, Versöhnung und Widerstand: Bibeltheologische Untersuchung zum Strafen Gottes und
264 John W. Kleinig, Leviticus, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2003), 106.
265 Propp, Exodus 19–40, 449.
266 Miroslav Volf, Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace (Grand Rapids:
York: Lang, 2010), 90–91.
267 David Noel Freedman, “God Compassionate and Gracious,” WWat 6 (1955): 15 (my emphasis). See also
Freedman and B. E. Willoughby, “なぜ nāšā’ ,” TDOT 10:35, “God frees the sinner from the burden of his guilt, he
lifts it up, suspends it (nāšā’ ̀āwōn), by taking on the injustice.”
“löse sie auf und vergieße sie, so daß sie nicht mehr existieren,” but it may also indicate that “Er bewahrt sie für später auf.”²⁶⁸ Schenker suggests in a note that because the idiom creates a word play, there may be a double meaning intended here.²⁶⁹ It is difficult, however, to see how “cancels so that it does not exist” and “stores up for later” could function together as the intended doubled meaning of a verb. In both of these cases, Barr’s indictment of “illegitimate totality transfer” is legitimately applied.²⁷⁰ Nida, too, warns that “many biblical scholars want to read into every word in each of its occurrences all that can possibly be derived from all of its occurrences,” and he stresses that “the correct meaning of any term is that which contributes least to the total context.”²⁷¹

In my judgment, נושא עון in Exod 34:7 indicates forgiving and taking away iniquity, and the attempts to invest Yahweh’s נושא עון with connotations of bearing, enduring, or storing iniquity should be set aside, since they emerge from theological reflections based on the basic meaning of the verbal root נושא and the total set of OT meanings for נושא rather than from its strict lexical meaning, based on specific lexical relationships in specific contexts. As evidence, consider the following four observations regarding the usage of נושא.

First, the verb נושא is frequently used in pleas for forgiveness, whether directed to humans or to God (e.g., Gen 50:17; Exod 10:16–17; 32:32; 1 Sam 15:25; 25:28; Hos 14:3 [Eng 14:2]; Ps 25:18). For example, at the height of the locust plague, Pharaoh says to Moses and Aaron, “I have sinned against Yahweh your God, and against the two of you. Now, just this once, please forgive (נושא) my sin, and pray to Yahweh your God so that he will just remove this death from

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²⁶⁸ Schenker, Versöhnung und Widerstand, 87.
²⁶⁹ Schenker, Versöhnung und Widerstand, 87n162.
²⁷⁰ Barr, Semantics of Biblical Language, 218, “The error that arises, when the ‘meaning’ of a word (understood as the total series of relations in which it is used in the literature) is read into a particular case as its sense and implication there, may be called ‘illegitimate totality transfer.’”
me” (Exod 10:16–17). Pharaoh is not asking that Yahweh vicariously bear, patiently endure, or store up his sin, but rather that Yahweh pardon his sin, take no more offense from it, and remove the punishing locusts.\(^{272}\)

Second, נושא עון (נושא פשע or נושא שר) occurs in synonymous\(^{273}\) parallelism with “forgiving” and “taking away” verbs such as עבר Hiphil (“take away”), עבר Qal (“passing by”), and כסה Piel (“cover, conceal”):

Why do you not forgive (несен) my transgression (פשע), and take away (черד Hiphil) my iniquity (עון)? (Job 7:21)

Blessed is the one who is forgiven (несен) with respect to his transgression (פשע) and who is covered (כסה) with respect to his sin (חטאת). (Ps 32:1)

You forgave (несен) the iniquity (עון) of your people, you covered (כסה) all their sin (חטאת). (Ps 85:3 [Eng 85:2])

Who is a God like you, forgiving (несен) iniquity (עון) and passing over (черד) transgression (פשע)?…? (Mic 7:18)

This last passage comes from a series of verses (Mic 7:18–20) full of allusions to Exod 34:6–7, so that v. 18 stands as an amplification of the expression נושא עון from Exod 34:7. The next verse in this passage pictures Yahweh treading sin under foot and casting it into the depths of the sea.

In another such passage, Ps 51:3–4 [Eng 51:1–2], the Psalmist rearranges the various elements of Exod 34:6–7a, but instead of נושא עון, Ps 51:3b–4 separates the three terms for sin from Exod 34:7 (עון ופשע וחטאה), assigning each sin term its own verb: מחה (“blot out”), כבס Piel (“to wash, full”), and טהר Piel (“to clean, scour”). While נושא is not used, each of these verbs stands in

\(^{272}\) Pharaoh’s request can also be associated with the narrator’s comment two verses later in Exod 10:19. Pharaoh had asked, “Forgive (несен, that is, ‘lift’) my sin…. remove (שrador, Hiphil) this death from me.” So Moses prays, and v. 19 records that Yahweh turned the direction of the wind, and it “lifted” (несен) the locusts and drove them away so that “not one locust remained in the whole territory of Egypt.”

\(^{273}\) Here, I am not using the term “synonymous” as a technical category of Hebrew poetic parallelism, along the lines of the taxonomy articulated by Robert Lowth, but only as an expression of my own general assessment of the relationship between the poetic lines discussed here. In each case, the second line states a thought which is to a large extent a restatement of the first thought, so that the paradigmatic relationship between the verbs and direct object nouns here is significant for lexical-semantic analysis.
paradigmatic relation with נשׂא, that is, each stands in for נשׂא, namely, each stands in for נשׂא. This is not to indicate that necessarily means “blot out” or “wash” or “scour”—or, for that matter, “take away,” “pass over,” or “cover” from the passages above. But of the two senses distinguished by Schwartz (“carry, be laden with” or “carry off, take away, remove”), the above associations link נשׂא עון more closely with the latter: carry off, take away, remove.

Third, apart from these direct parallels, OT usage situates נשׂא in a group of highly interrelated verbs which indicate the removal, hiding, or elimination of sin and guilt, further supporting the sense of “forgiving” or “removing” for נשׂא עון in Exod 34:7. This field of verbs includes לא זכר (“not remember”), כפר Piel (“cover, atone”), כסה (“cover”), סלח (“pardon, forgive”), מחה (“wipe away”), and היפיל Qal or Hiphil (“pass by” or “remove”). These terms are often interchangeable when used with terms for sin, being set in parallel or other close logical relation: סלח and נשׂא in Exod 34:6, 9; Num 14:19; and in Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 19:22; Num 15:25–28, etc.; and in Jer 31:34; מחה and כפר in Deut 29:19 [Eng 29:20]; נשׂא and מחה in Jer 18:23; כפר and מחה in Isa 6:7; 27:9; מחה and כפר in Zech 3:4; and מחה in Neh 4:5; and מחה in Isa 43:25 (and מחה and כפר in Ps 109:14); מחה and כפר in Ps 51:3 [Eng 51:1]; מחה and כסה in Pss 32:1; 85:3 [Eng 85:2]. Two such associations with נשׂא are found within the Exodus narrative. As discussed above, Pharaoh’s locust-inspired request for forgiveness and relief in 10:17 sets נשׂא alongside כפר Hiphil (“remove”). After the golden calf apostasy, Moses announces, “Perhaps I can כפר Piel (“cover,

274 Raitt, “Why Does God Forgive?” 44, notes that 13 of 23 OT echoes of Exod 34:6–7 contain a verb for forgiveness, but only two employ the same verb as Exod 34:7 (פש). The other eleven passages use eight different verbs to depict forgiveness.

275 The tie between forgiving (נשׂא) and not remembering (לא זכר) is particularly significant in arguing against nuances of נשׂא as bearing, enduring, or storing up iniquity. Walter Kaiser, “שׂא,” TWOT 2:601, observes, “Sin can be forgiven and forgotten because it is taken up and carried away” (my emphasis).

276 Horst Dietrich Preuss, Old Testament Theology, trans. Leo G. Perdue, OTL, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 2:180–81, “God’s action of forgiveness is conveyed not only by נשׂא כפר = nś' ('lift up, bear') and מחה פלד = slḥ ('forgive') but also by numerous other expressions. In addition the verbs grouped above, Preuss includes רפא (“heal”) and לא זכר (“not take into account”).

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atone for”) for your sin” (Exod 32:30). He then approaches Yahweh and prays, “And now, if only you will נשתא (“forgive”) their sin” (32:32). All this is not to suggest that every semantic dimension of this word-group should be loaded into the interpretation of נשתא עון, but only to establish that the sense of נשתא as “forgiving, taking away” is supported by a network of syntagmatic relationships.

A fourth observation may appear subtle, but in my mind it is significant. In Exod 34:7, the participle נשתא is followed not merely by עון but by the threefold sequence עון פשׁע וחטאה (“iniquity, rebellion, and sin”). At first, reading נשתא עון in 34:7 as “bearing the weight of iniquity” may appear natural, since the combination נשתא עון occurs 27x in the OT in the sense of someone bearing the culpability and consequence for his own sin, or of someone shouldering the iniquity of another, esp. in reference to the role of the priests. The formula נשתא עון occurs in this sense mainly in Leviticus (10x), Numbers (6x), and Ezekiel (8x). However, נשתא עון in such contexts is a very stable construction: six times עון is in construct with another noun (e.g., “iniquity of guilt” in Lev 22:16; “iniquity of the sanctuary” in Num 18:1), and twice עון is plural, but otherwise the expression is always simply נשתא עון. In nine similar passages, נשתא is followed by the noun חטאה (“sin”). These also occur mainly in Leviticus, Numbers, and Ezekiel. There are two problems with reading נשתא עון פשׁע וחטאה in Exod 34:7 in close association with these OT passages of “sin bearing.” First, the idiom of “bearing” sin culpably or vicariously in the OT is always and only formulated with the sin terms עון or חטאת. It never occurs with פשׁע, nor does it ever occur with חטאה. Both of these terms are included in the Exod 34:7 construction:

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277 These include Gen 4:13; Exod 28:38 (with עון in construct), 43; Lev 5:1, 17; 7:18; 10:17; 16:22 (iniquities pl.); 17:16; 19:8; 20:17, 19; 22:16 (construct); Num 5:31; 14:34 (iniquities pl.); 18:1 (2x, both construct); 18:23; 30:16 [Eng 30:15]; Ezek 4:4; 5 (construct), 6 (construct); 14:10; 18:19, 20; 44:10, 12.

278 נשתא is used with חטאת in Lev 19:17; 20:20; 22:9; 24:15; Num 9:13; 18:22, 32; Isa 50:12; and Ezek 23:49.

279 This claim regarding נשתא פשׁע considers it evident from the context and logic Exod 23:20ff that the warning in 23:21 against disobedience on the grounds that Yahweh’s angel will not נשתא פשׁע must mean that his angel will “not forgive your rebellion.” This passage stands in direct relation—and tension—with Exod 34:7. While
“forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin.” Second, the “bearing iniquity” idiom is always used with a single direct object—either עון or חטאת but never with both, even in parallel expression. In contrast, נשא in the sense of “forgiving” occurs in many poetic parallel constructions with multiple sin term (several listed above) and twice has multiple sin terms as direct objects (Gen 50:17 and Josh 24:19, both with חטא פשע and חטאת פשע). All this supports the traditional rendering of נשאanghai in 34:7 as “forgiving iniquity.”

A final consideration in the interpretation of this element of Exod 34:7 is the significance of the string of three terms for sin: עון (“iniquity”), פשע (“transgression” or “rebellion”), and חטאת (“sin”). The first of these, עון, is discussed above under Exod 20:5 (see §4.2.6.). It means “iniquity” in the sense of personal offense against and guilt before Yahweh. The terms פשע and חטאת are particularly apt following the golden calf apostasy. Seebass concludes that “the noun [פשע] means ‘offense, transgression,’ and is a general term for various offenses of outrage or indignation.”

The noun חטאת (“sin”) has a distinct pointing in Exod 34:7, occurring only here and in Isa 5:18. Nevertheless, its close relation to the people’s sin in ch. 32 is clear: the cognate nouns חטא and חטא (both also meaning “sin”) each occur three times in ch. 32, along with three occurrences of the verb חטא, as the chief terms for Israel’s “great sin (חטא) which they sinned (חטא)” in making gods for themselves (32:31).

While commentators often distinguish the semantic nuances of

280 Horst Seebass, “פשע pāša’,” TDOT 12:141.

their use in 34:7 piles them up for their cumulative force: Yahweh forgives all sins of every sort. This is not unusual: “In at least eight passages, ‘awôn is used alongside both ht’ and pš‘ in simply designating ‘sins’…. We may suppose that the individual terms have lost some of their crisp distinctiveness, and are employed as virtual synonyms.”

4.3.4. Yet He Certainly Will Not Neglect Punishment

Franz notes that the root נקָה can have a negative meaning in the sense of “empty” or “free from,” such as when a city is vacant, robbed (Isa 3:26) or has nothing to eat (Amos 4:6). But the more important meaning of the root lies in “the favorable freedom from (legal) punishment and from (cultic) sin” (der günstigen Freiheit von (rechtlicher) Strafe und (kultischer) Sünde). Here in Exod 34:7, it appears in the Piel, which HALOT glosses with the factitive meanings “leave unpunished” and “declare to be free from punishment.”

Warmuth observes that the OT usage of נקָה Piel (“to clear, acquit, treat as innocent, leave unpunished”) is quite uniform: all but one of its 18 occurrences have Yahweh as subject, all but one are negated by לא or אל, and the nature of the implied punishment is never specifically described. Exodus 34:7 is unusual in that here נקָה lacks a direct object, but the previous context of iniquity (with the triple terminology of עון ופשׁע וחטאה) as well as the nature of the verb נקָה clarify the sense: Yahweh will certainly not neglect to punish sinners. Thus, most English

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283 Helpful overviews of these and other sin terms can be found in Preuss, Old Testament Theology, 2:170–77; Rolf Knierim, Die Hauptbegriffe für Sünde im Alten Testament (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1965); Elmer A. Martens, God’s Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology, 3rd ed. (Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 1998), 50–52.

284 Robin C. Cover, “Sin, Sinners (OT),” ABD 6:32. So also Cassuto, Commentary on Exodus, 440, “It is actually difficult to determine the distinction [in Exod 34:7]…. Possibly, however, it was not intended here to differentiate between three varieties of sin, but to mention various synonyms in order to cover the entire range of wrongdoing.”

285 Franz, Barmherzige und gnädige Gott, 139.


287 Osborn and Hatton, A Handbook on Exodus, 801, “The words ‘the guilty’ are implied by the verb and the context.”
versions supply “the guilty” (cf. LXX τὸν ἐνοχον) as the object; for example, the ESV reads, “but who will by no means clear the guilty.” Such a statement directly contrasts with or qualifies the piled-up grace and mercy language in the preceding context, particularly the description of Yahweh as “forgiving iniquity, etc.” The shift from adjectives and participles to this distinctive infinitive absolute plus cognate verb construction reinforces the sense that ונקה לא ינקה contrasts with or significantly qualifies the preceding descriptors.

It is the severity of the contrast, however, which has caused a division among interpreters. Most English translations and a number of commentators express the contrast here in stark terms: yet Yahweh will “by no means,” “certainly not,” “surely not” clear the guilty or neglect punishment. This reads the infinitive absolute construction ונקה לא ינקה in an “emphatic” or “intensifying” sense. “With the non-perfective conjugation the infinitive absolute often emphasizes that a situation was, or is, or will take place.” Stuart’s informal rendering, “not letting anybody off,” and Durham’s nuanced translation, “certainly not neglecting just punishment,” are consistent with this understanding. Brueggemann discourages attempts to soften the disjunction here, which he sees as intended and theologically significant:

There are only two terms, two negatives [נקה and פקד] as over against seven positives. They are, however, weighty and severe. God will not acquit [נקה ngh]. This takes the form of an infinitive absolute. God will really not pardon! God will not overlook or ignore violations of covenant…. Structurally and at the heart of this formulation is a profound, unacknowledged, and unresolved contradiction…. God forgives iniquity, and God punishes iniquity…. The formula itself gives no hint how to work out this contradiction.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁸ See ESV, GWN, KJV, NASB, NET, NKJV, NRSV, as well as the Spanish RV. The NIV, as well as the LXX, do not translate an emphatic sense, but simply assert the negative: “he will not clear the guilty,” “οὐ καθαριεῖ τὸν ἐνοχον.” Commentators who see an emphatic sense here include Dozeman, Exodus, 738; Johnstone, Exodus, 2:408; Osborn and Hatton, A Handbook on Exodus, 801; Stuart, Exodus, 717; Durham, Exodus, 450; Walter Brueggemann, “The Book of Exodus: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in General and Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus, NIB 1, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 947; Hamilton, Exodus, 572.

²⁸⁹ Waltke and O'Connor, §35.3.1b.

While noting that he does not follow “Brueggemann’s notion of an unpredictable God,” Kürle concurs that “the tension in 34:7 between the willingness to forgive and not to ṭĕm (release from punishment) cannot and should not be resolved on any level.”

Dozeman also takes ונקה לא ינקה as an emphatic negative (“yet by no means does he acquit”), although for him the contrast this draws is not an absolute contradiction: “There is forgiveness, but God also reserves the right to punish to the fourth generation, as in the Decalogue.”

For many others, however, the contrast created by the “emphatic” sense of the infinitive absolute here is simply illogical and necessitates the consideration of other grammatical possibilities. Garrett notes that the ESV rendering “creates a significant problem: if the guilty person is not in some sense cleared of guilt and released from punishment, there is no forgiveness. Such a translation of 34:7c does not qualify but flat-out contradicts the previous lines.” Softened renderings have been proposed which qualify but do not contradict the forgiving which has just been predicated of Yahweh:

- Jacob: “without declaring completely innocent”
- Alter: “yet he does not wholly acquit”
- Muffs: “but does not entirely expunge the record”
- Garrett: “but he does not grant blanket amnesty”

291 Kürle, Appeal of Exodus, 45.
292 Dozeman, Exodus, 738.
293 Garrett, Exodus, 640n39.
294 Jacob, Second Book of the Bible, 984, asserts that the expression here in Exod 34:7 is “weaker than the absolute lo y’na-qeh of the third commandment [Exod 20:7].”
295 Jacob, Second Book of the Bible, 980.
296 Alter, Five Books of Moses, 508.
297 Muffs, Love and Joy, 16. Cassuto, Commentary on Exodus, 440, also uses the language of “not expunging” sin: “Sin is not completely expunged by mercy; the punishment is suspended, and if a man sins again, the Lord exacts retribution from him for both the present and the former sin (compare above, [Exod] 32:34).”
298 Garrett, Exodus, 640, 721.
Scharbert, Scoralick, Dohmen: “spricht aber den Sünder nicht einfach frei”\textsuperscript{299}

NJPS, Milgrom, Childs: “yet he does not remit all punishment”\textsuperscript{300}

Warmuth: “but does not leave the guilty totally unpunished”\textsuperscript{301}

NEB, Knight: “not sweeping the guilty clean away”\textsuperscript{302}

Fishbane: “but he will not acquit (guilt forever)”\textsuperscript{303}

These approaches have been especially prevalent in the Jewish exegetical tradition and among German exegetes since Scharbert. Sarna cites the Talmudic interpretation of the phrase ונקה לא ינקה which holds that God “remits punishment for the penitent, but not for the impenitent” (Yoma 61a)\textsuperscript{304}—or, as Kugel puts it, for the “good sinners” but not for the truly wicked.\textsuperscript{305} Kugel cites the paraphrase of Exod 34:7 in Targum Onkelos: “pardoning sins for those who return to His Torah; but to those who do not return, He does not pardon.” Widmer cites the view of Rashi (A.D. 1040–1105) that Yahweh does not cancel punishment entirely but “little by little exacts punishment from [the sinner].”\textsuperscript{306} Both Muffs and Milgrom emphasize that the formula in Exod

\textsuperscript{299} Scharbert, Exodus, 128–29; Scoralick, “JHWH, JHWH,” 145; Dohmen, Exodus 19–40, 319. Also Schenker, Versöhnung und Widerstand, 85–86, follows this interpretive tradition, but his translation “Er spricht keineswegs einfach frei” is a hybrid of the “emphatic” and “softened” renderings of this infinitive absolute construction.

\textsuperscript{300} Jacob Milgrom, Numbers, JPSTC (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 111, 392–95. In his excursus, “Judgment and Mercy: Vertical Retribution and “Salaḥ,” Milgrom argues that Exod 34:6–7 does not speak of unqualified forgiveness and that, in Num 14:17–19, “Moses asks for reconciliation not forgiveness, for assurance that Israel will be brought to its land and not that the sin of the Exodus generation will be exonerated.” Cf. Childs, Exodus, 602.

\textsuperscript{301} Warmuth, “נָגָא nāqā,” TDOT 9:556–57.

\textsuperscript{302} Knight, Theology as Narration, 201.

\textsuperscript{303} Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation, 335. Fishbane’s translation (“but he will not acquit guilt forever”) is unique in that he qualifies the duration of the acquittal, rather than its general completeness or severity. He does not explain his grammatical or contextual reasoning for this translation, but it would seem to invest the infinitive absolute construction here with a nuance of continuation rather than intensification. While some grammarians allow a sense of duration with the postpositive infinitive absolute (that is, when the infinitive follows the verb), the sequence in Exod 34:7 is prepositive (the infinitive precedes the finite cognate). Waltke and O’Connor, §35.3.1c, reject the nuance of duration in both cases.

\textsuperscript{304} Sarna, Exodus, 216, 262n13.

\textsuperscript{305} Kugel, Bible As It Was, 433.

\textsuperscript{306} Widmer, Moses, God, and the Dynamics, 192.
34:6–7a does not speak of the canceling or expunging of sin; rather, its punishment is mercifully deferred. For them the נקה phrase in v. 7b confirms that guilt and punishment may remain; the transgenerational language which follows clarifies how this merciful deferring of sin will work.

Schenker, Scoralick, and Dohmen, following Scharbert, understand the affirmation of punishment (ונקה לא ינקה) in close relation both with Yahweh’s preceding mercy and with the transgenerational language which follows: Yahweh forgives, but rather than simply (einfach) acquitting, he goes on to closely and continually examine the descendants to see if they exhibit the same iniquity as the fathers.307 Note that here the alternative to “simply acquitting” is not primarily punishing but rather examining, which is Scharbert’s understanding of the verb תַּפַּד in this context. Scharbert comments on 34:7:

Er is auch bereit, Sünde zu vergeben, spricht aber den Sünden nicht einfach frei und prüft an den Nachkommen bis in die vierte Generation hinein nach, ob sie an den Sünden der Väter festhalten oder nicht, damit andeutend, daß er zwar lange zuschauen kann, aber eines Tages doch strafend dreifährt.308

Largely following Scharbert, Schenker explains, “Gemeint ist jedoch, daß Gott überhaupt nicht strafen wird, es sei denn, die folgenden Generationen würden den Abfall ihrer Väter ebenfalls vollziehen.”309 Though Schenker goes on to construct a coherent explanation, there is something odd about beginning an explanation of the phrase “he will certainly not leave unpunished”—or even “he will not leave completely unpunished”—with the assertion, “What is meant, however, is that he will not punish at all (überhaupt).”

The various alternatives to the “emphatic” translation are sometimes justified by a grammatical claim. It is well known that the infinitive absolute preceding a verb from the same root can exert an “emphatic” or “intensifying” force on the verbal action. But, additionally, it is

307 See note 297 above.
309 Schenker, Versöhnung und Widerstand, 86n159.
claimed, when such a construction is negated it can also carry the sense of “not entirely,” “not completely,” “not certainly,” “not really” performing the action of the verb. Having reviewed these alternative positions, Widmer judges, “From a strictly grammatical point of view both sets of interpretations are possible.” And he adds, “This verse is a good example of the importance of context and how intrinsically connected wider theological issues are with an exact rendering of the Hebrew.”

Widmer’s latter observation is massively true for any number of issues in Exod 34:6–7. However, his assertion that *these* two sets of translations are equally possible from a grammatical point of view deserves substantial critique.

Widmer cites both GKC (§113) and Joüon (§123e) in claiming that both interpretations are possible from a “strictly grammatical point of view;” however, neither of these grammars contains any discussion which would justify the second, “softened” understanding of the negated infinitive absolute in ונקה לא ינקה. Likewise, Waltke and O’Connor (§35) speak only of the “intensifying” force of the cognate infinitive absolute: “The precise nuance of intensification must be discovered from the broader context; it can usually be rendered into English by an intensifying adverb appropriate to the clause (e.g., ‘certainly,’ ‘really’).” Of these three grammars, only Waltke and O’Connor specifically cite Exod 34:7, translating it, “Yet he will by no means leave the guilty unpunished.”

On what basis then, have so many commentators discovered a sense of “yet he does not remit all punishment,” and so forth, in this passage? Two factors seem to come in to play, one explicitly and the other implicitly. First, many discussions explicitly connect this interpretation of Exod 34:7 to the re-use of the ונקה לא ינקה expression in other key texts: Num 14:18; Jer 30:11; 46:28; and Nah 1:3. In particular, Jer 30:11 has been identified as justifying the sense: “will not

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311 Waltke and O’Connor, §35.2.2e., 583 (emphasis in original).
leave you completely unpunished.” Second, there seems to be an unstated assumption about the grammatical logic of the negative when used with the infinitive absolute. To illustrate, consider the following translations of these infinitive absolute constructions:

- He certainly will acquit, or, He completely will acquit.
- A) He certainly will not acquit, or, He completely will not acquit, or
- B) He not certainly will acquit, or, He not completely will acquit.

Those proposing “softened” translations of ונקה לא ינקה implicitly assume that it is grammatically viable to shift the negative sense in the syntax from the finite verb (as in A here) to the “intensifying element” (as in B here). “He certainly/completely will not acquit” becomes “He will not certainly/completely acquit.” In the following, I will argue that the shifted negative required by such translations is not grammatically defensible for ונקה לא ינקה, and also that the Jer 30:11 connection mentioned above does not justify a “softened” translation in Exod 34:7.

To translate ונקה לא ינקה as “yet he does not wholly acquit,” and so forth, ignores the semantic significance of the position of the negative (לא) in absolute infinitive with cognate verb constructions. The grammars note that the regular position of the negative is between the infinitive and the finite verb, as it is in Exod 34:7 (ונקה לא ינקה). The infinitive absolute + לא + finite cognate verb (x) occurs 27 times in the OT. In each of these, the context supports an emphatic or intensified sense such as “surely not x,” “by no means x,” or “not at all x.”

Two groups of passages are sometimes treated as exceptions to this consistently emphatic sense. In the first group are the five passages containing the Exod 34:7 formula: ונקה לא ינקה (34:7); Num 14:18; Jer 30:11; 46:28; and Nah 1:3). I will consider these below and argue for an

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312 For example, Sarna, Exodus, 216, 262n13, emphasizes Jer 30:11 as a key parallel.
313 GKC, §113v; Waltke and O’Connor, §35.2.2e.
314 Exod 5:23; 8:24; 34:7; Lev 7:24; 19:20; Num 14:18; 23:25 (2x); Deut 21:14; 17:13; Judg 1:28; 15:13; 1 Kgs 3:27; Isa 30:19; Jer 6:15; 8:12; 11:12; 13:12; 13:32; 30:11; 46:28; Ezek 16:4 (2x); 20:32; Dan 10:3; Amos 3:5; Nah 1:3. Of these, 10 are Qal; 6 are Piel; 8 are Hiphil; and 3 are Hophal.
emphatic reading for all of these. The second group consists of the statement in Josh 17:13, repeated in Judg 1:28, which the ESV translates, “but (Israel) did not drive them out completely” (והורישׁ לא חורישׁ). Contextually, however, the issue in these passages is not that Israel did not completely drive out the Canaanites, in general, but that Manasseh “(certainly) did not drive out” the Canaanites of some specific villages, named in the previous verses (Josh 17:11–12 and Judg 1:27).315 In times of strength, they conscripted them as laborers, but they did not dispossess them or drive them out at all. For this reason, the “emphatic” translation of Josh 17:13 and Judg 1:28 in the NRSV is more accurate: “but did not in fact drive them out.” The simple rendering of the NJPS, “but they did not dispossess them,” also expresses the idea well, and might be strengthened to “but they certainly did not dispossess them.” Thus, in no instance is the negative in these constructions “shifted” from negating the finite verb to negating the emphatic infinitive idea, as in “not completely,” “not wholly,” etc.

In fact, Hebrew has a different syntactical sequence which does shift the negative sense in this way, which Exod 34:7 could have employed to express the idea of “not declaring completely innocent” or “not wholly acquitting.” Logically, in order to negate the sense of the intensifying infinitive rather than the finite verb, Hebrew can place the לא prior to the infinitive absolute, rather than intervening between the infinitive and the finite cognate. Three verses in the OT exhibit this “exceptional” sequence: Gen 3:4; Amos 9:8; and Ps 49:8.316

In Gen 3:4, the serpent replies to the woman: לא מות תמותו. Gesenius speculates that this

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315 In Judg 1, the following verse (v. 29) also states, bluntly, that “Ephraim did not drive out (והוריש) the Canaanites who lived in Gezer.” Again, at issue is not a partial expulsion but rather the complete neglect of the command to expel, at least with respect to a specifically referenced group of Canaanites.

316 GKC, §113v, identifies three exceptions to the normal negative construction of the infinitive absolute, without further consideration of the semantic nuance of this altered sequence: Gen 3:4; Ps 49:8; Amos 9:8. It should be acknowledged that three other passages have this alternative structure, but only superficially. In Num 22:37; Jer 3:1; and Jer 38:15, the fronting of לא is motivated by a different syntactical factor, a clause-initial interrogative ה. This allows the interrogative to begin with the familiaremony איהו or איה, and it does not alter the meaning: it is still an emphatic expression.
construction may intentionally maintain the word order of Yahweh’s positive formulation in Gen 2:17, apparently to more dramatically contradict it. However, the assertion of the serpent is perhaps more naturally read as challenging the rhetorical intensification or certainty of the infinitive absolute spoken in Gen 2:17, rather that negating the finite verb. There is a subtle but significant difference in tone between, “You will not surely die” (ESV) and “You surely shall not die” (NASB). The ESV rendering “not surely die” (shared by KJV and NIV) rings true to the context, specifically to the character and rhetoric of the serpent, and attests to a different semantic logic of the לא-first syntactical construction here. To examine this claim, one has only to try out the formula “not surely x” in translating the 27 לא-intervening passages. It does not work.

Of the three exceptional passages, Amos 9:8 offers the most clear-cut support of the thesis that a syntactical repositioning of the לא yields a predictable semantic shift. All modern versions along with the LXX are unanimous in offering a “softened” translation of כי לא השמי אוים אשת-בית יעקב: “except I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob” (ESV), “will not totally destroy” (NIV), “will not wholly wipe out” (NJPS), οὐκ εἰς τέλος ἐξαρῶ (LXX). The comment of Andersen and Freedman on this verse is precisely to the point: “The usual position of the negative lō’ before the infinitive absolute emphasizes the negation of the intensification, not of the action itself. Not: ‘I shall not destroy the house of Jacob at all,’ but ‘I shall not completely wipe out the house of Jacob.’”

The interpretation of the final לא-initial example, Ps 49:8 [Eng 49:7], is less definite, because of the nature of poetry and uncertainties regarding the text itself. BHS notes a variant אח (“surely”) for the initial אח (“a brother”) and suggests repointing the finite verb as a Niphal. The English translations vary in their navigation of these questions. However, whether the verse is

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317 Andersen and Freedman, Amos, 869–70.
read as denying the capacity of a man to redeem his own life with his wealth, or the life of a
to redeem his own life with his wealth, or the life of a
brother, the question at hand involves the syntactical sequence: לא פדה יפדה. Modern versions
either ignore the force of the infinitive or render it in an emphatic sense: “No man can by any
means redeem his brother” (NASB). None translate, “A man can not sufficiently ransom a
brother.” Still, this “not sufficiently” or “not completely” rendering is not only consistent with
the logic of the ואין-initial syntax, it is also well-matched to the quantifiable nouns in the context
(wealth, v. 7; ransom-price, v. 8) and to the following thought in vv. 9–10: “For the ransom of
life is costly and can never suffice, that one should live on forever and never see the grave”
(NRSV).

These three examples of an alternative syntax of negation in infinitive absolute plus finite
cognate constructions suggest that there is a semantic distinction between ואין-initial and אין-intervening sequences. This weighs strongly in favor of a straightforward “emphatic” rendering
for the אין-intervening formula in Exod 34:7: “but he will certainly not neglect punishment.”

One objection to this claim, however, remains. The phrase ונקה לא ינקה from Exod 34:7 is
closely paralleled in four other passages; in particular, the usage in Jer 30:11 (with its near-echo
in Jer 46:28) is often cited as justification for reading Exod 34:7 as “not leave totally
unpunished.” If this were the appropriate reading of Jer 30:11, this would indeed be persuasive

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318 NIV translates without any additional nuance from the infinitive: “No man can redeem the life of another.” The non-translation of the infinitive absolute can at times be a legitimate option. Reuven Yaron, “Stylistic Conzepts II: The Absolute Infinitive in Biblical Law, in Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom, ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 460, after surveying the use of the infinitive absolute in the Book of Covenant, concludes, “The absolute infinitive was widely used, but this does not justify the search for meaning. Sometimes it was used for reasons of style, to avoid an excess of brevity, as in the case of an apodosis consisting of a single word.”

319 Robert G. Bratcher and William D. Reyburn, A Handbook on the Psalms, UBSHS (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 450, after discussing the textual issues in v. 8, observe, “In either case the thought is the same: there is not enough money for anyone to buy permanent life insurance; death comes to all, even to the very wealthy.”

for Exod 34:7, since they share not only a לא-intervening negative infinitive absolute construction but also the same verb, נקה Piel. The English versions are evenly divided, but I will argue that, “will certainly not leave you unpunished” is the best contextual reading of Jer 30:11 (and 46:28).

Those who justify a “softened” reading for Exod 34:7 based on Jer 30:11 can point to the strong statement in that passage that “I will not make an end of you.” However, close attention to the poetic structure of Jer 30:11 is essential here:321

(a) For I am with you (declares Yahweh) to save you,
(b) for I will make an end of all the nations
(c) where I have scattered you,
(d) but I will not make an end of you.
(e) I will chasten you according to justice,
(f) and will surely not leave you unpunished.

The declaration of Yahweh’s presence and saving help in (a) is elaborated by (b) and (d): salvation involves the destruction of the enemy nations but the ultimate sparing of Israel. Lines (c), (e), and (f) set this promise of salvation against the backdrop of Yahweh’s just and certain punishment of Israel itself. Note that our phrase in line (f) parallels line (e)—“I will chasten you according to justice—not line (d). Line (d) stands as the contrasting parallel to (b).

The immediate context and the broader rhetoric of Jeremiah also support reading נקה לא אנקך (line (f)) in Jer 30:11 as an expression of the certainty and severity of divine punishment juxtaposed in this context with God’s promise not to make an end of Israel. Likewise, Jer 30:7

321 The structure presented here (by the varying indentation of the English lines) follows the BHS editors and is generally consistent with William L. Holladay, Jeremiah 2, HCS (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 173, who speaks of “the parallelism of the two occurrences of ‘make an end’ (עשׂה כלה) and the plausibility of the matching parallelism of the last two cola of the verse.” He considers the phrase “where I have scattered you” (colon (c) below) to be a gloss. To excise (c), however, would remove the parallel relation between (c) and (e)–(f).
both warns and assures, “Woe! For that day is great and there is none like it! It is a time of
distress for Jacob, but he will be saved from it.” In v. 10, the promised rest and peace will follow
their experience in a “land of captivity.” Following 30:11, vv. 12–15 establish the necessity of
this certain punishment, climaxing in the refrain, “because your iniquity is abundant, your sins
are vast” (vv. 14, 15). And, as Bracke points out, “the claim that God will severely punish but
not make a ‘full end’ of Judah … occurs earlier in the Book (4:27; 5:10, 18)” as well.322

For these reasons, line (f) is best read as “and will certainly not leave you unpunished”
rather than “will not let you go entirely unpunished” (NIV). This is consistent with the
observation above that לא- intervening infinitive absolute negative constructions are always
intensifying, never softening. A number of English versions support this reading of Jer 30:11
with translations such as “I will by no means leave you unpunished” (ESV) or simply “I will not
leave you unpunished” (NJPS), as do numerous Jeremiah commentaries.323 So also Gesenius, in
discussing the infinitive absolute, cites Jer 30:11 and translates: “and will in no wise leave thee
unpunished.”324 This emphatic (or intensifying) reading of the infinitive in Jer 30:11 is congruent
with another canonical re-use of the הנך לא נך formula in Nah 1:3 (a more direct allusion to
Exod 34:7 than Jer 30:11). In the context of the judgment declared against Nineveh in Nah 1, the
sense cannot be that Yahweh will not completely acquit but rather that Yahweh will certainly not
acquit or leave unpunished (cf. Nah 1:8, 10).

323 John Bright, Jeremiah, AB 21 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 270; Jack R. Lundbom, Jeremiah 21–
36, AB 21 (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 387, 392; Pamela J. Scalise (with Gerald L. Keown and Thomas G.
Smothers), Jeremiah 26–52, WBC 27 (Dallas: Word, 1995), 91; Holladay, Jeremiah 2, 174; William McKane,
interpretation of the phrase by Rashi and the targumim and concludes: “There is little doubt that ‘I will not let you
go unpunished’ is the correct nuance.” John A. Thompson, Jeremiah, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 555,
694, translates inconsistently between Jer 30:11 (“I will not exempt you completely”) and 46:28 (“By no means will I exempt you”). He does not discuss his translations of the phrase in question, focusing instead on questions of the
textual history of these passages.
324 GKC, §113n.
Thus, I conclude that the ונקה לא ונקה in Exod 34:7 baldly states, “Yet he will certainly not neglect punishment.” It may be the case be that some of the proposed qualifications to “he will certainly not remit punishment” which are discussed above are legitimate and defensible interpretations of the unexpressed logic of Exod 34:6–7. It may even be the case that the theological dynamic in related passages such as Jer 30:11 may be in some sense interpretively suggestive for Exod 34:7. Still, the basic translation and starting point for interpreting ונקה לא ונקה must be its stark claim: “Yet he will certainly not neglect punishment.” This is what the construction νقة לא νاقة means.

4.3.5. Summary Translation of Exodus 34:6–7

As with 20:5–6 above, I will here offer two translations of Exod 34:6–7 in an attempt to draw together the preceding lexical and syntactical discussions. The first translation is slightly amplified, the second more direct but still somewhat wooden.

_Yahweh, Yahweh, a merciful and gracious God, slow to (act in) anger and abounding in faithful lovingkindness, preserving (protecting and prolonging) (His own) lovingkindness for the thousands (of the progeny of his people), forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin; yet he will certainly not neglect (the) punishment (of sinners), visiting (in) punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons and against sons of sons, against members of the third and the fourth generations._

_Yahweh, Yahweh, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful lovingkindness, preserving lovingkindness for the thousands, forgiving_...
iniquity and rebellion and sin; yet he will certainly not neglect punishment, visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons and against sons of sons, against members of the third and the fourth generations.

4.4. Delimiting the Texts

The two name-speeches in Exod 20:2–6 and Exod 34:6–7 occur as elements within larger narrative and rhetorical episodes. However, in each case, textual features mark these name-speeches as discrete units.

4.4.1. Exodus 20:2–6 as a Discrete Text

Exodus 20:2–6 begins and belongs to the address of Yahweh from Sinai to the gathered children of Israel. In Exod 19, the people have arrived and camped before the mountain. Through Moses, Yahweh has instructed the people regarding their preparations and his purposes for an imminent theophany. On the morning of the third day, Yahweh descends onto the mountain in fire, amidst smoke and lightning and thunder. Concluding a series of ascents and descents, Moses rejoins the people at the foot of the mountain as Chapter 19 draws to a close. Exodus 20:1–17 is then introduced: “And God spoke all these words, saying....” Exodus 20:2–6 contain God’s initial statements, and the verses that follow through v. 17 contain the remainder of “all these words”—the well-known Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:18–21 then reports the people’s fear, their distance from God, and their demand for Moses’ mediation, and while the people stand far off, Moses again approaches the thick darkness of God’s presence. Thus, Exod 20:2–6 are closely bound together with the rest of Exod 20:1–17—all apodictic commandments formulated as second person singular address.

Furthermore, God’s seemingly unmediated speech here and Moses’ apparent position within the Israelite audience break the normal pattern of mediated divine revelation in Exodus.326

This unifies Exod 20:1–17 and sets it apart. God’s theophanic speech in this section is prefaced by Moses’ descent to the people (19:25) and concludes with Moses’ separation from the people and re-approach to God (20:18, 21), resuming his role as mediator of revelation, now at the people’s request.

Within the larger speech of Exod 20:1–17, vv. 2–6 stand as a distinct and self-contained unit. Several textual features establish this. First, these verses exhibit a concentric structure. The self-proclamation of the divine name (v. 2 and vv. 5–6) forms an inclusio around this unit.327 Within this inclusio, the prohibition of plural “other gods” in v. 3 is followed by the prohibition of making a singular carved image or likeness in v. 4. The prohibitions of v. 5a—“you shall not bow down to them or serve them”—return to the plural diction of v. 3, suggesting the “other gods” as the antecedent of these third person plural pronouns.328 This creates a strong concentric

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unity to these verses. McBride gives the following structure and translation:

I, Yahweh, (am) your God, who…. (20:2)

You shall not have other gods (imposed) upon my presence. (20:3)

You shall never make for yourself an idol…. (20:4)

You shall neither bow down to them nor serve them. (20:5a)

For I, Yahweh your God, (am) a vehement deity (who)…. (20:5b-6)

Second, further distinguishing vv. 2–6 within Exod 20:1–17 is Yahweh’s first person address.330 This unit opens with the word אַנְכי, “I” (v. 2) and concludes with the first person singular pronoun suffix on מצותי, “my commandments” (v. 6). Six first person pronouns and pronominal suffixes appear in vv. 2–6. In v. 7 and the remainder of the Decalogue, on the other hand, Yahweh’s self-references shift exclusively to the third person.331

(Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 21–26. argues that the prohibition in v. 4 against making “an image and any likeness” provides the plural antecedent for אלהים in v.5; however, the negative construction in v. 4 (“you shall not make for yourself an idol nor any likeness”) weighs against this view; as does Zimmerli’s observation that elsewhere the expression “bow down and worship” regularly has other gods as its object but never idols or images (e.g. 2 Kings 17:35). Joüon, §148a, classifies אלהים אחרים in Exod 20:3 as a plural of majesty denoting “another god” rather than “other gods,” perhaps under the weight of the singular verb in that verse (יהיה). He explains that plurals of majesty can be modified by either singular or plural adjectives, in this case the plural אחרים. This reading, which does not agree with the LXX or any major English version, has several problems. First, elsewhere in the OT, אלהים is used as a plural of majesty, singular in sense, only in reference to Yahweh, never to a foreign god. Second, this would remove the only likely antecedent of אלהים in the context. Third, Joüon seems to be addressing a problem which does not exist, since a singular form of היה can be used to introduce a statement about the possession of plural items (Gen 1:29; 26:14; etc.).


331 McBride, “Essence of Orthodoxy,” 137, suggests that the shift to third person voice implies that only vv. 2–6 were spoken directly by Yahweh, and that Moses’ mediation resumes in v. 7. However, while the prominence of Moses’ role as mediator of revelation in the book of Exodus can hardly be overstated, and while the theophany of Exod 20 serves to enhance Moses’ credibility as mediator (Exod 19:9; 20:18–19), the canonical narrative presents Exod 20:1–17 as the extraordinary event in which God himself thunderously addresses the people in direct divine speech. McBride’s observations remain relevant, however, in noting the distinctive character of vv. 2–6 within Exod 20:1–17. Dale Patrick, The Rhetoric of Revelation in the Hebrew Bible, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 74–77, also argues for the unity of Exod 20:2–6, labeling this text the “chief commandment” and the “hermeneutical key” to the rest of the Decalogue. However, when discussing the shift to third person voice in v. 7, Patrick writes, “It is certainly not to remove YHWH as the speaker of the rest; no reader gains that impression, and there is no one to speak if it is not YHWH.” On the prominence of Yahweh’s third-person self-reference (“illeism”) in the OT, see Roderick Elledge, Use of the Third Person for Self-Reference by Jesus and Yahweh: A Study of Ileism in the Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Its Implications for Christology, LNTS 575 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark,
Third, the specific theological concern of Exod 20:2–6 is reprised at the end of Yahweh’s initial Sinai revelation in Exod 20–23. In 23:23–33, Yahweh warns and instructs the Israelites regarding the necessity of driving out, rather than settling among, the inhabitants of Canaan. The concern is couched in language evoking these initial prohibitions of the Decalogue: “You shall not bow down to their gods nor serve them…. You shall serve Yahweh your God…. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they cause you to sin against me. For you would serve their gods; for it would become a snare to you” (Exod 23:24–5, 33; compare esp. 20:5). The bracketing of Exod 20–23 with this theme further distinguishes Exod 20:2–6 from the commands which follow in 20:7–17.

Fourth, as with Exod 23:24–25, 33, some other OT passages employ and recombine phrases from Exod 20:2–6, indicating that 20:2–6 is being applied or appealed to as a textual unit. Terence Fretheim notes passages within the Book of the Covenant (Exod 20:23; 23:32–33) in which the language of v. 3 and vv. 4–6 is interwoven. Thus, Fretheim reads vv. 3–6 as “a single multi-faceted commandment on idolatry.”332 Bori states, “The two prohibitions are inseparable aspects of biblical monotheism…. Idolatry—associating other gods with God, creating an image of God—is the sin par excellence: once this sin is committed the cardinal commandment is jettisoned and with it the whole covenant.”333 Regarding Deut 6:12–15, Mordecai Breuer observes that “the wording … is reminiscent of the language at the beginning of the Ten Commandments, from ‘I am the LORD’ to ‘those who reject Me.’”334

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17:35 is another example of an inner-biblical application\(^{335}\) which connects the prohibition language of Exod 20:5a directly to the “other gods” of Exod 20:3: “Yahweh made a covenant with them and commanded them, saying, “You shall not fear other gods, nor shall you bow down to them, nor shall you serve them, nor shall you sacrifice to them.”

Fifth, Moses’ exact, nearly verbatim, repetition of this initial section of the Decalogue in Deut 5:6–10 contrasts with the more free rendering and modification of the rest of the Decalogue in Deut 5:11–21,\(^{336}\) adding to the characterization of Exod 20:2–6 as a distinct unit.

Sixth, the Qumran manuscripts contain fragments of “reworked” passages from Exodus. These Exodus manuscripts generally follow the received text or the Samaritan Pentateuch, but intersperse sections of Exodus with excerpts from related Pentateuch passages, posturing these as interpretive aids or keys for the Exodus text. Among these, 4Q158 contains fragments of Exod 20 with interpolations from Deuteronomy which Michael Segal has reconstructed as follows: Exod 20:1–6, 18–19a (not preserved), Deut 5:[24]–27, Exod 20:19b–21, Deut 5:28–29, Deut 18:18–22, Exod 20:[7]–17, Deut 5:30–31, Exod 20:22–26.\(^{337}\) Sidnie White Crawford assesses this sequence as follows: “Thus the first two commandments are narrated as spoken directly by God to the people, followed by the people’s request that they should no longer hear the voice of

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\(^{335}\) Such examples speak to the textual unity of Exod 20:2–6 as they comport with the evidence within Exod 20 itself. This is not to deny that in some cases inner-biblical interpretation can significantly re-interpret and re-arrange texts as it invokes them for a new situation. See Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*.

\(^{336}\) Deuteronomy 5:6–10 alters Exod 20:2–6 only by the deletion of a *vav* prior to “any likeness” in v. 4 and by the addition of a *vav* before “upon the third generation” in v. 5. In the verses which follow, by contrast, Deut 5 twice adds the parenthetical comment “just as Yahweh your God commanded you” (vv. 12, 16), provides a completely different rationale for the Sabbath commandment (vv. 14–15), prescribes Sabbath rest for “your ox” and “your donkey” in addition to “your livestock” (v. 14), expands the motive clause of the parent commandment (v. 16), moves “your neighbor’s wife” to the head of the coveting prohibitions, adds “his field” to the list, and instead of repeating the verb *תַּאֲדו*, “to covet,” uses a the synonym *אָדוּ*, “to desire.” On the treatment of the coveting commands in Deut 5, see William L. Moran, “The Conclusion of the Decalogue (Ex 20,17 = Dt 5,21),” *CBQ* 29 (1967): 543–54; Daniel I. Block, “You Shall Not Covet Your Neighbor’s Wife: A Study in Deuteronomistic Domestic Ideology,” *JETS* 53 (2010): 460–63.

God. This is followed by passages from Deuteronomy promising a prophet, and then that very
prophet, Moses, narrates the rest of the Decalogue.\textsuperscript{338} Thus, Exod 20:1–6 is distinguished from
vv. 7–17.

Finally, the Masoretic tradition lends weight to the standing of Exod 20:2–6 as a discrete
unit. The Masoretic paragraphing treats this unit as a single paragraph amid the ten paragraphs of
Exod 20:1–17. Also, the unique accentuation and verse division of Exod 20:2–3 suggests reading
v. 2 as closely bound to vv. 3–6. The division of the Hebrew Bible into verses is quite ancient,
inherited by the Masoretes who reproduced it with remarkable agreement.\textsuperscript{339} However, the
Decalogue portions of Exod 20 and Deut 5 stand as an exception, being marked with a double
system of accents and versification. Significant to the unity of Exod 20:2–6 is the accenting on
the final word in Exod 20:2, which is given both an \textit{atnach} and a \textit{sillûq/sôph pâsûq}. The \textit{atnach}
system resists any separation of v. 2 from vv. 3–6. And even the system employing \textit{sillûq/sôph
pâsûq} can be read as unifying, rather than fragmenting, vv. 2–6. Breuer argues that the “lower
cantillation” system (with \textit{sillûq/sôph pâsûq} dividing v. 2 from v. 3) extends the implications of
the phrase “I am Yahweh” in v. 2 beyond the prohibition of “other gods” in v. 3 to justify also
the prohibition of images and false worship in vv. 4–6.”\textsuperscript{340}

While these several factors bind Exod 20:2–6 as a discrete and coherent text, other factors
draw v. 7 into this same orbit. The Masoretic differentiation of open (פתוחא) and closed (סתומא)
paragraphs suggests a secondary relationship between vv. 2–6 and v. 7, since the stronger, open

\textsuperscript{338} Crawford, “Exodus in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” 309.

\textsuperscript{339} Jordan S. Penkower, “Verse Divisions in the Hebrew Bible,” \textit{VT} 50 (2000): 379–93, briefly discusses the
history of the verse divisions and catalogues and categorizes the rare instances of disagreement among
the manuscripts and printed editions of the Hebrew Bible. Most differences in versification do not involve verse
divisions, strictly speaking, but rather the chapter association of verses: a verse may conclude a chapter or it may be
counted as the initial verse of the next chapter. Such decisions (and therefore differences) emerged only after the
division of the Vulgate into chapters by Archbishop Stephen Langton in the thirteenth century. Differing Masoretic
traditions regarding the division of the verses themselves are limited to a handful of texts: Gen 35:22, Exod 19:9, the
Decalogue, and four verses in Deuteronomy.

paragraph breaks are placed after v. 7 and after v. 17, partitioning the Decalogue into 20:2–7 and 20:8–17 (which are further divided into closed paragraphs containing vv. 2–6, 7, 8–11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17). Also, intertextual dimensions between chapter 20 and chapter 34 imply an important relationship between Exod 20:7 and Exod 20:2–6. Exod 34:7 prefaces its repetition of Exod 20:5b with a warning couched in the language of Exod 20:7b, emphatically employing the verb נקה, “leave unpunished.” Shortly after this in Exod 34, elements from 20:3 (“other gods”), 20:5a (“bow down”), 20:5b (“a jealous God”), and 20:7 (“name of Yahweh”) are melded into a single verse: “For you shall not bow down to another god, for Yahweh is jealous for His name, he is a jealous God” (Exod 34:14). Thus, Exod 20:2–6 stands as the primary textual unit for the phrase “visiting sins of fathers upon sons” in Exod 20:5b, with v. 7 standing in close secondary association.

4.4.2. Exodus 34:6–7 as a Discrete Text

The formula of Exod 34:6–7 is often assumed to originate in the liturgy of Israel, or in the teaching of the sages, etc., but Exodus presents this brief name-speech of Yahweh as an integral part of the narrative scene in which it occurs. Yahweh’s self-proclamation in Exod 34:6–7 is provided a setting by vv. 1–5. In vv. 1–4a, God commands Moses’ lone ascent of Sinai, within the context of the re-hewing and re-writing of covenant tablets, implying the re-making of the covenant. Verses 4b–5 record Moses’ ascent, tablets in hand, and God’s descent upon the mountain in fire and his proclamation of the name Yahweh. Exod 34:6–7 then contains the divine name-speech, which elicits Moses’ prostration and prayer for Yahweh’s forgiveness and

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341 Dozeman, Exodus, 738, characterizes the language of “not acquitting” in 34:7 as being “from” the command against misusing the divine name in 20:7. So also Stuart, Exodus, 717, speaks of this as “another instance of the way vocabulary and themes repeat from Exod 20 to [Exod 34], just as might be expected since we are dealing in the present context with a renewal of the covenant first instated in Exod 20.”

presence with Israel in vv. 8–9.

Within the larger trajectories of Exod 32–34, the merciful character of Yahweh’s name-speech in 34:6–7 functions as explanation, ground, and turning-point for Yahweh’s re-covenaniting (34:10) with stiff-necked, idol-forging Israel (32:1–6, 9; 33:3, 5; 34:9). Exod 34:6–7 also functions as the answer to Moses’ request to be shown Yahweh’s “ways” and “glory” (33:13, 18) and as the fulfillment of Yahweh’s pledge to “cause [His] goodness to pass by and proclaim [His] name” (33:19) in the preceding chapter.

At the same time, while integrally related to Exod 32–34, the name-speech of Exod 34:6–7 also stands as a distinct and self-contained textual unit. This is self-evident and requires little justification. First, in contrast to Exod 20:2–6, which stood as part of a larger divine speech, Exod 34:6–7 represents the entire initial speech of Yahweh in the theophanic encounter of Exod 34:1–9. Second, because Yahweh speaks in first person voice in the surrounding verses (34:1–2, 10, 11, 18–20, 24, 27), Yahweh’s third person proclamation in vv. 6–7 lends distinction and prominence to this text. And third, Exod 34:6–7 alludes to and reformulates the language of Yahweh’s name-speech in Exod 20:2–6, especially 20:5a–6, further displaying its distinctive function and coherence as a textual unit.

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343 Yahweh’s third person speech in Exod 34:6–7 is bracketed by passages with first person speech, and first person divine speech predominates in Exod 34. However, the third person voice of vv. 6–7 resurfaces in a few other passages (e.g., vv. 10b, 14, 24, 26), often in close proximity to first person expressions. While oscillation between first and third person voice is not uncommon in OT divine speech, the resumption of the third person voice of vv. 6–7 in v. 14 can be read as more closely tying the double ascription of “jealous” in v. 14 to the double divine name with its characteristics expounded in vv. 6–7. Thus, Dohmen, Exodus 19–40, 368: “Dass V 14b von JHWH in der 3. Person spricht, muss auf dem Hintergrund des Bezugs zur Selbstvorstellung JHWHs in Ex 34,6f. verstanden werden.”
CHAPTER FIVE
THE COLLOCATION פַּקֵּד עַל

In this chapter, I will argue that the Hebrew collocation פַּקֵּד עַל in contexts of iniquity, including Exod 20:5 and 34:7, carries the sense of “visiting-in-punishment against.” Later parts of the chapter will discuss the semantic components of the English word “visit” and their correspondence to this use of פַּקֵד. From the outset, however, the phrase “visiting-in-punishment” or the term “visiting” will be used as glosses for פַּקֵּד עַל, in anticipation of this conclusion.

5.1. Key Studies Regarding the Meaning of פַּקֵּד

Much of the scholarly discussion of Exod 20:5 and 34:7 has revolved around the precise meaning of the phrase “visiting iniquity.” The Hebrew verb פַּקֵּד is perplexingly multivalent, and its diverse meanings have frustrated efforts to pinpoint a single core meaning for the root.¹ Spencer notes that “the major Hebrew lexicons are uniform in their rendering of pqd as ‘to attend to’, ‘to look after’, or ‘to appoint’. However, it is when secondary and extended meanings are given that problems arise.”² Grossfeld accents its breadth and difficulty:

Hebrew PQD is perhaps the most versatile root in the entire Biblical text. Its semantic range includes the meanings ‘to appoint, deposit, rule, command, inspect, muster,

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count, remember, miss, punish, review’, just to name some of the common ones. Consequently, it has caused the ancient as well as the modern translators considerable consternation in rendering it into their respective languages.³

Franz concurs: “Der Versuch, die vielen verschiedenen Bedeutungen von פָּקַד von einer Grundbedeutung herzuleiten, ist ein mühsames Unterfangen.”⁴

When Yahweh is the subject of פָּקַד, the sense of Yahweh’s פָּקַד-act can be either starkly positive (visiting his people with gracious help, provision, and deliverance) or starkly negative (visiting people with devastating punishment for iniquity).⁵ Used with יָעָן (“iniquity”) and the preposition על (“upon, against”) in Exod 20:5 and 34:7, פָּקַד carries this latter, negative sense of Yahweh visiting iniquity in punishment. Thus, most English versions render פָּקַד in these passages with the verb “visiting” (ESV, ASV, KJV, NKJV, NASB, NJPS; cf. Vulg. visitans; Spanish RV visito; and Luther’s German Bible heimsucht) or with the verb “punishing” (GWN, NIV, NRSV; cf. LXX ἀποδίδωμι, ἐπάγων; French NEG punis).

Studies on the verb פָּקַד by Koch, Scharbert, André, and Lübbe were briefly noted in Chapter 3. These will be outlined more extensively here at the outset of this chapter, along with some indication of their influence on the contemporary discussion of Exod 20:5 and 34:7. They

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⁵ This two-edged understanding of God’s “visitation” is evidenced across both the OT and NT, especially in the verbs ἐπισκέπτομαι and in the nouns ἐπισκοπή and ἐπισκοπη. Gehman, “Επισκέπτομαι,” 199, notes that, in the LXX, “By far the largest number of occurrences of ἐπισκέπτομαι is found in the renderings of pāqad.” Arthur A. Just, Luke 9:51–24:53, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 1997), 741, comments on the OT background of ἐπισκοπή in Luke 19:44: “For the faithful, this ‘visitation’ is a Gospel event, but it will lead to Jerusalem’s destruction.… The OT speaks of God ‘visiting’ his people, which is a Gospel event for the faithful, but Law for the apostate.” Allen P. Ross, Holiness to the LORD: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 479, commenting on Lev 26:16, notes: “The verb pāqad describes divine intervention that changed the destiny of those involved, either for the better or for the worse.”

⁶ The LXX renders פָּקַד with ἀποδίδωμι (“recompense”) in Exod 20:5. This verse and two of its parallels, Num 14:18 and Deut 5:9, are the only LXX passages which translate פָּקַד as ἀποδίδωμι. In the repetition of the Exod 20:5 formula in Exod 34:7, the LXX uses ἐπάγω (“bring (something) upon (someone)”), a verb used to translate פָּקַד also in Exod 32:34 and in five passages in Isaiah. Elsewhere in the LXX, uses of פָּקַד in punitive contexts are translated by ἐπισκέπτομαι (“visit,” here, in punishment) or, most frequently, by ἔκδικέω (“avenge, punish”). An excursus on LXX tendencies in translating the Hebrew idiom פָּקַד can be found later in this chapter (§5.3).
will be critiqued in light of the present investigation at a further point in the chapter.

5.1.1. Klaus Koch

Klaus Koch’s famous essay diminishes any sense in this verb of God actively punishing, seeing it as an idiom of the built-in consequences of a deed falling upon the doer: “Yahweh lets the action go back home to where its roots are (pāqad),” he lets a man’s action “home in on him (’Heimsuchung’).” Focusing on the verbal actions of שׁלם Piel, שׁוב Hiphil, and פקד (traditionally “recompense,” “repay,” and “visit,” respectively) in the Prophets and in wisdom texts, Koch writes:

_Yahweh is obviously described as a higher authority in relationship to humans, but this is not meant in the juridical sense of a higher authority who deals out reward and punishment on the basis of an established norm, but rather somewhat like a ‘midwife who assists at a birth’ by facilitating the completion of something which previous human action has already set in motion._

In Koch’s view, some texts indicate that human actions do not always continue on to their built-in consequence. “Yahweh is introduced as an element in this ‘process’ because, without such active involvement, the process would never get started.” Forgiveness also, under this conception, is a matter of Yahweh guiding the dynamic of the “Action-Consequences-Construct” (in this case, halting it). He explains: “The in-the-world, material nature of the action’s powerful sphere of influence is destroyed by Yahweh’s ‘forgiving’ intervention.”

According to Koch, “the clearest evidence for the absolute validity of the suggestion that biblical Hebrew uses this concept of actions with built-in-consequences is the striking evidence

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8 Koch, “Is There a Doctrine of Retribution?” 61 (author’s emphasis). On the next page, Koch claims that “there is not so much as a hint of juridical terminology” in these passages.

9 Koch, “Is There a Doctrine of Retribution?” 73.

10 Koch, “Is There a Doctrine of Retribution?” 73.
that the OT does not have a single word for ‘punishment’.”

Koch’s overall thesis, as well as this particular assertion (its “clearest evidence”), will be opposed below.

Koch does not apply his thesis to Exod 20:5 or 34:7, since his study traces the “close connection between human actions and the consequences for those humans” only in wisdom texts, the Prophets, and the Psalms. Nevertheless, the chorus of commentators who regard the “transgenerational visitation” language in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 as referencing natural processes or an ongoing moral order—a view occasionally given voice prior to Koch—was swollen by Koch’s theory in general and by his close association of this idea with the verb פקד in particular.

5.1.2. Josef Scharbert

Two studies by Josef Scharbert engage the verb פקד and critique the work of Koch, who, according to Scharbert, did not sufficiently note “dass פקד eben Gott zum Subjekt hat; dh. der auf den Sünder ‘losgelassene’ Fluch als Folge der Sünde bleibt immer von Jahwe, der die Auswirkungen überwacht, abhängig.” Scharbert’s own approach rests heavily on his understanding of the Grundbedeutung of פקד as “keep in sight, take care of something in detail, make a thorough inspection.” Thus, when the OT speaks of Yahweh “visiting iniquity” (פקד עון), the sense is that Yahweh pays attention to transgression, he subjects it to a thorough inspection,

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11 Koch, “Is There a Doctrine of Retribution?” 77 (author’s emphasis). Koch continues, “It is even less satisfying to look for a word which would translate the verb form ‘punish’…. The OT, seemingly at odds with the entire ancient Orient, does not have a single expression which is an exact parallel for the most common aspect of administering justice. The gap in the lexicon suggests that even in the secular sphere of judicial terminology ancient Israel never freed itself from the concept that there was a powerful sphere of influence in which the built-in consequences of an action took place.”

12 For a listing of such commentators and their explanations of Exod 20:5, see §3.1.1.c above.


14 Scharbert, “Formgeschichte und Exegese von Ex 34,6f,” 140.
and he takes any necessary steps to redress it, since he has irresistible power to do so. Scharbert suggests that it is impossible to translate the pregnant phrase ‘visiting iniquity upon’ concisely, since the rendering ‘avenge’ (ahnden) excludes the sense of examination or investigation (nachkontrollieren, untersuchen) which is also contained in the Hebrew expression. Since there is no single German word which adequately captures all of this, Scharbert recommends the traditional translation of heimsuchen (“visit”). For Scharbert, then, the phrase encompasses both God’s careful inspection and his appropriate ensuing punitive action. It is probably fair to say that Scharbert sees “close inspection” of iniquity as the denotation of the phrase, while he sees “ensuing punishment” as connoted or implied.

He notes that this explanation appears especially useful in shedding light on the visitation of the iniquity of fathers upon sons in Exod 20:5 and 34:7. From Scharbert’s double-action perspective: “Jahwe ahndet die Schuld der Väter dann an den Söhnen, wenn er durch pqd, also durch eine ‘Kontrolle’ festgestellt hat, daß die Nachkommen, wie es der allgemeinen Erfahrung entspricht, mit ihren Vätern solidarisch im Denken und Handeln sind.”

Scharbert’s dual emphasis on pqd as investigation plus any appropriate punishing action is commonly echoed. Some, like Scharbert, are careful to stress both investigation and the

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17 Scharbert, “Verbum PQD,” 292; “Formgeschichte und Exegese von Ex 34,6f,” 139.
18 The criticism of Scharbert by Bernard Levinson, Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 54n54, is thus overstated when he writes, “Josef Scharbert … without philological justification restricts the meaning of the key verb pqd to ‘test.’” For Scharbert, this root meaning is the primary meaning, but he clearly affirms the secondary sense of pqd as acting in punishment in these contexts as well.
19 Scharbert, “Verbum PQD,” 291, while describing Yahweh’s pqd as the punitive expedition of a king and suggesting that the approximate sense of the action here is to avenge/punish (ahnden), cautions that this translation “trifft aber vielleicht nicht ganz den Sinn, vor allem dort, wo das pqd sich gegen die Nachkommen des Schuldigen richtet.”
21 In addition to the examples discussed below, Thomas E. McComiskey, “Prophetic Irony in Hosea 1, 4: A
punitive measures which ensue; others pivot significantly away from Scharbert, suggesting investigation as the correct sense rather than punishment. Schenker translates יָכָד in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 as prüfen and states, “Das Verbum bedeutet nicht ‘strafen,’ sondern prüfen, untersuchen, nachsehen.”[22] He goes on, however, to include within this verbal action both such investigation as well as the measures of support, rehabilitation or punishment which follow thereupon. In their UBS Handbook on Exodus, prepared chiefly to assist translators, Osborn and Hatton remark on Exod 20:5, “Visiting the iniquity is literally ‘attending to [or, searching out] the evil.”[23] Rendtorff assumes the meaning of יָכָד here as “testing,” and notes, “When guilt or sin is involved, to which the divine testing is directed…, then the consequence that God will draw from this testing is indirectly indicated already. God’s ‘visitation’ implies the punishment of the transgression.”[24] Most recently, Johnstone comments on Exod 20:5: “The verb ‘punishing,’ from the verb pqd, implies thorough investigation and the taking of necessary steps for recovery and preservation … rather than merely inflicting penalty.”[25] Dohmen tends to set the two aspects in opposition, repeatedly citing the work of Schenker, but downplaying the aspect of punishment. He translates יָכָד with prüfen in both Exod 20:5 and 34:7, and explains that the word must be understood here “im Sinne von ‘prüfen’, nicht ‘strafen.’”[26] Commenting on 34:7, Dohmen

Study of the יָכָד Collocation and Its Implications for the Fall of Jehu’s Dynasty,” JSOT 58 (1993): 95–96, notes, “We cannot, however, limit the sense of יָכָד only to God’s cognizance of a situation, for the word always signals an active and appropriate response on the part of God.” Tyler F. Williams, “יָכָד,” NIDOTTE 3:659, 661, suggests that “perception and response is implicit in the verb.”


elaborates: “Es nicht—wie durch viele Übersetzungen unterstellt wird—um ein Bestrafen der nachfolgenden Generation für die Vergehen der vorausgehenden geht, sondern um ein Prüfen, ob die Sünden der einer Generation bei den Nachgeborenen wieder begegnen.”

27 Annemarie Ohler paraphrases 34:7: “When fathers incur guilt, God pays persistent attention to whether sons, grand-children, and great-grandchildren continue in the bad example.”

28 Later, she explains, “Luther translated pqd with ‘visit’; in its original meaning (but not as usually used today) ‘visit’ gives the meaning of pqd, ‘examine critically.’”

29 Michael Widmer explicitly invokes Scharbert’s reading of רָאָה and makes this reading central to his own thesis: “YHWH comes first to examine or assess the moral standing of successive generations before appropriate measures are being taken. He is visiting with a view to examine the iniquities of fathers onto the third and fourth generation.”

30 In fact, for Widmer, this רָאָה formula indicates that the children are “graciously judged on their own merits.”

Others follow Scharbert with regard to a basic meaning of the root רָאָה as the key to its sense in Exod 20:5 and 34:7, but differ slightly in the execution of this approach. Propp translates רָאָה in Exod 20:5 with “reckoning” and notes, “The multivalent verb pqd here combines nuances of record-keeping and punishment.”

31 André Wénin explicitly limits רָאָה to God’s “coming to see (vient voir) whether the sin of the fathers has consequences for the sons, apart from any ensuing action or punishment.”

32 Durham translates the expression as “keep in

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29 Ohler, *Bible Looks at Fathers*, 103n23.


32 André Wénin, “‘Dieu qui visite la faute des pères sur les fils’ (Ex 20,5): En marge d’un livre récent de B. M. Levinson,” *RTL* 38 (2007): 70, goes further than others here: “Elle [Exod 20:5] pourrait parler d’un Dieu que vient voir que la faute des pères a des conséquences sur les fils pour plusieurs générations, sans qu’il soit question
mind the fathers’ guilt against the sons of the third and fourth generations” explaining in his translation notes that פָּקַד means “attend to, give heed to, observe, seek out with interest.” Buber and Rosenzweig highlight the meaning of פָּקַד as “set in order, arrange, assign” (zuordnen) and translate Exod 20:5 and 34:7—along with all other occurrences of פָּקַד in Exodus—accordingly.

5.1.3. Gunnel André

The most extensive treatment of the verb פָּקַד to date is the 1980 monograph by Gunnel André, Determining the Destiny: PQD in the Old Testament. She has also written the TDOT article on this verb. André focuses on syntactical structures and on two key social settings in which the verb occurs: the activity of God as the divine judge and military or cultic officials inspecting and conscripting those under their charge. She proposes “to determine the destiny” as the core meaning for the verb, which may appear to synthesize Scharbert’s dual components of both inspecting and acting. For André, however, this “determining” is largely declarative: in

pour autant de punir” […]a God who comes to see if the sin of the fathers has consequences for the sons for several generations, without consideration of punishment] (my emphasis). See also Pieter Middelkoop, “A Word Study: The Sense of PAQAD in the Second Commandment and Its General Background in the OT in Regard to the Translation into the Indonesian and Timorese Languages,” SEAJT 4 (1963): 60–63, who argues that natural religion, rather than biblical faith, ascribes revenge-taking activity to God. Therefore, with Exod 20:5, he explains the motivation behind his Timorese translation: “take heed of (or … pay attention to) the fault of the fathers which is ‘upon’ the children” (English equivalent). Middelkoop (p. 63) writes, “Such a rendering frees the meaning of the Second Commandment in Timorese from being caught in the net of retribution-belief … in order that in this language too the Second Commandment may be freed from its bondage to conceptions of belief in transcendental revenge inherent in natural religion.” It is unclear whether this is purely a theological, or also a philological, translation decision.


34 Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, Die Fünf Bücher der Weisung (Cologne: Jakob Hegner, 1954). In this translation, every occurrence of פָּקַד in Exodus is rendered with zuordnen, whether describing Yahweh’s saving (3:16; 4:31; 13:19) or punishing (20:5; 32:34; 34:7) visitation. Abigail E. Gillman, “Between Religion and Culture: Mendelssohn, Buber, Rosenzweig and the Enterprise of Biblical Translation,” in Biblical Translation in Context, ed. Frederick W. Knobel, STJHC 10 (Potomac: University Press of Maryland, 2002), 106, notes that for Buber and Rosenzweig, “the word, not the verse, became the primary unit of meaning, the key to unlocking Scripture’s internal hermeneutic. Thus the translation was studded with Leitwörter, leading words from various parts of the Bible joined by their common roots, which together formed constellations of meaning normally unseen in idiomatic translations… If truth inhabited every word and no translator could foresee which word would prove revelatory for the individual reader, idiomatic translation had to be ruled out.”


negative contexts she regularly glosses the verb with “condemn” or “pronounce judgment.”

Her conclusions are perhaps overly colored by the regularly imposed juridical metaphor and by the hypothesis that such usage is ultimately grounded in an annual New Year’s festival. André speculates that the people were liturgically visited and accused by God of covenant unfaithfulness resulting in the ritual death sentence upon the king (the “first determination of destiny”), whose protestations and appeals to God result in the declaration of vindication and the renewal of covenant blessings (“a second determination of destiny”) the following morning. Thus, the people’s destiny was determined for another year. In André’s view, the biblical texts with ֻפָּד evoke and perhaps participate in this annual ritual sentencing and reprieve.

While André links the fundamental accusation of breach of covenant and the ensuing death sentence with Exod 20:2–6, the dynamic which she posits for the “visiting” verb does not match with the phrase “iniquity of fathers upon sons to the third and fourth generation” in any self-evident way. It seems nonsensical to insert the gloss “determining the destiny” directly into this formulation; perhaps with some logical and syntactical contortion one could arrive at something like, “determining the destiny of the sons in light of the iniquity of the fathers.” Nowhere in this study does she interact with the intergenerational dimension of the visiting phrases of Exod 20:5; 34:7; Num 14:18; or Deut 5:9.

It is no surprise, then, that while André’s work is occasionally cited, it has had little impact on the discussion of the meaning of ֻפָּד in our passages. In his article on ֻפָּד, Williams criticizes André’s proposal because it “reads too much into the meaning of the verb.” Spencer also questions the value of this work: “In spite of the length of André’s study, it remains unclear how

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38 André, *Determining the Destiny*, 237–41.
39 André, *Determining the Destiny*, 236.
40 Williams, *NIDOTTE* 3:659
‘determine the destiny’ becomes an apt translation. Simply put, the ‘destiny’ of an object or person subject to the verb pqd is not tied to the word itself. Rather, it is the activity of pqd which is fundamental to its meaning.’

5.1.4. J. C. Lübbe

J. C. Lübbe investigates -parts according to componential analysis and semantic domains, grouping its occurrences into thirteen domains. He places the use of -parts in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 under the third category: “event of punishment and reward,” which depicts “caus[ing] to suffer for an offense,” with the possible glosses “punish, cause to suffer the consequences, chastise.”

It is unclear, however, on what basis Lübbe has delineated his categories and assigned passages to them, since his brief article does not discuss words associated with -parts in Hebrew texts by parallelism or collocation. Grouping by semantic domain holds great promise for Hebrew lexicography. However, Lübbe’s classification of Exod 20:5 and 34:7 as punitive simply invites, rather than resolves, all of the questions which circle around the meaning of “visiting iniquity of fathers upon sons” in light of the studies of Koch, Scharbert, André, and others.

While the notion that -parts describes punishment is often denied, Lübbe’s identification of a semantic domain of “event of punishment or reward” for the root is affirmed by other scholars. Grossfeld’s analysis is similar; to the broad usage categories “General,” “Legal-Administrative,” and “Military,” Grossfeld adds a fourth, “Theological,” in which -parts carries the sense of “avenge, punish.” Levinson, in his study of the inner-biblical transmutations of Exod 20:5, works with an understanding of -parts here as “punish,” criticizing Scharbert’s emphasis on -parts as

41 Spencer, “PQD, the Levites, and Numbers 1–4,” 541.
While much ground has been plowed regarding the meaning of פָּקַד, significant disagreement and confusion remains regarding the sense of פָּקַד עִלָּהֶם עַל בֵּיתוֹ in Exod 20:5 and 34:7. In the following analysis, I will emphasize the fact that Exod 20:5 and 34:7 employ not merely the verb פָּקַד, but the idiomatic collocation פָּקַד עִלָּהֶם. Thus, focused attention will be paid to outlining the usage and meaning of two specific uses of פָּקַד: the construction עִלָּהֶם + פָּקַד and certain uses of the noun פְקֻדָּה ("visitation") which are closely related to it.

5.2. The Collocation פָּקַד עִלָּהֶם as an Idiom for Punishment

5.2.1. פָּקַד עִלָּהֶם as a Standard Collocation

If the preposition עִלָּהֶם is to be ascribed its own meaning in פָּקַד עִלָּהֶם passages which depict Yahweh dealing with iniquity, it must be an adversative עִלָּהֶם or an עִלָּהֶם of disadvantage. The parallelism of Zec 10:3 suggests this: "עָלָיו הָעֹשֵׂה הַמַּעֲבֵד אֶפְרָי, עָלָיו הַפֶּקַד אַפִיקוּד" ("Against the shepherds my anger burns, and against the he-goats I will visit"). While עִלָּהֶם is used with פָּקַד frequently (49x) in the OT to mark the unfortunate recipient of Yahweh’s visiting-in-punishment, no other preposition is used for this purpose, except for one such use of ב in Jer 9:8 [Eng 9:9] and two passages in which אל is used interchangeably with עִלָּהֶם. On the other hand, passages which depict Yahweh’s פָּקַד-acts as divine rescue never mark the recipient of such visitation with the preposition עִלָּהֶם. Viewed as an independent semantic unit then, עִלָּהֶם conveys an adverse relation

44 Levinson, Legal Revision, 54.
45 Waltke and O’Connor, §11.2.13.c.; Arnold and Choi, §4.1.16(f); Joüon and Muraoka, §133.f.
46 While פָּקַד עִלָּהֶם is the normal idiom, Jeremiah perhaps switches to adversative ב in 9:8 because פָּקַד was used at the head of the clause (הַעֲבֵד אֶפְרָי). The prepositions ב and עִלָּהֶם are the most likely choices to convey an adversative force. Joüon and Muraoka, §133.f. (2:489–90), under עִלָּהֶם, write, “The pejorative meaning is highly developed: thus עִלָּהֶם often means against (but ב is more common).” Two passages use אל with פָּקַד: Jer 46:25 and 50:18, the former using both פָּקַד and עִלָּהֶם synonymously in the same verse. These are instances of the occasional interchangeability of עִלָּהֶם and אל, especially common in Jeremiah (e.g., Jer 11:2; see Joüon and Muraoka §133.b (2:485)). Because אל must be read here with the sense and force of עִלָּהֶם, Jer 46:25 and 50:18 are not exceptions to, but rather examples of, the idiom פָּקַד + עִלָּהֶם.
between its object and the subject’s act of יַעַקֵּב: Yahweh visits iniquity in punishment against someone. This sense is likely in the LXX’s consistent rendering of this idiom with the preposition ἐπὶ plus accusative. The Vulgate almost exclusively translates יַעַקֵּב as visitare super plus accusative, with super as the standard translational equivalent for יַע. The implied adversative sense in this construction is made explicit in the few passages which render יַעַקֵּב as visitare contra (Isa 13:11; 26:21; and Jer 36:31) or visitare adversum (Jer 30:20).

While יַע can be seen to contribute an independent adversative meaning to these contexts, it may be more helpful to regard the syntagm יַעַקֵּב as a single semantic unit. Williams notes that “the negative meaning punish is most often construed with the collocation pqd ‘l, where the preposition indicates the object of divine displeasure (Exod 34:7; Num 14:18; etc.).”

Here the observation of Arnold and Choi is helpful:

Some prepositions … have connotations determined by the verb with which they are used. In other words, the meaning of certain prepositions is not so much determined by morphological origins or by use with specific nouns as it is by the particular pattern of verb plus preposition plus object.… Since the meaning of some prepositions is determined by the verbs which govern them, it is necessary for the exegete to learn particular prepositions used with certain verbs, or to use the lexica for specific verbs to determine their meaning when used with a given preposition.

47 On the one hand, ἐπὶ is a stock translational equivalent of יַע, and even with the accusative, ἐπὶ could simply mark that the Lord’s (positive? negative?) visitation “reaches its goal completely” (BDAG, III.1.β). However, the consistent use of ἐπὶ in rendering יַעַקֵּב in contexts of Yahweh’s punishing visitation rather suggests verbal action “that takes a particular direction.… This forms a transition to the next mng…, against w. hostile intent” (BDAG, III.1.δ. and ε.). See also Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 376.

48 At minimum, יַעַקֵּב works as a set pairing in Hebrew usage, as seen by the infrequency of the expression ב יַעַקֵּב. While generally ב is more common than יַע as an adversative preposition, the idea of visiting-in-punishment against is expressed by יַע כ 50 times in the OT and by ב כ only once (Jer 9:8 [Eng 9:9]), and here ב is perhaps used only to avoid confusion or repetition with the prepositional phrase על־אלה ("against these things" or "concerning these things") earlier in the verse.

49 Williams, NIDOTTE 3:659. Williams’ phrase “where the preposition indicates the object of divine displeasure” is imprecise, however. While God’s displeasure is certainly implied, the object of יַע in these constructions is the recipient of divine sanction or punishment, not merely the object of divine displeasure.

Waltke and O’Connor balance this perspective by stressing that this does not eliminate the contribution of the preposition itself, in terms of its semantic *propria*: “To a large degree the meaning of the preposition is consistent and capturable, even with the variations due to the meanings of the verbs used with it.”\[^{51}\] Muraoka critiques those who make too direct a comparison between such verb plus preposition pairings in Hebrew and “phrasal verbs” in English such as “come by” (= receive) or “take off” (= depart).\[^{52}\] Such English combinations are more strictly cohesive than Hebrew pairings. For example, whereas the verbal noun in English normally retains the preposition (e.g., the plane’s take-off), Hebrew systematically deletes them. Muraoka offers the example of the verbal combination ל עזר (come to the aid of) which, when expressed by verbal nouns (עזרה or עזר) forfeits the preposition ל, and this would apply directly to פקד על (visit-in-punishment against) and its verbal noun פקדת (visitation). Nevertheless, Muraoka acknowledges that, as in English, often the Hebrew “verb has different meanings or nuances in accordance with differing particles to which the complement is attached”\[^{53}\] Muraoka does not discuss פקד על, but the present study will demonstrate that it functions in this semantically unified sense. The regularity and frequency with which פקד על is paired with עזר to express Yahweh’s dealing with unpunished iniquity\[^{54}\] suggests that פקד על has become a common idiomatic\[^{55}\] construction denoting punishment.


\[^{54}\] The preference in Hebrew usage for עזר על פקד (50x) in these contexts rather than עזר ב פקד (1x) can be contrasted with the closely related verb נקם (“take vengeance”) which seems to prefer marking the recipient of vengeance with the preposition ב (Judg 15:7; 1 Sam 18:25; Jer 50:15; Ezek 25:12) over על (used with שבע only in Ps 99:8).

\[^{55}\] Peter Cotterell and Max Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 131, “An ‘idiom’ has traditionally been defined as an expression whose meaning cannot be inferred from the meaning of its parts. A rather more precise definition (offered by D. A. Cruse) is that idioms are complex lexemes acting as a single semantic constituent, but the traditional formulation at least sounds a warning against too ready an assumption of transparency in language.” On this, see D. A. Cruse, *Lexical Semantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2.7 and 2.9.
Lübbe makes the explicit (though somewhat offhand) claim that פקד על does not need to be treated as a distinct lemma because פקד sometimes bears this punitive meaning without על. A closer examination of these occurrences, however, removes this objection. Only 14 times is the verb פקד used without על in contexts indicating the recipient of Yahweh’s punishing visitation, and the non-use of על can be explained by syntactical or literary factors in each of these. In four cases, an object pronoun is suffixed directly to פקד to indicate the recipient of punishment, a syntactical structure which does not allow the interposition of an על, even though the semantic sense of פקד על is clearly implied. In three cases, punishing visitation is expressed in a passive construction, using a Niphal form of פקד; here, the recipient of the visitation stands as the subject of the passive verb and, thus, cannot be governed by על. In five cases, the recipient of punishment is implied by a pronominal suffix on an iniquity term. For example, Yahweh will “visit their sins (חטאות)” (Hos 8:13). One additional passage, 1 Sam 15:2, functions in much

57 The exclusion of a few passages from this group of fourteen deserves comment. Both על and adversative ב are used with פקד in Jer 9:8. Two passages mark the recipient of Yahweh’s punishing פקד with לא as an interchangeable equivalent with על (Jer 46:25; 50:18; the former using פקד על פ ApplicationContext and the latter using פקד על פApplicationContext synonymously).
58 Isa 26:14; Jer 6:15; 49:8; and 50:31. On the ambiguity of such constructions and the possible implication of a distinct preposition as part of the verbal meaning, see Muraoka, “On Verb Complementation,” 428.
59 Prov 19:23; Isa 24:22; and Isa 29:6. See also Num 16:29, where the subject of Niphal פקד is not the recipient of the visitation, but rather the cognate noun פקד, with Yahweh as the implied agent and the recipient grammatically expressed with the preposition על. These four passages are the only Niphal occurrences of פקד which mean “to be visited in punishment.” In other uses, the Niphal of פקד means “to be missing, lacking, empty” (14x), “to be appointed” (2x), or “to be mustered” (1x).
60 Jer 14:10; Hos 8:13; 9:9, Ps 89:33 [Eng 89:32], and Lam 4:22. In each of these, the syntax could have explicitly expressed but instead merely implies the prepositional phrase על plus the pronominal suffix corresponding to the pronoun attached to the iniquity term. Compare Hos 8:13 (ויפקד חטאתם, “and he will punish their sins”) with Exod 32:34 (��ר וילך למלחמה "and I will visit against them their sin"). Other than the first person subject and the singular rather than plural “sin” in Exod 32:34, the meaning is sufficiently equivalent to conclude that Hos 8:13 implies a verbal action of פקד על פApplicationContext or even that it implies the prepositional phrase על פApplicationContext פApplicationContext, an implication which is explicitly expressed in Exod 32:34. In all five of these passages, the rationale for unstated implication is likely the concern for syntactic parallelism or poetic meter. Three of these passages echo the same parallel construction: יזכור עונם ויפקד חטאותם (Jer 14:10; Hos 8:13; 9:9). Alongside a concern for meter in Lam 4:22, the poet chooses to indicate the recipient of punishment as a vocative rather than with an לעphrase: ויפקד עונך בת־אדום (Hos 8:13; 9:9). In Ps 89:33 [Eng 89:32], within the constraints of meter the poet opts to express the means of punishment by prepositional phrase, thereby leaving the לעphrase marking the recipient of punishment unstated and merely implied: ויפקדתי בשׁבט פשׂעם ובנגעים עונם, “I will punish with a rod their rebellion, and with blows their iniquity.”
the same way, indicating Amalek as the recipient of punishment by naming it in a relative clause as the perpetrator of the sin being punished. In the sole remaining passage, Ps 59:6 [Eng 59:5], the absence of the preposition על alongside the verb פקד in a punitive context may result from poetic concerns of meter or sound, or from other factors.

This collocation of פקד + על is so well-established that, even without further contextual clues such as terms of iniquity and guilt or instrumental phrases indicating calamity, the bare use of פקד commonly indicates visiting-in-punishment-against. The collocation פקד על thus functions as a set expression in Hebrew, and its meaning in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 will be investigated from this standpoint.

Again, in all five of these passages, the recipient of punishment is sufficiently indicated by the pronominal suffix on the term for iniquity.

61 The construction here is פקדתי את־אשׁר עשׂה עמלק לישׂראל, “I (now) visit-in-punishment that which Amalek did to Israel,” with Amalek, the subject noun within the relative clause, standing as the implied recipient of Yahweh’s punishing visitation. To make פקד explicit here would have required the fuller expression פקדתי את־אשׁר עשׂה עמלק לישׂראל עליו, “I (now) visit-in-punishment that which Amalek did to Israel against him,” but עליי is unnecessary here and would even be grammatically ambiguous following לישׂראל.

62 In Ps 59:6 [Eng 59:5], the Psalmist prays, הקיצה לפקד כל־הגוים (“Awaken to visit all the nations”). It is also possible that Ps 59:6 omits על because it is not indicating punishment. In light of the syntactic parallelism with the end of v. 5, which implores Yahweh, “Awaken to meet (קרא) me,” and in light of the use of פקד without על here, Yahweh’s visitation of the nations in v. 6a might be read as a neutral term, rather than a visitation-in-punishment. Just as he awakens “to meet” the Psalmist in v. 5, Yahweh should awaken “to visit” all the nations in v.6a, with punishment coming into view only with the second colon of v. 6b, where Yahweh is asked not to show mercy (אל־תחן) to those who plot evil. Such a reading seems congruent with the preceding context, in which the Psalmist’s enemies are certain men rather than “the nations,” and it fits especially well with the psalm’s superscription, which identifies these enemies as men sent by Saul to kill David. As the psalm continues, however, v. 9 repeats the expression “all nations,” this time unambiguously casting them as foes of Yahweh and the Psalmist, deserving of divine derision and judgment. In light of the second half of the psalm, then, פקד in v. 6 is best understood as “visit-in-punishment,” lacking but implying the preposition על. Another possible explanation for the lack of על with פקד in Ps 59:6 is scribal alteration of an original פקד with על in the phrase כל־הגוים, under pressure of the expression כל־האומות just three verses later in 59:9.

63 For example, see Zeph 1:8: פקדתי על־השׂרים (“I will visit-in-punishment against the princes.” Several other examples can be found under the discussion of Pattern 2 passages below. The set expressions visitare super in the Vulgate and ἐκδικέω/ἐκδίκησις/ἐπισκέπτομαι/ἐπάγω/ἐπιδιδόμεν ἐπί in the LXX mimic this Hebrew idiom, most apparently in such contexts where no iniquity term is present. So, for Zeph 1:8, the Vulgate reads visitabo super principes and the LXX ἐκδίκησις ἐπί τοὺς ἀρχοντας.
5.2.2. Syntax Patterns of על + פקד

The combination על + פקד is used to express punishment for iniquity 50 times in the Hebrew Bible, including Exod 20:5 and 34:7. Yahweh is the explicit or implied subject in 49 of these. The syntax structure of these uses of על + פקד can be grouped into four patterns, illustrated by examples below and listed exhaustively in Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter. Syntax Pattern 1 contains an explicit iniquity term (as the direct object of פקד) and marks the recipient of punishment with על. Pattern 2 also marks the recipient of punishment with על but contains no explicit iniquity term in the immediate syntax. The iniquitous nature of the recipient, however, is in all cases clearly stated or implied in the near context. Pattern 3 also marks the recipient of punishment with על, and further indicates the instrument (with ב) or substance of the punishment. Pattern 4 is rare; here the iniquity term itself is the object of על.

64 פקד על refers to punishing iniquity in Exod 20:5; 32:34; 34:7; Lev 18:25; 26:16; Num 14:18; 16:29; Deut 5:9; 2 Sam 3:8; Is 10:12; 13:11; 24:21; 26:21; 27:1, 3; Jer 5:9, 29; 9:8, 24 [Eng 9:9, 25]; 11:22; 15:3; 21:14; 23:2, 34; 25:12; 27:8; 29:32; 30:20; 36:31; 44:13; 29; 46:25; 50:18; 51:44, 47, 52; Hos 1:4; 2:15 [Eng 2:13]; 4:9, 14; 12:3 [Eng 12:2]; Amos 3:2; twice in Amos 3:14; Zeph 1:8, 9, 12; 3:7; Zech 10:3; and Job 36:23. All these have the Qal of פקד except Lev 26:16 (Hiphil) and Num 16:29 (Niphal). One of the passages, Jer 50:18, uses the preposition על with פקד, but this should be read as equivalent to על (see Joüon and Muraoka, §133.b (2:485); cf. Jer 46:25). Alongside these punitive uses, על פקד means “to appoint over, commit unto” in 22 other passages: Gen 39:4, 5; 41:34; Num 1:50; Josh 10:18; 1 Kgs 14:27; 2 Kgs 17:7; 25:22; 1 Chr 26:32; 2 Chr 12:10; Ps 109:6; Is 62:6; Jer 1:10; 40:11 (all Hiphil); Num 4:27; 27:16; Jer 51:27; Job 34:13; 2 Chr 36:23; Ezra 1:2 (all Qal); 2 Chr 34:12 (Hophal); and Neh 12:44 (Niphal). Commentators and translators are divided on whether על פקד indicates appointing or punishing in five passages: Lev 26:16; Job 36:23; Jer 13:21; 15:3; and Zeph 3:7. It makes good sense either way Lev 26:16 is rendered; I read the idiom here along with LXX, ESV, NRSV, NIV and others as God bringing calamities upon the people, that is, visiting them in punishment with calamities, rather than as “appointing calamities” over them. In Job 36:23 also, I read punishment as the likely sense of על פקד, with its language of “his way” and “injustice.” Finally, I read “punish” as more likely than “appoint” in Jer 15:3 and Zeph 3:7, in both of which the LXX renders על פקד with ἑκδικάω (“punish”). Therefore, Lev 26:16; Job 36:23; Jer 15:3; and Zeph 3:7 are included in this study as examples of punitive על פקד. The syntax and sense in Jer 13:21, on the other hand, is so opaque, leading to such divergent translations, that it has been set aside for the purpose of this study.
Pattern 1 (20x): Verb פקד, Person Punished as Object of על, Iniquity-Word.\(^6\)

Exod 34:7
("visiting-in-punishment iniquity of fathers against sons and against sons of sons")

Isa 13:11
(And I will visit-in-punishment against the evil world and against the wicked their iniquity."")

Hos 2:15\(^67\)
("And I will visit-in-punishment against her the days of the Baals.")

Jer 21:14
("And I will visit-in-punishment against you according to the fruit of your deeds.")

Pattern 2 (20x): Verb פקד, Person Punished as Object of על, No Iniquity-Word.\(^68\)

Zeph 1:8
("And I will visit-in-punishment against the officials and the against the sons of the king.")

Isa 24:21
("Yahweh will visit-in-punishment against the host of the heights in the heights, and against the kings of the earth upon the earth.")

Jer 51:47\(^69\)
("And I will visit-in-punishment against the idols of Babylon.")

\(^{65}\) Here “person punished” refers to the recipient of Yahweh’s punishment, the subject receiving harm. These recipients are usually personal (people, leaders, nations, foreign gods) but are occasionally inanimate objects (land in Jer 50:18; idols in Jer 51:47, 52; and illicit altars in Amos 3:14b).

\(^{66}\) Under Pattern 1, the iniquity-term can be generic (e.g., עון, "iniquity"; פשע, "rebellion"; דרכים, "ways") or specific (ימי הבעלים, "the days of the Baals"; דמי יזרעאל, "the blood of Jezreel"). It can precede על + person punished, or follow it. It can stand alone, be preceded by the definite direct object marker את, or be attached to the preposition כ ("according to"). Pattern 1 passages include: Exod 20:5; 32:34; 34:7; Lev 18:25; Num 14:18; Deut 5:9; 2 Sam 3:8; Isa 13:11; 26:21; Jer 21:14; 23:2; 25:12; 36:31; Hos 1:4; 2:15 [Eng 2:13]; 4:9; 12:3; Amos 3:2, 14; Job 36:23. See Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter.

\(^{67}\) Eng Hos 2:13.

\(^{68}\) Pattern 2 passages include Isa 24:21; 27:3; Jer 9:24; 11:22; 23:34; 29:32; 30:20; 44:29; 46:25; 50:18; 51:44, 47, 52; Hos 4:14; Amos 3:14b; Zeph 1:8, 9, 12; Zeph 3:7; Zech 10:3. See Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter.

\(^{69}\) At first, Jer 51:47, along with vv. 44, 52, and Amos 3:14b, might suggest themselves as Pattern 4 clauses, where על marks the ground for punishment (that is, the iniquity), rather than the recipient of the punishment, since these passages have pagan idols or illicit altars as the objects of על after פקד. However, Yahweh’s punishing visitation in these clauses is directed at the idols or altars; they are depicted as recipients of harm at the coming visitation of Yahweh. See, for example, Amos 3:14b, where the explicit result of Yahweh visiting-in-punishment against the altars of Bethel is not that the worshippers will suffer but that “the horns of the altar will be cut off and will fall to the earth.” Here, Yahweh is not punishing someone because of the illicit altar; rather, grammatically, as the object of על after פקד, it is the altar itself which receives harm at the visitation of Yahweh. Therefore, these passages are classified as Pattern 2 rather than Pattern 4. In the rare Pattern 4 sentences, an iniquity term stands as the object of על, but it is not the iniquity-term which receives the harm (but rather the sinners themselves).
Amos 3:14b
(“And I will visit-in-punishment against the altars of Bethel.”)

Pattern 3 (6x): Verb פקד, Person Punished as Object of על, Means of Punishment.70

Psalm 27:8
(“And I will visit-in-punishment with his hard, great, strong sword against Leviathan.”)

Jeremiah 15:3
(“With sword and famine and pestilence I will visit-in-punishment against that nation.”)

Leviticus 26:16
(“And I will cause to visit-in-punishment against you sudden panic, wasting disease, and fever”)
(Note: פקד here is Hiphil.)

Jeremiah 15:3
(“And I will visit-in-punishment against them [with] four kinds [of punishments].”)

Pattern 4 (4x?): Verb פקד, Iniquity-Term as the Object of על.

Jeremiah 5:9
(“Against these [previously mentioned offenses] shall I not visit-in-punishment?”)

Jeremiah 9:8
(“Against these [previously mentioned offenses] shall I not visit-in-punishment against them?”)

Isaiah 10:12
(“I will visit-in-punishment against the fruit of the pride of the heart of the king of Assyria, and against the splendor of the haughtiness of his eyes.”)

From the examination of these patterns, a number of insights arise regarding the syntactical logic. The preposition על consistently marks the unfortunate recipient of Yahweh’s visiting-in-punishment. These recipients include individuals and groups of persons, sons, a man and his household, a man and his seed, lands, inhabitants of a land, nations, the earth, the hosts of heaven and the kings of the earth, Pharaoh, other gods, mythic beings (Leviathan), idols, and illicit altars. In most cases, such recipients are personal. The only exceptions to על marking the

70 Pattern 3 passages include Lev 26:16; Num 16:29; Isa 27:1; Jer 15:3; 27:8; 44:13. See Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter.

recipients of harm from Yahweh’s פקד על are the Pattern 4 passages, in which the grammar predicates Yahweh visiting-in-punishment not against (על) the offenders, but rather against (על) the offenses themselves. However, these Pattern 4 passages are few and may actually employ על in a different sense. Whether or not Pattern 4 exists and whichever passages should be included in it, one thing does remain clear: Hebrew usage with פקד על strongly prefers to make the recipient of the punishment, rather than the grounds of punishment, the object of על (Patterns 1–3). No passage is structured to directly state that Yahweh visits-in-punishment על־עון (“against iniquity”) or על־חטאה (“against sin”), or even על־דרכים (“against ways”) or על־מעללים (“against deeds”).

In Pattern 3 passages, the means or instruments which Yahweh uses in visiting-against-iniquity are indicated. The simplest way to express this is with the preposition ב followed by an instrument of punishment (sword, famine, pestilence, etc.). Other syntactical strategies for stating the instruments of פקד על include expressing the instrument as the direct object of Hiphil פקד (Lev 26:16), the subject of Niphal פקד (Num 16:29), or leaving the instrument-term unmarked by a preposition to function as an adverbial accusative (Jer 15:3).

Pattern 1 passages explicitly mention the offense or iniquity (in general or specific terms)

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72 Pattern 4 is the most tenuous category, and a case could be made that each of the passages included belongs more properly under Pattern 2 or should be excluded from the punitive פקד על altogether. Pattern 4 passages may include Isa 10:12; Jer 5:9; 29; 9:8 [Eng 9:9]. There is uncertainty, however, regarding the precise sense of the three Jeremiah passages, which repeat a rhetorical refrain: העל־אלה לא פקד (בם) נאם־יהוה ("Shall I not visit against these things (against them)?" declares Yahweh.") The prepositional phrase with על is fronted within the interrogative clause. Separated in this way from פקד, it is less certain that the preposition על functions here in the sense of the idiom of פקד על "visit against," since the initial על-phrase could also be read as "concerning these things," that is, "Shall I not, concerning these things [previously enumerated sins], visit/punish?" (See similar syntax with this sense in Isa 57:6; 64:11; Jer 2:34 and Eccl 11:9.) Such a rendering is esp. attractive for Jer 9:8, which includes a final prepositional phrase, בם: "Shall I not, concerning these things, visit against them?" At the same time, if Isa 10:12 indicates that Hebrew usage does allow Yahweh to be described as visiting against (על) the iniquity itself (על plus "these things," in Jer 5:9, 29; 9:8), then such an understanding cannot be ruled out for Jer 5:9, 29; 9:8. Even in Isa 10:12 (see above), however, this sense is not indisputable. The object of יְהֹוָה there ("the fruit of the pride of the heart of the king of Assyria and ... the splendor of the haughtiness of his eyes") can be taken as יָעֵן plus iniquity (that is, יָעֵן plus the grounds for punishment), but it may also function to rhetorically and intimately indicate the king personally as the recipient of Yahweh’s visitation-in-punishment, as much as his iniquity.
which elicits Yahweh’s visiting-in-punishment. This expression of iniquity stands most often as the direct object of the verb הֵעָרֵף (infrequently marked by יָרָע). Occasionally, the iniquity term stands as the object of the preposition כ, “according to.”73 Woodenly expressed, iniquity as a direct object would be rendered, “Yahweh visits-in-punishment iniquity against X” or “Yahweh visits-iniquity-in-punishment against X.” With כ, the wooden sense would be “Yahweh visits-in-punishment against X in accordance with iniquity.” In the numerous Pattern 2 passages, הֵעָרֵף has no direct object (there is no explicit iniquity term), and the הֵעָרֵף constriction has the sense “Yahweh visits-in-punishment against X.”

A comparison with the English usage of the verb punish may be helpful here. In English, a magistrate can both “punish the crime” and “punish the criminal.” A Google search yielded 22,000 results for the English phrase “God punishes sin” and 10,500 results for “God punishes sinners.”74 In Hebrew also, both the offense and the offender are, in some sense, objects of Yahweh’s הֵעָרֵף. Syntactically, however, Hebrew usage with הֵעָרֵף strongly prefers to make the personal recipient of the punishment the object of a preposition (על), rather than the direct object. When both elements are present (Pattern 1), Hebrew clarifies the relationship between the nouns following הֵעָרֵף with the direct object indicating the offense eliciting punishment (an iniquity term) and with the preposition על marking the recipient of harm (“Yahweh visits-in-punishment iniquity against (על) X”). English adopts an opposite approach when both recipient and reason for punishment are present: it normally clarifies the relationship of the nouns following punish with the direct object indicating the recipient of harm and with a preposition marking the grounds for punishment (“Yahweh punishes X for iniquity”).

Thus, English translations vary, with some maintaining the Hebrew syntax and translating

73 Jer 21:4 and Hos 12:3 [Eng 12:2]. See Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter, Pattern 1.B.3.
74 Google searches conducted October 28, 2018.
the collocation פקד על as “visiting upon” (so, generally, ESV, ASV, KJV, NKJV, NASB, NJPS), and others adopting a more familiar English syntax and translating פקד על as “punishing” (so, generally, NIV, NRSV, GWN). Overwhelmingly, the LXX and the Vulgate mimic the Hebrew syntax in translating פקד על. The following chart compares these syntax structures, using Amos 3:2 as an example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Verb of Punishment</th>
<th>Offense Eliciting Punishment</th>
<th>Recipient of Punishment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MT</td>
<td>יהוה</td>
<td>פקד</td>
<td>הצרעים עליכם [acc.]</td>
<td>עליכם [prep. + acc.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LXX</td>
<td>κύριος</td>
<td>ἐκδικέω</td>
<td>πάσας τὰς ἁμαρτίας ὑμῶν [acc.]</td>
<td>ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς [prep. + acc.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulg.</td>
<td>Dominus</td>
<td>visitare</td>
<td>omnes iniquitates vestras [acc.]</td>
<td>super vos [prep. + acc.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASV</td>
<td>LORD</td>
<td>visit</td>
<td>all your iniquities [acc.]</td>
<td>upon you [prep. + obj.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIV</td>
<td>LORD</td>
<td>punish</td>
<td>for all your sins [prep. + obj.]</td>
<td>you [acc.]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is worth noting that the recipient of Yahweh’s punishing visitation (箨פיך) is nowhere marked by the definite direct object marker את. In contrast, when פקד is used to describe Yahweh’s saving or helping visitation, the standard construction is תָּא פָּקַד, with את marking the recipient of Yahweh’s gracious visitation. Of the 15 passages which employ פקד in this gracious sense, 11 have תָּא פָּקַד, and three others have פקד with an object suffix (excluding the possibility of the object marker את). The one remaining passage, Ps 80:15, is not really an exception, since poetry often omits prose particles such as את.

In addition to its use as saving visitation, a few passages employ the idiom תָּא פָּקַד to

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indicate a similarly positive, yet more constant and ongoing action: “to take care of, look after.” Two of these passages employ פקד both negatively and positively, both with and without על, in deliberate contrast. In Zech 10:3, God declares: “My anger burns against the shepherds, and I will punish (פקד על) the he-goats; for Yahweh of hosts takes care of (פקד את) his flock, the house of Judah, and he will make them like his majestic horse in the battle.” A similar passage, Jer 23:2, is also helpful in illustrating the ordinary force of פקד with על. Yahweh rebukes the shepherds of Israel, saying, “You have scattered my flock … and you have not attended to them (פקדתם). Behold, I am about to visit against you (פקד על) the evil of your deeds.” Here again, פקד with על has a meaning distinct from פקד with על. The shepherds were negligent in פקד- ing the flock—that is, they omitted this positive action of seeking out, looking after, attending to the sheep. Therefore, Yahweh will פקד על—that is, he will engage in the negative action of punishing the shepherds for their misdeeds. Both Zech 10:3 and Jer 23:2, then, further confirm the function of פקד על as a distinct idiom denoting visitation-in-punishment.

5.2.3. A Differing Use of פקד על and the Cognate Noun פְקֻדָּּּה

In what follows, the Biblical passages containing פקד על as punishing visitation by Yahweh are examined with an eye toward various contextual elements that may further clarify the meaning and usage of פקד על. Before laying out these contextual observations, however, two more items must be mentioned: the differing use of פקד על with the meaning “to appoint, assign,”

76 Indeed, there is an intentional play on words here, yet the word play involves not the repetition but rather the contrast in meaning between the first and second use of פקד in Jer 23:2. To elaborate this point, consider the following translations of Jer 23:2. The ESV reads, “You have not attended to them, therefore I will attend to you for your evil deeds,” which captures the play on words, but masks the distinction suggested by the use of על in the second clause. The LXX, on the other hand, obscures the play on words here, translating the first occurrence with οὐκ ἐπέκεκίστη (“you did not visit”) and the second with ἐκδικῶ (“I will avenge”). The KJV mimics the Hebrew construction precisely, capturing the play on words and the punitive force of the second clause: “You have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings.” A fourth translation, GWN, runs, “You have not taken care of them, so now I will take care of you by punishing you for the evil you have done.” This expands the second clause to express a single action with two aspects—take care of by punishing—which serves to retain both the פקד word play and the distinct meaning of פקד על in the second clause.
entrust” and the close relationship between the punitive idiom פקד על and several occurrences of the cognate noun פֶקְדָּה.

While פקד על means “to visit against, to punish” in fifty passages, in twenty-two other passages, the collocation על + פקד means “to appoint (someone) over” or “to assign or entrust (something) unto.” An example is Potiphar’s appointment of Joseph in Gen 39:4: ויפקדהו על־ביתו, “and he appointed him over his house” (using the Hiphil of פקד). Another is the claim of Cyrus in 2 Chr 26:23: והוא פקד עלי לבנות־לו בית בירושׁלם, “and he entrusted to me the building of a house for him in Jerusalem.”

For certain occurrences, the Dictionary of Classical Hebrew attempts to meld this appointing/assigning sense of פקד על with the visiting/punishing sense of the expression, glossing the “punitive” sense of פקד as “assign (usu. of Y.) guilt (עון sin, etc.) or the punishment for guilt to someone, thus perch. punish.” Josef Scharbert summarizes the view of Klaus Koch in very similar terms, which accents the root meaning of פקד as entrusting: God entrusts to sins, and the curse resting upon them, a certain authority over the sinner, gives them the power to effect disaster upon the sinner. Hamilton translates פקד as “assigns (the consequences of) the fathers’ iniquity

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77 פקד על refers to appointing or assigning in Gen 39:4, 5; 41:34; Num 1:50; Josh 10:18; 1 Kgs 14:27; 2 Kgs 7:17; 25:22; 1 Chr 26:32; 2 Chr 12:10; Ps 109:6; Is 62:6; Jer 1:10; 40:11 (all Hiphil); Num 4:27; 27:16; Jer 51:27; Job 34:13; 2 Chr 36:23; Ezra 1:2 (all Qal); 2 Chr 34:12 (Hophal); and Neh 12:44 (Niphal). The designation of 50 instances as punishing and 22 instances as appointing/entrusting leaves only one passage unassigned: Jer 13:21. On this, and on the assignment of four marginal passages to the punishment category, see footnote 64 above.


79 Scharbert, “Formgeschichte und Exegese von Ex 34,6f.” 140: “Halten wir uns auch hierbei die Grundbedeutung vor Augen! In dem Ausdruck ist immer ein starkes Abhängigkeitsverhältnis des Betrauten vom Betrauenden gegeben, das sich in der Kontrolle der Amtsführung zeigt. Der פֹקֵד gibt dem Betrauten zwar ein gewisses Verfügungsrecht über die Dinge oder Personen, über die er ihn bestellt, behält sich aber auch die Kontrolle vor. פֹקֵד על Könnte man dann so verstehen: Gott gibt der Sünde und dem auf ihr ruhenden Fluch eine gewisse Verfügungsweite über die Betroffenen, gibt ihr die Macht, sich unheilvoll an ihnen auszuwirken. Zu einer solchen Deutung gelangt K. Koch.” Scharbert himself affirms this view, and lauds the attention to the “root meaning” of פֹקֵד which leads to it; his critique of Koch is that Koch limits himself to this aspect of Yahweh’s פֹקֵד על, without acknowledging the aspect which Scharbert tends to accent, derived from a different aspect of the “root meaning” of פֹקֵד: to inspect and to take appropriate action. See Scharbert, 141–44.
This may also be the sense in Buber and Rosenzweig’s rendering of פקד in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 with zuordnend (“assigning, arranging”). Perhaps this same logic accounts for the free rendering of the NLT: “I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations.”

A number of factors however, urge against conflating the appointing/assigning with the visiting/punishing meanings of פקד על, and suggest instead treating these as distinct expressions. First, with the meaning “appoint, assign,” פקד על is performed by humans in 18 of 22 passages. By contrast, as a punitive idiom, פקד על has God as subject 49 times and a human as subject only once (2 Sam 3:8), and even this single human usage seems to play on the divine scope of punitive פקד על. Second, “appoint, assign” passages prefer the Hiphil of פקד, whereas the use of פקד על in situations of punishment is overwhelmingly Qal. Third, an even weightier objection to reading פקד עון על as “assign guilt or punishment to (someone)” is the close association of the four syntax patterns of punitive פקד על outlined above. The DCH suggestion of “assign … unto” has plausibility only for Pattern 1, in which an explicit iniquity term is present to serve as the direct object of פקד, and only for those passages in which the iniquity term can

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81 Buber and Rosenzweig, *Die Fünf Bücher der Weisung*. See discussion in footnote 34 above.

82 In 2 Sam 3:8, Abner chafes when Saul’s son Ish-bosheth confronts him for consorting with Saul’s concubine: והقضاء על ים אשighthouse. The NIV renders this, “Yet now you accuse me of an offense involving this woman!” In light of the consistent usage of פקד על elsewhere, “accuse me” is too weak here. Not only the situation, but also the speaker should be borne in mind. While Ish-bosheth may in fact merely have accused Abner, Abner overstates Ish-bosheth’s action with rhetorical flair: “Today I have been acting in faithful kindness (אעשׂה-חסד) toward the house of Saul your father, and with his relatives and companions, and I have not delivered you into the hand of David, and so you have visited-to-punish against me the iniquity concerning this woman today!” As Benno Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus*, trans. Walter Jacob (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1992), 554, observes, here “the speech of Abner, in dramatic and exaggerated form, asked: ‘Are you God?’” The only other passage which does not clearly state or imply Yahweh as the subject of פקד על is Isa 27:3, in which Yahweh promises to watch over his vineyard “lest anyone should פקד על it.” In view of the thematic relation between Isa 27 and Isa 5, however, it is most importantly Yahweh’s own destructive action against the vineyard that is being warded off here. Therefore, Isa 27:3 cannot be excluded from the passages which envision פקד על as an activity of Yahweh.

83 The statistics are 14 Hiphil, 1 Hophal, 8 Qal, and 1 Niphal in appointment passages. In punishment passages, 44 Qal, 1 Niphal, 1 Hiphil. See footnote 64 above for specifics.
carry the sense of “guilt, punishment.” However, the DCH suggestion of פקד על as “assign unto” makes little sense in the syntax of the other three patterns, nor does it work with Pattern 1 passages with iniquity terms such as “his ways” (Hos 4:9) or “the days of the Baals” (Hos 2:15 [Eng 2:13]). There is no reason to ascribe a fundamentally different meaning to פקד על in Pattern 1 than it carries in Patterns 2–4; in fact, Amos 3:14 uses פקד על as a punitive expression twice in the same verse, first using Pattern 1, then Pattern 2. Fourth, the assign and the punish senses of פקד על involve distinct meanings of the preposition על. Using the nomenclature of Arnold and Choi, על indicates “rank” or “duty” in appointment/assignment contexts, while it has an “adversative” meaning in contexts of punishment. Finally, the use of פקד על as “appoint over” is well-aligned with the meaning of the root פקד in other ancient Semitic languages, whereas comparative philology has not, to this point, discovered a meaning of “visit-for-harm” or “punish” for this root. Therefore, פקד על as “assign, appoint over” is a straightforward, sum-of-the-parts use of language in which פקד is read as “assign” and על as “over.” Its punitive use, however, is a distinct idiom or Hebraism in which פקד and על, appearing as a combination within a context of iniquity, bear a specialized, idiomatic meaning distinct from the sum of their parts. Thus, על פקד in the sense of “appoint over” and פקד על in the sense of “visit (iniquity) against” should be regarded as separate expressions, and על פקד passages bearing the sense of assign or appoint are therefore excluded from further investigation here.

It is also important to note at this point that the collocation על פקד as a punitive idiom has a

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84 Arnold and Choi, §4.1.16(b) “duty.” E.g., Judg 19:20: “I will care for all your wants” is, woodenly, “all your wants are upon me (על).” §4.1.16(c) “rank.” E.g., 2 Sam 8:16: “Joab, son of Zeruiah, was over (על) the army.” §4.1.16(f) “adversative.” E.g., 1 Kgs 15:27: “And Baasha conspired against him ((Of על).”

85 For a concise and excellent summary of the comparative philology of פקד, see Spencer, “PQD, the Levites, and Numbers 1–4,” 535–38.

86 My argument for the separate and distinct senses of these two על פקד expressions is further supported by the rendering of פקד by the Vulgate in these two sets of passages. In punitive contexts with על פקד, the Vulgate consistently translates פקד as visitare (and rarely, reddo, “to repay”). In contrast, in the 22 passages of על פקד as appointing or entrusting, the Vulgate renders פקד with twelve different verbs (credere, constitue, ponere, praeponere, tradere, praeficere, praeipere, etc., but never visitare).
close relation to many occurrences of a cognate noun, פְּקֻדָּּה. This noun has several meanings, corresponding to the varied meanings of the verb פְּקַד, with 12 of its 31 occurrences depicting a visitation-in-punishment. Under their discussion of prepositions, Joüon and Muraoka note that “a verbal substantive can have a meaning corresponding to a verb and a preposition, e.g., פְּקַד in the sense of punishment (Num 16:29; Jer 10:15 etc.) refers to פְּקַד על to punish (Isa 24:21 etc.).”

While the noun פְּקֻדָּּה and the verb-preposition פְּקַד על appear together in a single verse only in Num 16:29, several other passages describe Yahweh’s punitive act of פְּקַד על in the near context as the day/year/time of (your, their) “visitation” (פקדה). Therefore, the lengthy investigation of פְּקֻדָּּה which follows will encompass not only the 49 passages containing Yahweh’s פְּקַד על acts in contexts of iniquity and punishment, but also the 12 associated passages containing the noun פְּקֻדָּּה employed in this same sense.

The present approach might be criticized as circular, since it appears to gather all “punitive” instances of פְּקַד על and then analyze them in order to demonstrate the hypothesis that פְּקַד על is an idiom for visiting-in-punishment. A certain degree of circularity is inescapable in usage-centered semantic description. However, two considerations help to address this concern. First, the occurrences analyzed include all instances of פְּקַד על in the OT with the exception of the 22 occurrences expressing the separate sense of “appointing, entrusting.” Thus, while I have distinguished above between “appointing-פקדה” and “punishing-פקדה” passages, this classification was, methodologically, merely a way to set aside the “appointing”

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87 These 12 passages are Num 16:29; Isa 10:3; Jer 8:12; 10:15; 11:23; 23:12; 46:21; 48:44; 50:27; 51:18; Hos 9:7; and Mic 7:4. The noun פְּקֻדָּּה refers to Yahweh’s positive life-preserving visitation in one passage: Job 10:12. In 14 other occurrences, פְּקֻדָּּה carries the sense of appointed duty (Num 3:36; 1 Chr 24:3, 19), appointed office (Ps 109:8); oversight (Num 3:32; 4:16; Ezek 44:11; 1 Chr 26:30), or watchmen/officers (2 Kgs 11:18; Isa 60:17; Jer 52:11; Ezek 9:1; 2 Chr 23:18; 24:11). In its remaining four occurrences, פְּקֻדָּּה means a counting, grouping, or mustering (1 Chr 23:11; 2 Chr 17:14; 26:11) or things laid up in store (Isa 15:7).

88 Joüon and Muraoka, §133.i. (2:491).

89 Isa 10:3, 12; Jer 11:22, 23; 23:2, 12; 46:21, 25; 50:18, 27, 31. See also Hos 9:7, 9, and compare Jer 6:15 with Jer 8:12.
passages, with the label “punishing” serving only as a hypothesis and a placeholder for “all the remaining passages;” it did not pre-judge the sense of פקד על in these contexts. “The punitive idiom פקד על” is a way of identifying and distinguishing the uses of פקד על which are not referring to appointing/entrusting. Second, as will be demonstrated below, all of these punitive/non-appointing פקד על passages clearly express a concern with iniquity under various terms and descriptions, if not in the same clause as פקד על then in the near context, so that this collection of passages can also be categorized as “uses of פקד על in contexts of iniquity.” Methodologically, I remained non-committal regarding the semantic content of פקד על while analyzing the regular features of its context. Having said that, I often substitute “visit-in-punishment against” for פקד על in the presentation and discussion of the analysis which follows here. This is to demonstrate the broad suitability of this gloss and to anticipate my conclusion regarding the meaning of פקד על.

5.2.4. Contextual Analysis of Relevant Passages with פקד or פקדת
The present study focuses on the 49 of 50 occurrences of the punitive פקד על idiom which have Yahweh as subject. In addition, 12 occurrences of the noun פקדת are closely related to this idiom, also depicting Yahweh’s visiting-in-punishment. Because Amos 3:14 contains two occurrences of פקדת, and Num 16:29 contains both פקד and the noun פקדת, this yields 59 passages which speak of Yahweh visiting-in-punishment against iniquity. These 59 passages were investigated in order to identify linguistic and semantic phenomena noticeable as regular features within such contexts.90

90 The determination of the boundaries within which associated acts of Yahweh would be noted for each “visiting” occurrence was a fluid process, and was decided on a case by case basis. The goal was to discern the discreet scene or episode which contains a related set of Yahweh’s actions, based on a variety of contextual features. With some פקד passages, the discreet set of related divine acts extends across several verses or even an entire chapter: e.g., for the פקד occurrence in Jer 44:13, Yahweh’s actions in Jer 44:1–14 were inventoried; for the פקד occurrences in Zeph 1:8, 9, and 12, Yahweh’s actions in all of Zeph 1 (vv. 1–18) were inventoried. In some cases, the discreet set of Yahweh’s actions extends for only two or three verses: e.g., for Lev 18:25, Yahweh’s actions in
In particular, the following matters were catalogued. What actions of Yahweh are closely associated with his action of "פקד על", that is, what verbs with Yahweh as subject occur in contexts which describe his activity of visiting against? (See Appendix 2, Tables A, B, and C, found at the end of this chapter.) What acts of Yahweh stand as opposites or antitheses to his acts of "פקד על"? (See Table D.) What other verbs occur in these passages which do not have Yahweh as subject but which explicitly depict the impact of Yahweh’s visitation upon the recipient? (See Table E.) What nouns in these passages express the nature or the content of Yahweh’s visitation, and what descriptions of instrument or agent attend these acts of Yahweh? (See Table F.) How consistently is the concept of sin, iniquity, or guilt present in these passages, and what syntactical constructions are employed which indicate that Yahweh’s acts of "פקד על" take place on the basis of the recipient’s iniquity? (See Table G.) Are terms indicating anger and jealousy regularly associated with Yahweh’s acts of "פקד על"? (See Table H.) Are there expressions in these passages which indicate Yahweh’s acts of "פקד על" coming after a period of delay and in fulfillment of Yahweh’s words of warning? (See Table I.) The tables referenced here appear in Appendix 2, located at the end of this chapter. These contain more data than can be thoroughly discussed in the present study, but what follows are summary observations for each of the questions just noted.

5.2.4.a. Associated Acts of Yahweh: Verbs of Bringing Ruin

Tables A, B, and C (found in Appendix 2 at the end of this chapter) categorize and list other verbs predicated of Yahweh in conjunction with his acts of "פקד על". These verbs can be

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vv. 24–25; for Hos 1:4, in vv. 4–5; for Isa 26:21, in vv. 20–21. For some occurrences of Yahweh’s visiting-against, the associated context of Yahweh’s action does not extend beyond the verse itself: e.g., Exod 34:7; Num 14:18; Amos 3:2. Such an approach was adopted in concurrence with the emphasis of James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 125, that the semantic description of a word should focus not on the word’s root but the word’s “sentence and the still larger literary complex.”
grouped under three broad headings: bringing ruin (94x, Table A); judgment, vengeance, or discipline (30x, Table B); and negative personal regard (15x, Table C).

The most immediate impression such an inventory presents is the variety and contextual dominance of expressions for Yahweh’s bringing harm and ruin (Table A). Yahweh’s acts of פקד על are accompanied by his own arising (קום) or coming forth (יצא), and, as he visits, he brings (forth), sends, causes to fall, or gives (נחית) harm upon the iniquitous—harm which includes the sword, an enemy nation, the hand of those seeking their life, disaster, the destroyer, all the words/harm he has spoken, anguish and terror, everlasting reproach, pestilence, and wasting disease. Yahweh stretches out his hand against (שתלחת, נ QStringList::Piel) the recipients of his פקד על. He slays them (הרג), bereaves them (שכול), and draws the sword after them (תקע). In fact, הרג (“slay”) stands in close parallel relation to פקד על in Isa 27:1: “In that day, Yahweh will visit-in-punishment … against Leviathan…; he will slay the dragon that is in the sea.” In 17 passages, when Yahweh visits-in-punishment against the iniquitous, he brings them to an end (מות, כלה, מת, פנים, זהב, ברכת, כלה, חמה, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חמה, ברכת, חמה, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חמה, ברכת, חמה, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חמה, ברכת, חמה, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חמה, ברכת, חמה, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חמה, ברכת, חמה, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חמה, ברכת, חמה, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חמה, ברכת, חמה, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חמה, ברכת, חמה, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חמה, ברכת, חמה, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חמה, ברכת, חמה, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חמה, ברכת, חמה, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חמה, ברכת, חמה, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חמה, ברכת, חמה, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חmah, ברכת, חmah, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חmah, ברכת, חmah, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חmah, ברכת, חmah, ברכת, פанс, מות, פנים, חmah, ברכת, חmah, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חmah, ברכת, חmah, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חmah, ברכת, חmah, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חmah, ברכת, חmah, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חmah, ברכת, חmah, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חmah, ברכת, חmah, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חmah, ברכת, חmah, ברכת, פנים, מות, פנים, חmah, ברכת, חmah, ברכת, פנים, מות, פัน

91 Paul R. Raabe, Obadiah, AB 24D (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 206–42, offers a thorough excursus on the OT metaphor of drinking the cup of Yahweh’s wrath. On pp. 229–30, he discusses Jer 51:39, 57, which associate Yahweh’s visitation-in-punishment (פקד על) in 51:44, 47, 52 with his act of making Babylon and its leaders drunk (שכל). “Both verses [51:39, 57] depict the experience of divine wrath (the subject) in terms of inebriety and its accompanying drowsiness (the symbol)… This is a ‘perpetual sleep’ from which they will never awaken. The
this field of associated actions comports with the thesis that פקד על is an idiom which means visit-in-punishment.

5.2.4.b. Associated Acts of Yahweh: Verbs of Judgment, Vengeance, or Discipline

A second grouping includes associated actions involving judgment, vengeance, or discipline (Table B, found in Appendix 2 at the end of this chapter). These actions are bound together by related conceptions of Yahweh’s authority and obligations: as plaintiff, judge, examiner, punisher, avenger, disciplinarian. Here, alongside his acts of פקד על, Yahweh can be a plaintiff, prosecuting disputes (ריב...ריב) with the iniquitous. More often, he is portrayed as the judge, gathering (אסף, קבץ) for judgment, judging (שׁפט) and performing justice (עשׂה משׁפט), bringing justice to light (נתן משׁפט לאור). It is noteworthy that in these passages, the accent with Yahweh’s judging and justice is on his diligence to perform acts of judicial punishment against the iniquitous, rather than upon other aspects of his just judgment such as careful investigation, deliberation, declaration, etc.92

Table B also lists a number of פקד על passages that associate Yahweh’s visitation with his acts of judicial recompense and vengeance. Yahweh is a God of reprisals (גְמֻלוֹת). He recompenses (שׁלם Piel) people according to their deeds. Hosea twice uses פקד על in syntactic parallelism with “repaying” (שׂוב לHiphil). “I will visit-in-punishment against him his ways, and image indicates that Yahweh gives the Babylonians a full measure of his wrath with the result that they will perish forever.” Cf. Jer 25:15–29; 48:26–27; 49:12; 51:7–8.

92 Three passages associate Yahweh’s פקד על and פאשע with his acts of פקד על: Jer 9:22–26 [Eng 9:23–27]; Jer 11:19–23; and Zeph 3:5–8. In Jer 9:23, Yahweh asserts that he practices and delights in “steadfast love, justice, and righteousness.” The stress in this context, however, is on the middle term: justice. Two verses prior, Yahweh has pronounced a death sentence, and in the verse which follows he warns that he will “visit against” the uncircumcised: the uncircumcised nations and uncircumcised Israel! In Jer 11:19–23, the prophet laments regarding those who scheme against his life, appealing for vengeance to Yahweh of hosts who judges rightly (v.20). The following two verses express Yahweh’s response, decreeing that he will “visit against” the men of Anathoth: the young men will die by the sword and their children by famine. In Zeph 3:3–4, the unfaithfulness of Israel’s officials, judges, prophets, and priests is described. Verse 5 contrasts Yahweh to these: he does no injustice but rather consistently brings justice to light. The next three verses extend this thought, depicting and warning the people about Yahweh’s imminent actions of devastating judgment against them and the nations.
his deeds I will repay to him” (Hos 4:9b). “He will visit-in-punishment against Jacob according to his ways, and according to his deeds he will repay him” (Hos 12:3 [Eng 12:2]). In several passages, Yahweh’s acts of פקד על are associated with his avenging (נקם Piel or Hithpael),93 three times as a close syntactic parallel (Jer 5:9, 29; 9:8 [Eng 9:9]). This grouping of verbs aligns almost precisely with one application which Peels identifies for the verb נקם: “retributive vengeance.” According to Peels, in contexts where נקם functions in this “general sense of the justified punishment of a sinner or enemy … there are synonyms such as שלח, השיב, משלי, פקד; antonyms are: e.g., נקה and משא.”94

Twice, Yahweh’s act of פקד על is associated with his disciplining (יסר Piel, Lev 26:18, 28). While the goal of this discipline is that Israel will listen to Yahweh and not walk contrary to him,95 the emphasis is still on the sustained severity of the disciplinary acts (“sevenfold according to your sins,” Lev 26:18; “I will keep on striking you,” Lev 26:21).

In a few פקד על passages, Yahweh is also the subject of verbs that can be translated as test (בחן, צרף) or search thoroughly (שוח Piel). This portrayal of Yahweh as judicial examiner or investigator might be significant in connection with the frequent claims in the literature that the basic meaning of פקד על is to inspect, test, or examine, and that in Exod 20:5 or 34:7 it is not Yahweh’s punishing that is in view but rather his investigating “whether the sins of one generation reoccur among the descendants.”96

Two observations, however, call into question any direct equivalence of פקד על with inspecting or testing in these contexts. First, both צרף and צרף, the verbs for “test” which appear


94 Peels, _Vengeance of God_, 266. As will be discussed below, the antonyms for נקם mentioned by Peels (נן and משא) are also employed in the OT as contrasting alternatives to פקד על.

95 See Lev 26:18, 21, 23.

96 Dohmen, _Exodus 19–40_, 355, my translation.
in contexts of פקד על, signify testing by fire, smelting. In these passages (Jer 9:6 [Eng 9:7]; 11:20), Yahweh does not subject the people to such smelting in order to determine their iniquity; on the contrary, a clear indictment of their sin immediately precedes each reference to Yahweh’s intention to test by fire. Such “judicial smelting,” then, presumes guilt and functions as a punitive response. That this smelting is a punishment (or at least a chastening) can also be seen by the paralleling of פקד על and נקם עלי in Jer 9:6 [Eng 9:7] with נ印象深刻 and נקם (Hithpael, “avenge oneself”) in 9:8 [Eng 9:9]. A second observation deals with Zeph 1:12, the single occurrence of חפש (Piel, “search thoroughly”) alongside פקד עלי. The ESV renders: “At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps, and I will punish the men who are complacent, those who say in their hearts, ‘The LORD will not do good, nor will he do ill.’”97 Here, searching (חפש) is not equated with פקד עלי. Rather, there is a sequence: Yahweh will search the [entire] city [for those who are complacent], and those who are [found to be] complacent, he will then punish (פקד עלי). Indeed, the verses which immediately follow (vv. 13–18) specify the calamities which this visitation-in-punishment will bring. Thus, while a few passages associate Yahweh’s פקד עלי with searching or testing, further attention to the contextual relationship does not suggest that these are semantic equivalents or that the “basic meaning” of פקד as inspect, test, or examine is the key to its meaning in the idiom פקד עלי.

Table B also includes two occurrences of verbs that often indicate acts of perception or attention: “to remember” (זכור) and “to watch over” (שכן). Because another common proposal for a basic meaning of פקד עלי has been “to attend to, to look after,”98 these passages

97 The Hebrew expression rendered “the men who are complacent” by the ESV is somewhat cryptic, a participial phrase referring to “those thickening on their lees,” apparently an image of ease, complacency, and imperturbableness, like undisturbed wine maturing on its lees. The LXX renders it with the interpretive translation: τοὺς καταφρονοῦντας ἐπὶ τὰ φθόλιματα αὐτῶν, “those who despise their obligations.” In any case, it is clear that those referred to by the expression are those found culpable by Yahweh and that the phrase specifies the nature of this culpability and the grounds for visitation-in-punishment.

98 Durham, Exodus, 276–77; Wénin, “Dieu qui visite,” 70.
also warrant brief comment. Hosea 9:9b, picturing Yahweh as divine judge and covenant enforcer,\(^99\) declares, “He will remember (זמר) their iniquity; he will visit-in-punishment (פקד) their sins”—a precisely parallel construction. “Remembering in the Old Testament is never purely an activity of the mind. God’s remembering always implies his movement toward the object of his memory. It involves his acting.”\(^100\) In this passage, to “remember their iniquity” implies an act of punishment, and the second poetic line with פקד makes this act of punishment explicit.\(^102\)

Jeremiah 44:27 warns that Yahweh “will watch over (שׁקד) for harm, not for good.” “Watching over for harm” tropes on a stock metaphor, inverting the expected picture of Yahweh standing watch over the city as its caretaker (cf. Ps 127:1). This instead indicates a vigilant intention to allow or to work harm, and vv. 27b-28 elaborate on the nature of this harm (sword and famine).\(^103\) In such a context, the sense of visit-in-punishment fits precisely for the expression here: “I am about to visit-in-punishment against you in this place” (Jer 44:29) follows more logically than “I am about to pay attention to or look after you in this place.” The point here is that Yahweh’s פקד על is not associated with the bare actionمشר על (“watch over”), but with the fuller expressionمشר על ישראל ולרשעה ולא хорошה (“watching over them for harm and not for...”)

\(^99\) On the fundamental violation of the covenant between God and his people, note esp. Hos 6:7; 8:1; 9:1.

\(^100\) It must be acknowledged that here the second verb is simply פקד, without על. However, I have argued above that in a few passages, including Hos 9:9, the idiom of פקד על is implied, the על being omitted to preserve poetic parallelism and the recipient of punishment indicated by the pronoun suffix on “their sins” (חטאם). See footnote 60 above.

\(^101\) Terence Fretheim, *Creation, Fall, and Flood* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), 115. Also Peter Enns, *Exodus*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 418, discussing the Sabbath command: “This is not merely a cognitive exercise, any more than remembering your wedding anniversary means simply recalling it…. Some concrete demonstration of remembrance is expected. Biblical remembrance requires action. In Exodus, we have seen this already in 2:24 and 6:5, where God remembers Israel in their slavery. There, too, remembering means more than just recalling.”

\(^102\) The sense of active punishment in these parallel verbs in Hos 9:9 is further confirmed by the related parallelism of Hos 9:7: “The days of visitation (פקדה) have come; the days of recompense (שלם) have come.”

\(^103\) The passage echoes the imagery of Jer 5:6, which pictures “a leopard watching over (שׁקד) their cities” so that all who go out are torn to pieces.
good”). Even this fuller expression is not equated with the Yahweh’s פקד על in the passage; rather, פקד על functions in v. 29 as a summary label for the death-bringing actions of Yahweh in vv. 27b–28 which are themselves the result or manifestation of Yahweh “watching over them for harm.” Against the claim that פקד על really or literally means “to attend to, look after (iniquity)” in this passage and elsewhere, note that the OT never places פקד על into the formula in which שׁקד is found in v. 27, nor could it. To say that Yahweh פקד عليهم לרעה (“visits-in-punishment against them for harm”) would be noticeably redundant, in a way in which שׁקד عليهم לרעה (“watch over them for harm”) is not.

5.2.4.c. Associated Acts of Yahweh: Verbs Expressing Negative Personal Regard

A third grouping of Yahweh’s acts associated with his פקד על contains a variety of verbs expressing negative personal regard (Table C, found in Appendix 2 at the end of this chapter). In conjunction with Yahweh’s visitation-in-punishment, his disposition toward the recipients of visitation ranges from impatience (לאה Niphal, “weary of relenting”) to loathing and indignation (געל, שׁפך...זעם). He stands in “direct opposition to” (ךָהנני אלי; 104) his very being is “not towards” (אין נפשׁי אל) he will set his face against them (שׂים...פני ב). They have walked contrary to Yahweh, so he will walk contrary to them (הלך...בקרי). Yahweh has rejected them (לא ריח) and cast them off (שׁנט) and will no longer smell (לא ריח Hiphil) the aroma of their sacrifices. He will utterly forget them (שׁחה, נשׁה).

Not all of the verbal actions in the preceding sections are precise or even general synonyms with פקד על. They are simply actions of Yahweh which take place alongside of and in some relation to פקד על. They serve as a broad contextual field for evaluating the hypothesis that פקד על is an idiom referring to an act of visitation-in-punishment. Perhaps deserving of closest attention

104 In this phrase is from Jer 21:13, א לא functions as an equivalent to the adversative preposition על (“against”).
were the syntactic parallels to פקד על: “slaying” (הור, Isa 27:1), “remembering” iniquity105 (זכר, Hos 9:9); “repaying” (שׁוב Hiphil, Hos 4:9; 12:3 [Eng 12:2]), and “avenging oneself” (נקם Hithpael, Jer 5:9, 29; 9:8 [Eng 9:9]).

5.2.4.d. Associated Acts of Yahweh: Verbal Opposites or Antitheses

While the actions congruent to פקד על are illuminating, at the same time, the contrasting actions expressed in these contexts are also helpful in distilling the precise sense of פקד על. While smaller in number, there are a handful of divine actions in these contexts which are expressed as binary alternatives to Yahweh’s visitation-in-punishment (see Table D, found in Appendix 2 at the end of this chapter). These include performing steadfast love (חסד), forgiving (נשׂא, סלח), leaving unpunished (נקה), relenting (נחם Niphal), and guarding from harm (נצר).

In Exod 20:5–6 (= Deut 5:9), Yahweh’s פקד על (“visiting iniquity against”) is set over against his עשה חסד (“acting in lovingkindness”). Both verbs are clause-initiating participles, and their contrasting specification toward “those who hate me” and “those who love me” marks them as, in some sense, binary alternatives.

In the related expression in Exod 34:7, there is a similar contrast with Yahweh’s activity of steadfast love, here expressed as נצר חסד (“preserving lovingkindness”). In addition, this passage adds a third participial clause— נשא עון ופשׁע וחטאה (“forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin”)—which also stands in direct parallel contrast to פקד עון על, “visiting iniquity against” (cf. Num 14:18). Within this passage, פקד על modifies the statement which precedes it: “yet he will certainly not neglect punishment” (ונקה לא ינקה). Since thus describes what Yahweh does when he certainly does not “neglect punishment,” this establishes נקה Piel (“leave unpunished”)

105 Hos 9:9 parallels punitive פקד אל (“he will remember their iniquity”). This use of זכר with iniquity as the direct object is distinct from Yahweh graciously remembering someone so that he acts to save or help. In such positive uses of זכר, the person graciously remembered is the direct object. With זכר, the direct object makes all the difference.
as another binary alternative to פקד על in Exod 34:6–7. While is not contrasted with פקד על in Exod 20:5–6, the following commandment against misusing Yahweh’s name is sanctioned with the threat that “Yahweh will not neglect to punish (לא נקה) the one who takes up his name in vain” (Exod 20:7 = Deut 5:11). Here also, then, the parallelism between the כי motive clause for the idolatry command and the כי motive clause for the name command closely ties פקד על with לא נקה, suggesting that נקה (“leaving unpunished”) may be an opposing or alternative action to פקד על. While leaving unpunished is not necessarily identical to forgiving, they are closely related concepts. Their contrastive relationship to פקד על fits comfortably with an understanding of פקד על as visiting-in-punishment.

Having heard Yahweh’s self-revelation (Exod 34:6–7) as a God who forgives (נשׂא) iniquity and who visits iniquity in punishment (פקד על), Moses bows low and prays that God will forgive (סלח) his stiff-necked people. This same verb for forgiveness also stands as a contrasting alternative to Yahweh’s פקד על in Jer 5:7a (cf. Jer 5:9a). After declaring that their transgressions are numerous and their apostasies vast (v. 6), Yahweh asks, rhetorically, in v. 7: “How should I forgive (סלח) you for this?” After labeling them adulterous stallions (v. 8), Yahweh asks again in v. 9: “Shall I not visit-in-punishment (פקד על) against these things?” Thus far, opposites or alternatives to Yahweh’s action of פקד על have included acting in steadfast love, forgiving sin, and leaving unpunished.

Two more opposing actions, one from Isa 27:3 and one from Jer 15:6 serve to round out this general field. Isaiah 27:3 sets Yahweh’s protective watchfulness (נצר) in contrast to visitation-in-punishment. In Isa 27:2–6, Yahweh describes Israel as a vineyard (v.2, 6) and himself as void of wrath and desiring peace with his people (v. 4–5). In v. 3 he declares: “I, Yahweh, am [the vineyard’s] watchman (נצר). Every moment I water it. Lest one should visit-in-punishment against (פקד על) it, night and day I watch over (נצר) it.” Within the book of Isaiah, the
interplay of this oracle with the previous Song of the Vineyard in ch. 5 is unmistakable—and there Yahweh decreed his intention to act in punishment against his bad-fruiting people. In view of this intertextual relation to Isa 5, in view of the oracles of Yahweh’s coming “visitation” (פקד על) against the inhabitants of the earth and Leviathan in the immediately preceding context (Isa 26:21; 27:1), and in view of the OT use of the פקד על idiom almost exclusively with Yahweh as the subject, Isa 27:3 likely (and dramatically) implies that the warded-off “visitation” is Yahweh’s own. In this sense, Yahweh’s posture of “watching over (nçژר) against visitation-in-punishment” stands as another direct contrasting alternative to the prospect that he himself would פקד על the vineyard.\(^{107}\)

Jeremiah 15:6 speaks of Yahweh’s relenting (נחם Niphal) as the alternative to פקד על. “I am weary (לאה Niphal) of relenting (נחם Niphal)” is the explanation of why Yahweh will visit them in punishment (Jer 15:3). If Yahweh relents, he foregoes or forestalls visiting (cf. Exod 32:12, 14); when he grows sufficiently weary of relenting, then he visits in punishment (פקד על).

Thus, all of the actions of Yahweh occurring as opposites or binary alternatives to his acts of פקד על support the denotation of פקד על as “visiting-in-punishment.” These include performing and especially guarding steadfast love (עשׂה חסד, נצר חסד), forgiving iniquity (נשׂא, סלח), leaving unpunished (נקה Piel), guarding against punishment (נזר... פ כEDA עליהָּ in Isa 27:3), and relenting from punishment (נחם Niphal). In these contexts, it would be more difficult to construe these as precisely contrasting alternatives to other proposed “basic meanings” of פקד, such as “pay attention to, take care of” or “inspect, examine, test.”

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107 Without suggesting any intended allusion, the note of Yahweh watchfully preserving his gracious disposition against punishment, which is sounded by the use of the נזר here, resonates with the shift from עשׂה חסד ("performing steadfast love," Exod 20:6) to נזר חסד ("guarding steadfast love," Exod 34:7) following the golden calf apostasy.
5.2.4.e. Verbs Describing the Impact of Yahweh’s Acts of פקד על

To this point, the contextual analysis of the פקד על passages has dealt only with associated verbs with Yahweh as subject. Table E (found in Appendix 2 at the end of this chapter) catalogues other verbs in these contexts which, while not having Yahweh as their grammatical subject, are directly relevant to the characterization of Yahweh’s פקד על since they depict the impact upon the recipients of Yahweh’s visitation. Most of these follow one of three patterns. First, rather than directly expressing Yahweh’s act, some statements make the recipient of Yahweh’s visitation the subject of the verb, e.g., “Babylon will become a desolation” (יהיה שׁממה) (Jer 15:13). In these cases, the verb is often passive, e.g., “All those laden with money will be cut off (כרת Niphal)” (Zeph 1:11). Second, the impact is sometimes depicted by using the city, the land, or an important possession of those visited as the subject noun, e.g., “The great houses will come to an end (סוף)” (Amos 3:15). Third, some of these verbs have an agent associated with Yahweh’s visitation as their subject noun (death, sword, fire, dogs, army from the north, etc.) rather than Yahweh himself. In each case, while Yahweh is not the subject, a verbal sense is expressed which is closely associated in the context with Yahweh’s act of פקד על.

In Table E, these verbs are grouped by field of meaning into 12 subgroups. The majority of these fall into the first seven subgroups: come (of harm), strike, kill, bring to an end, destroy, drive out/scatter, and burn/consume. These fields of meaning directly correspond to the actions of Yahweh discussed above under the general heading “bringing ruin” (Table A) and include many of the same verbs. Verbs in the eighth subgroup—stumble/totter/fall—are also common in the פקד על passages and fit with a context in which Yahweh is bringing ruin.108 The ninth subgroup—be found, caught, captured, shut in, gathered (in prison)—corresponds to Yahweh

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108 There are 17 occurrences of verbs in the stumbling/tottering/falling field in the 59 פקד על passages being examined. Among these, נפל (“fall”) occurs 11 times. There are also single occurrences of כשל ("stumble"), כשל Niphal (“be overthrown”), נד Hithpael (“move to and fro”), נד נו (“not stand”), and לא קום (“not arise”).
bringing ruin, and perhaps also to Yahweh’s “judicial” verbs included in Table B. The tenth subgroup is labeled “disgrace” and lists occurrences of שׁבו (be ashamed), שׁבו Hiphil (“be put to shame”), and חפר (“be disgraced”). Such shame and disgrace expresses the impact or result of the harm-bringing visitation of Yahweh. Generally speaking, the first ten meaning subgroups supplement and reinforce the character of the פקד על-associated acts of Yahweh listed in Tables A, B, and C. The final two subgroups contribute unique associations but contain few occurrences.

Subgroup 11 consists of two verbs from a single passage, Isa 26:21: גלה Piel and לא כסה (revel and “not cover”), referring to the coming to light of bloodshed and murder. While this verbal association with Yahweh’s פקד על might be marshalled as evidence of a “basic meaning” of “investigate, examine” underlying פקד על, a sense of “visiting-in-punishment” is equally congruent with bloodshed and slayings no longer being hidden. In fact, in this passage, the reference to the earth “revealing” and “no longer covering” the murdered not only depicts a situation of bloodshed and judgment, but also implies a situation of previous, ongoing impunity. Thus, it is not Yahweh’s close scrutiny that is paired with the earth disclosing its slain, but Yahweh coming-with-punishment—a punishment whose postponement has allowed the earth to “cover” bloodshed (and corpses) for a time. Punishment for these hidden crimes, however, is not omitted by Yahweh. The idiom פקד על refers to the awaited moment of its decisive execution.

Lastly, Subgroup 12 notes two passages in which Yahweh’s פקד על is associated with the result of people “knowing” (ידע). In Num 16:29–30, because of the unusual visitation to be visited פקד עלי Niphal, with Yahweh as the unexpressed agent) upon Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, the people will “know that these men have reviled Yahweh.” The parallelism of vv. 29–30 here also implies a second aspect of knowledge revealed or confirmed by this visitation—that

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109 The Hiphil of שׁב often has this passive-causative sense.
Yahweh has sent Moses. In Jer 44:28–29, Yahweh rebukes those of Judah who have fled to Egypt, warning that he will visit-in-punishment against them (פֶּקֶד על) in Egypt and that those few who escape the sword there will return to Judah. When this happens, the remnant “will know whose word will stand, mine or theirs” (v. 28). Thus, there can be a revelatory or evidentiary dimension to Yahweh’s פֶּקֶד על. When Yahweh acts to פֶּקֶד על, people see this and draw certain conclusions. This association seems to fit פֶּקֶד על as “visitation-in-punishment” more naturally than as “pay attention” or “inspect.”

5.2.4.f. Nouns Expressing the Nature or Results of Yahweh’s Acts of פֶּקֶד על

The 59 passages examined also contain a number of nouns which create a field of association for Yahweh’s פֶּקֶד על (Table F, found in Appendix 2 at the end of this chapter). Some of these nouns describe the nature of the action unfolding in the context: devastation from the Almighty (כָּשְׁד משָׁד), sudden and complete destruction (כָּלָל אָרֶנֶבֶל), great shattering (שֵׁבֶר גָּזָר), vengeance (רֵגֶר), reprisal (גֵּמָל), recompense (שָׁלֹם), something new and unparalleled (בְּרֵיא), a work (מְלאָכָה), calamity (שָׁוָא, שָׁוָא), darkness (אָפָה), disaster/evil (רָעָה), “no good” (אֵין טוב).

Of particular note is the term “recompense” (שִׁלֻם), which stands in precise parallel with פֶּקֶד על in Hos 9:7: “The days of visitation have come; the days of recompense have come.” Other nouns in these contexts depict the result of Yahweh’s action in the context. Some of these results are physical: people’s land, city, streets, or houses will become a desolation (שָׁמֶשֶׁת), complete desolation (שָׁמֶשֶׁת כּלָּה), or everlasting desolation (שָׁמָּמִים עַלְוָם); heaps (גָּלִים), a lair of jackals (מעון).

110 In Num 16:30, the fate which will be visited-in-punishment against Korah and company is described as a בְּרֵיא which Yahweh will בְּרֵיא. This cognate accusative is glossed by BDB as “a creation, thing created, as preternatural, unparalleled.” English translations commonly render the noun as “something (totally) new.” The LXX has φάσμα (“sign from heaven, portent, wonder”).

111 The first seven expressions in this list are verbal nouns, representing Yahweh’s action nominally, in the same way that the noun פֶּקֶד על often captures the sense of the verbal construction פֶּקֶד על. They express nominally the following six verbs, respectively: שָׁדָד (“devastate”), כָּלָל (“be complete, finished”), שֵׁבֶר (“break”), נָקֵם (“avenge”), גֵּמָל (“deal with, repay”), שָׁלֹם (Piel, “repay”), בְּרֵיא (“create”).
a waste (חרבה). Their goods will become plunder (משׁס). Some results are emotional or existential: recipients of Yahweh’s פקד על experience terror(s) (חרה), anguish (ער), and confusion (מסבש). Their fate will be an object of horror (שם), a reproach (חרפה), and an oath (אלים), the object of everlasting reproach and shame (צלמות עולם). These nouns expressing the nature and result of Yahweh’s פקד על are inventoried in Table F, second column, with further notes in the fourth column. Clearly these support a consistent sense of פקד על as visit-in-punishment.

5.2.4.g. Instruments and Agents of Yahweh’s פקד על

In our passages, Yahweh often employs agents or instruments in carrying out his acts of פקד על (see Table F, third column—found in Appendix 2 at the end of this chapter). **Instruments** are most often marked by the use of the instrumental preposition ב, though sometimes indicated as such through other constructions. Typical is Jer 44:13: “I will visit-in-punishment against those who dwell in Egypt just as I visited-in-punishment against Jerusalem, with the sword (חרב), with famine (ברעב), and with pestilence (דבר).”112 Instruments of Yahweh’s פקד על include sudden panic (בחלה), wasting disease (שׁחפת), fever (קדחת), pestilence (דבר), sword (חרב), famine (רעב), fire (שׁא), captivity (שׁבי), and Nebuchadnezzar’s hand (בידו). Such things are “the weapons of his indignation” (כלי זעמו, Isa 13:5; Jer 50:25). Also on this list is the alliterative trio from Jer 48:44: פחד ופחת ופח—“terror, pit, and snare.” These are not the kind of instruments by means of which one “pays attention to” or “inspects.” (Yahweh’s “eyes” never appear in these contexts as the subject or instrument of his פקד על.)113 These are instruments employed in acts of


113 This is in stark contrast to the many times in which “eyes” (עין) are explicitly associated with the verb נבט (“look, pay attention to, regard”) as its subject or instrument (Job 39:29b; Pss 91:8a; 92:12; 94:9; 119:18; Prov 4:25; Isa 51:6; Hab 1:13), not to mention the numerous passages in which eyes are associated with רא and חzza (“to see”).
divine punishment.

*Agents* stand as the subjects of verbs, yet are indicated by the context to be themselves sent, wielded or directed by Yahweh as part of his *فلسطين*. Yahweh will bring a “sword” which avenges. God will send “destroyers,” and through them he will shatter and destroy and silence. “A nation from afar” will eat up and beat down. “Death” will ascend through the windows, enter into citadels, and cut off children from the streets and young men from the squares. A cluster of agents is expressed in Jer 15:3: “I will visit-in-punishment against them four ways, declares Yahweh: the sword to slay, the dogs to drag away, the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy.” “A fire in its forest” will consume everything around. Swords, destroyers, enemy nations, dogs and wild beasts, fire, and death are all well suited to Yahweh’s work of visiting-in-punishment. They are less suited to the work of “giving attention” or “inspecting, examining.”

5.2.4.h. *Iniquity in the Context of Yahweh’s פקד על*

 Granting the fact that human iniquity is a pervasive theme throughout the OT, it still bears noting that the contexts of Yahweh’s acts of *فلسطين* consistently emphasize sin, iniquity, evil deeds, etc. (Table G, found in Appendix 2 at the end of this chapter). Often, terms for iniquity stand as the direct object of the verb פקד, with the preposition על marking the recipient of Yahweh’s punishing visitation.114 When this is not the case, the iniquity of the recipients of punishment is nearly always explicitly indicated in the immediate context. In its second column, Table G inventories these iniquity references for each of the 59 פקד passages, with supporting notes in the fourth column.

 In demonstrating that the idiom פקד means to visit-in-punishment, the consistent

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114 These are the Pattern 1 passages discussed under §5.2.2 above.
emphasis on the iniquity of the objects marked by על is significant. The alternative proposal that פקד על has a “basic meaning” of “inspect, examine, or test” in such passages envisions Yahweh scrutinizing the deeds of the people to determine the presence (or absence) of iniquity, and perhaps taking appropriate measures if iniquity is discovered or confirmed. While some texts may tolerate this perspective, there are a number of passages whose construction emphasizes that Yahweh’s acts of פקד על are occasioned and provoked because of the recipient’s iniquity, rather than being purposed toward investigating the possibility of the recipient’s iniquity. Such a direct causal relationship between iniquity and פקד על is clearly established by grammatical constructions such as על אשׁר (“because of”), על (“because”), בגלל (“because of”), יען (“because”), כי (“for”), لذلك (“so that”). These are listed and detailed in the third column of Table G. Some passages depict Yahweh’s פקד על as “according to” the (evil) deeds of the recipient, using the preposition כ or כאשׁר. An implicitly causal sense of “according to” is evidenced by the parallelism between Jer 21:12 (“Lest my wrath go forth like fire … because of (משת) the evil of your deeds”) and 21:14 (“I will visit-in-punishment against you according to the fruit of your deeds”). One passage situates Yahweh’s פקד על as the apodosis of a conditional sentence prefaced with three uses of אם (“if”): “If you will not listen and do all these commandments, and if you reject my statutes and if your soul spurns my ordinances, by not doing all my commandments and by breaking my covenant,” then Yahweh himself will visit-in-punishment against them (פקד על, Lev 26:14–16). This clear, direct causal relationship between human iniquity and the divine activity of פקד על precisely suits an understanding of פקד על as visit-in-punishment. To repeatedly emphasize that because of human iniquity and rebellion Yahweh will “pay attention to” the iniquitous, or “inspect and examine” them, seems to make

115 See also syntax Pattern 1.B.3 in Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter.

116 Here reading with the Qere in Jer 21:12; the Kethib has יג 추진ורים (“their deeds”).
Space prohibits any thorough discussion of the specific kinds of iniquity presented in these passages; however, alongside frequent references to idolatry another feature commonly present is a directly personal dimension of the offense. Yahweh threatens to act in פקד על לבן, finally, because “they have refused to know me …. because they have forsaken my Torah which I set before them, and they have not obeyed my voice or walked in it, but they have walked after the stubbornness of their hearts and after the Baals, as their fathers taught them” (Jer 9:5, 24 [Eng 9:6, 25]); “because they have sinned against Yahweh” (Zeph 1:17); because they “have rejected knowledge … because they have abandoned Yahweh” (Hos 4:6, 10). He will פקד על against Moab “because he has magnified himself above Yahweh” (Jer 48:42) and against Babylon “because she sinned against Yahweh” and “because [she] challenged Yahweh” (Jer 50:14, 24). It is difficult to see how the interpretation of פקד על as the mere nurturing along of sin’s built-in consequences takes this personal dimension of divine provocation into account. This observation leads directly into the next contextual element: the intensely personal language of Yahweh’s jealousy and anger.

5.2.4.i. Yahweh’s פקד על and Yahweh’s Anger, Jealousy

In the first canonical use of the פקד על idiom, Yahweh’s visitation-in-punishment corresponds with his self-description as a jealous God: אל קנא (Exod 20:5=Deut 5:9). Twice, Zephaniah dramatically associates Yahweh’s fiery jealousy with his visitation-in-punishment. Zeph 1:18 warns, “Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of Yahweh’s fury (עברה), and in the fire of his jealousy (אשׁ קנאה) the whole earth will be consumed.” In Zeph 3:8, Yahweh warns of the day when he will rise up and “pour out upon [the assembled nations] my indignation (זעם) and all my burning anger (חרון אף), for in the fire of my jealousy (אשׁ קנאה) the whole earth will be consumed.” Both of these passages follow explicit
expressions of Yahweh’s פקד על (Zeph 1:12; 3:7).

While the association of Yahweh’s visitation with jealousy is limited to these passages, terms for Yahweh’s anger appear extensively throughout the 59 פקד על passages. These associations are detailed in Table H, found in Appendix 2 at the end of this chapter. The vocabulary here includes wrath (חרם, חמה, קצף), anger (אף), burning anger (חרון אף), fury (עברה), indignation (זעם), and rage (זעף). Sometimes wrath is personified, “going forth” and acting as the agent of Yahweh’s פקד על (Jer 21:12–14; cf. Jer 30:23–24; Isa 26:20–21). His פקד על is carried out using כלי זעמו, “the weapons of his indignation” (Jer 50:25, 27; Isa 13:5, 11). Yahweh’s anger and his visiting can be set as precise parallels: “My anger burns against the shepherds, and I will visit-in-punishment against (פקד על) the he-goats [leaders]” (Zech 10:3). In one passage, Yahweh explains the devastation of Jerusalem as his פקד על; just a few verses prior, he explains, “My wrath and my anger were poured out and burned against the cities of Judah and against the streets of Jerusalem” (Jer 44:2, 6, 13). Just as Yahweh’s פקד על is often associated with a “day” or “time” (see below), so also Yahweh’s anger has its “day”—sometimes in the same texts. “A day of wrath is that day” (Zeph 1:15). “Behold, the day of Yahweh comes—cruelty and fury and burning anger!—to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it … because of the fury of Yahweh of hosts and the day of his burning anger” (Isa 13:9, 13).

Above, it was observed that iniquity is frequently the cause for Yahweh’s פקד על, a relationship which corresponds naturally to פקד על as visit-in-punishment. Iniquity is not merely something discovered through Yahweh’s inspection or examination, nor is iniquity merely the object of attention or care. A similar observation must be made regarding divine anger in these contexts. When Yahweh acts to פקד על, his anger is already in place. Yahweh acts to פקד על because people have “provoked him to anger” (Hiphil, Jer 44:8; cf. 44:13). Divine wrath is
sometimes the cause, sometimes the instrument, but never the result of Yahweh’s פקד על.

Lastly, a word is in order about the exceedingly personal involvement of Yahweh indicated by the language of jealousy and anger in these texts. Such vehemence is consistent with the “verbs of negative personal regard” commonly associated with Yahweh’s פקד על, such as Yahweh growing impatient, loathing, becoming indignant, rejecting, and personally opposing (see Table C, found in Appendix 2 at the end of this chapter).

5.2.4.j. Yahweh’s פקד על Comes after a Period of Delay, in Fulfillment of Yahweh’s Words

Another regularly occurring element within these contexts is reference to a coming day or time when Yahweh will פקד על, or other temporal references which serve to characterize Yahweh’s פקד על as bringing to a close a period of time in which sin has gone unpunished. Of the 59 passages examined, 36 contain such references, and these are detailed in the first column of Table I (found in Appendix 2 at the end of this chapter). Canonically, the first explicit expression of this temporal framework for פקד על is Yahweh’s explicit statement: “In the day when I visit, I will visit-in-punishment against them for their sin” (Exod 32:34). However, the multi-generational language of Exod 20:5 implies such a dynamic for פקד על as well, as Jacob, commenting on this passage, observes: “Punishment … would definitely come. That thought was included in the wored po-qed, through which God maintained His right to future action.”117

In the Prophets, this time language is standard alongside פקד על: “on that day,” “the time is coming when,” “yet a little while,” and so forth. Some statements are more specific: “When Adonay has finished all his work against Mt. Zion,” he will פקד upon the king of Assyria (Isa 10:12), or, “When seventy years are completed,” he will פקד upon Babylon (Jer 25:12). In some instances, the time of Yahweh’s visitation-in-punishment is spoken of as an imminent and

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117 Jacob, Second Book of the Bible, 555.
extraordinary day, again evoking Exod 32:34: “on the day of my visiting” (בֵּית פָּקֵד, with infinitive construct), “on the day of visitation” (יָמִין פָּקֵד), “the year of their visitation” (שָׁנָה פָּקֵד), “at the time of their visitation” (יָמִי פָּקֵד), “The days of the visitation (ימי הפקדה) have come,” one prophet declares (Hos 9:7). In fact, 11 of the 12 occurrences of the noun פָּקֵד examined here stand in construct with the temporal nouns “day(s),” “time,” or “year.”

Surrounding the three references to Yahweh’s פָּקֵד in Zeph 1:8, 9, and 12, the prophet employs “day” (יום) 14 times in vv. 7–18: “the day of Yahweh,” “the day of Yahweh’s sacrifice,” “on that day,” “the great day of Yahweh,” “the day of the wrath of Yahweh,” etc.118

In some texts, there is a sense of mounting tension during the delay leading up to this “day of פָּקֵד.” This tension is drawn between Yahweh’s forbearance and his commitment to his people, on one hand, and Yahweh’s growing impatience over sin and its current impunity, on the other. “I am weary of relenting,” Yahweh declares in Jer 15:6, after threatening to פָּקֵד this people” in multiple ways in 15:3. In Jer 23:26, Yahweh laments, querying, “How long (עד־מתי) shall there be false prophecies in the hearts of the prophets?”119 In Jer 44:13, Yahweh threatens to פָּקֵד the Judean fugitives in Egypt, just as he had פָּקֵד Jerusalem; Jeremiah further explains this previous visitation: “Yahweh was not able (לא יכל) to bear/forgive (נשׂא) any longer (עוד) because of the evil of your deeds, because of the abominations which you committed” (44:22).

Similarly, Micah 6:10–11 may indicate the waning of Yahweh’s patience in connection with his פָּקֵד: “Shall I forget (נשׁה) forgive (נשׂא) any longer (עוד) the wicked treasure in the house of the wicked, and the accursedly scant measure? Acquit (晅ה) a man with wicked scales and a bag of

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118 Zeph 1:15–16, in particular, pile up the references to “day” (יום): “That day is a day of fury, a day of distress and anguish, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and supernatural darkness, a day of clouds and thick clouds, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the high battlements.”

119 In Jer 23:9ff, Yahweh extensively accuses and rebukes those prophets and priests who speak falsely in his name. In 23:34, he threatens to פָּקֵד the man—and his household—who presumes to claim falsely “the burden of Yahweh.”
dishonest weights?”—although there are textual difficulties here.\textsuperscript{120} 

Many interpreters note some relation between Yahweh’s slowness to anger and his forgiving yet visiting against (יִשָּׂא) perpetrators of iniquity in Exod 34:6–7; to be sure, “slowness to anger” is a description of his patience, further elaborating on “a merciful and gracious God,” yet it also maintains the possibility of provocation and anger. The picture drawn by the temporal expressions within many of the יִשָּׂא passages, then, is of a God who has been patient and forbearing, but who is not unconcerned and certainly not unprovokable. When his patience is exhausted—with iniquity and with impunity (“weary of relenting”)—he will visit-in-punishment. Many passages warn that that day is coming, is near, or has come.

The prophetic vocation itself and the prophets’ oracles are often closely associated with this notion of a period of delay or impunity preceding Yahweh’s יִשָּׂא. The prophets warn of Yahweh’s growing provocation and coming visitation. This likely explains the preponderance of יִשָּׂא and תֵּפָּד passages within the prophetic corpus.\textsuperscript{121} In some texts, this association is explicitly stated:

I will visit-in-punishment against [Jehoiakim, king of Judah] and against his seed and against his servants for their iniquity, and I will bring against them and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem and against the men of Judah all the disaster which I threatened (דבר) against them—but they would not listen. (Jer 36:31)

The prophetic oracles against the nations also pronounce the coming visitation of Yahweh, and these oracles likewise become the “script” when Yahweh acts to יִשָּׂא:

When 70 years are completed, I will visit-in-punishment against (יִשָּׂא) the king of Babylon and against (יִשָּׂא) that nation, declares Yahweh, for their iniquity, and against

\textsuperscript{120} Here, reading Mic 6:10–11 with the emendations suggested by BHS note. Leslie C. Allen, \textit{The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah}, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 375n53, explains, “MT ha’ish, apparently ‘is there?’ (cf. 2 Sam 14:19), is generally regarded as a product of a form defectively written either for ha’eśšā’, “can I bear” (Duhm), or for ha’esheh, “can I forget” (Wellhausen), which thus secures an expected parallelism with the next line.” Thus also ESV, NIV, and Bruce K. Waltke, \textit{A Commentary on Micah} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 394, 397–98.

\textsuperscript{121} In the Pentateuch, punitive יִשָּׂא and תֵּפָּד appear 8x and 1x, respectively. The Writings contain one use (יִשָּׂא in Job 36:23). All other occurrences are in the Prophets (52x), the majority of these in Jeremiah (29x).
Thus, Micah can place the day of Yahweh’s punishing visitation (יום פקdea) appositionally alongside “the day of [Israel’s] watchmen” (يوم מצפי, Mic 7:4), since it is “Yahweh’s prophets [the watchmen] who have declared the very disaster which is ‘now’ taking place.”

Just as the prophets assume and point forward to Yahweh’s act of פקד על as an abrupt endpoint punctuating a time of previous non-punishment, so also OT descriptions of the attitudes among the people and among the prophets’ opponents evidence such a period of delay and impunity. In several of the פקד על passages, the mindset—typical words or thoughts—of the audience is explicitly indicated. The visitation threatened in Jer 5:9 is upon those who have spoken falsely of Yahweh and have said “He will do nothing.” No evil will come upon us, and we shall not see sword or famine” (Jer 5:12). The visitation threatened in Jer 21:14 is upon those who say, “Who can come down against us, or who can enter our place of refuge?” (Jer 21:13). Those threatened with Yahweh’s visitation in Zeph 1:8, 9, and 12 are described in v. 12 as saying in their hearts, “Yahweh will not do good, nor will he do harm.” False prophets are threatened with visitation-in-punishment in Jer 23:12 and 34 because they “keep on saying to those who despise the word of Yahweh, ‘There will be peace for you,’ and to everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, they say, ‘Disaster will not come upon you’” (Jer 23:17).

122 Hans Walter Wolff, Micah: A Commentary, trans. Gary Stansell, CC (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), 207. Delbert R. Hillers, Micah: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Micah, HCS (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 84, dismisses the MTךָמצפי“(your spies, lookouts)” as “out of place in this context.” However, Wolff’s explanation of the MT is perfectly coherent. On מצפה as prophetic watchman, see Isa 21:6, as well as Jer 6:17; Ezek 3:17; 33:2, 6, 7; Isa 52:8; and Hos 9:8.

123 The first statement here in Hebrew is לא הוא, which might also be rendered, “It is not he,” “He is not [does not exist],” “This is not [so].” The ESV, NIV, and NRSV all translate: “He will do nothing.”

124 Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, Amos, AB 24A (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 230, describe this same attitude among Amos’ hearers, against whom Yahweh threatens his punishing visitation (פקdea) twice in ch. 3: “Complacency is one of the evils he attacks (4:1; 6:1, 6). The postponement of the day of reckoning
Most significant for the present argument is not the fact that Yahweh visits against those who hold such attitudes, but rather that such attitudes are portrayed as having developed prior to Yahweh’s act of פקד על. Yahweh’s forbearance, apparently for some significant amount of time (generations?), has led to the perception that Yahweh does not pay attention to or punish iniquity. Yahweh’s פקד על, on the other hand, occurs not merely out of pent up anger and impatience (although these are certainly in view), but also in order to remove this false perception. This is explicitly so in Jer 44:28–29, where Yahweh declares to the Judean fugitives in Egypt who have made vows and offerings to the Queen of Heaven:

Those who escape the sword will return from the land of Egypt to the land of Judah, few in number, and the whole remnant of Judah who went to sojourn in Egypt will know whose word stands, mine or theirs. And this will be the sign for you, declares Yahweh, that I am about to visit-in-punishment against you in this place, in order that you may know that my words will surely stand against you for harm.

5.2.5. Implications for the Scholarly Discussion of פקד על and Exodus 20:5 and 34:7

Before offering concluding proposals regarding the meaning and use of פקד על, it will be useful to pause and briefly relate the foregoing contextual analysis to the studies of Koch, Scharbert, André, and Lübbe outlined at the beginning of the chapter.

Klaus Koch’s thesis that the OT has neither a doctrine of retribution nor a verb or noun for punishment does not stand up to the data regarding the usage of פקד על and פקד. First, the texts which Koch cites to demonstrate that פקד means Yahweh “allowing a sinful action to home in on” the perpetrator are all Pattern 1 texts, which contain an explicit iniquity term as the direct object of פקד;¹²⁵ his gloss makes no sense for Pattern 2 examples which do not contain an iniquity term in the syntax. Second, the verbs associated with Yahweh’s פקד על overwhelmingly portray a

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¹²⁵ See Koch, “Is There a Doctrine of Retribution?” 65, 67, 73, where he discusses Hos 12:3, Hos 4:9, and Ps 89:33 [Eng 89:32], respectively.
more direct involvement of Yahweh in the process of “bringing consequences” than merely superintending a self-standing moral order like a mid-wife guides a birth.\textsuperscript{126} Third, in particular, the association of Yahweh’s פקד על with verbs of intense negative personal regard (opposition, reproach, rejection, etc.), along with its close association with jealousy and anger, do not fit comfortably into Koch’s model. To fold such personal passion, personal provocation, and personal opposition into a vision of Yahweh merely superintending the semi-automatic operations of an Act-Consequences-Construct, as Koch and other attempt, does not do justice to the biblical texts.\textsuperscript{127} Fourth, a review of the types of calamity visited-in-punishment upon the recipients does not support the notion that these are all consequences which materially grow out of the offending action like a plant from a seed.\textsuperscript{128} Josef Scharbert raised this same objection, noting the prevalence of destruction and death as the result or content of Yahweh’s פקד: “Der Tod is dann aber kaum die von selbst, schicksalhaft, eintretende Folge der ‘Übeltat’, wie K. Koch annimmt, sondern doch wohl die Todesstrafe, die Gott verhängt und auch vollzieht bzw.

\textsuperscript{126} The rejection of Koch’s position here is focused solely on this misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the meaning of פקד על. This is not to deny that the OT elsewhere contains the principle which Koch lays out, that deeds often set in motion their own fitting consequences. Nor is it intended to deny that Yahweh’s punishment is often shaped in a way which is most appropriate to the provoking sin (the talionic principle).

\textsuperscript{127} In support of this claim, consider the reflections on the relation between divine wrath and historical disasters in C. H. Dodd, \textit{The Epistle of Paul to the Romans} (London: Fontana Books, 1959), 47–50. Dodd insists that NT language of divine “wrath” has in view “an inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe,” an understanding much like that of Koch. Dodd emphasizes, however, that, finally, such an understanding of the “inevitable results of sin” pushes against the notion of God burning with or acting in anger and helps us to move away from such biblical imagery: “In the long run we cannot think with full consistency of God in terms of the highest human ideals of personality and yet attribute to Him the irrational passion of anger.” Opposing the views of Koch and Dodd, and more closely aligned with the contextual data examined in the present study, is Leon Morris, \textit{The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross}, 3rd ed. (London: Tyndale, 1965), 152: “While disaster is regarded as the inevitable result of man’s sin, it is so in the view of the Old Testament not by some inexorable law of an impersonal Nature, but because a holy God wills to pour out the vials of His wrath upon those who commit sin. Indeed, it is largely because wrath is so fully personal in the Old Testament that mercy becomes so fully personal, for mercy is the action of the same God who was angry, allowing His wrath to be turned away,” cited in Tony Lane, “The Wrath of God as an Aspect of the Love of God,” in \textit{Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God}, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 150.

\textsuperscript{128} Patrick Miller, \textit{Sin and Judgment in the Prophets: A Stylistic and Theological Analysis}, SBLDS 27 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), affirms this point in his critique of Koch: Yahweh’s punishment often \textit{corresponds} to the offending act, but that does not necessarily mean that it grows automatically from the act as its \textit{consequence}. 

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Fifth, the instrumental expressions contained in these contexts do not match with Yahweh’s act of פַּקְדָּה as fundamentally one of guiding, ensuring, or initiating the process of an act-consequence continuum. Yahweh does not guide or ensure “with sword, with famine, with pestilence,” nor with “fire”—and certainly not “with Nebuchadnezzar’s hand.” He employs these instruments to punish. Finally, the way in which Yahweh’s פַּקְדָּה is tied to a temporal framework in which a decisive, sudden, future act of Yahweh is envisioned (“the day of פַּקְדָּה”) does not correspond with Koch’s picture of Yahweh initiating and superintending an ongoing, natural process. One wonders how Koch’s model would be applied to the precise specification, “When seventy years are completed, I will פַּקְדָּה Babylon.”

The contextual analysis above weighs firmly against Koch’s framework, at least as an interpretation of the expression פַּקְדָּה. It likewise stands against the Koch-like “natural process” explanations of Exod 20:5 and 34:7 found in many commentaries. It also indicates that Koch overlooked at least one verbal construction and at least one noun—פקד and פַּקְדָּה—in his claim that the OT has no words for punish or punishment.

Over against Koch, Scharbert consistently affirms at least the implication of Yahweh’s

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130 Scharbert, “Verbum PQD,” 290. Scharbert also critiques Koch on this point, citing Ps 89:33 and observing that Koch would have to understand this as something like Yahweh “putting the sins into effect with sticks and blows”—a sense which “ist wohl nicht gut möglich.”
131 Franz, Barmherzige und Gnädige Gott, 142, suggests that this sense of sudden, situation-changing action inheres in the root הָפַךְ itself; it is “ein zeitlich begrenzter Vorgang … welche die Situation plötzlich verändert.” Again on p. 145: “Das Wort הָפַךְ meint einen einmaligen und plötzlichen Vorgang.… Es ist nicht auf Dauer angelegt” (author’s emphasis).
132 Even a rendering such as “I bring the consequences of the sin of those who hate me upon their sons” leans too heavily on Koch and reads too much into פַּקְדָּה. This is the wording of the Translator’s Old Testament (TOT) as cited in Osborn and Hatton, A Handbook on Exodus, 474. Similarly Jacob, Second Book of the Bible, 555, “A father who felt that God might ‘let the guilt of the fathers affect his children’ incurred a wholesome warning.”
133 To these could be added the verb נָקֵם (“avenge, punish”) and the noun נָקֶמֶת (“vengeance, punishment”). See Peels, The Vengeance of God, 265, who concludes, “In general, the root NQM can be paraphrased as punishing, justified retribution. Thereby, NQM is characterized as one of the terms that belongs to the terminological field describing the thought of retribution.” These are often associated with פַּקְדָּה and נָקֵם (Jer 5:9, 29; 9:8 [Eng 9:9]; cf. Jer 11:20, 22; 50:15, 18; 51:36, 44), and the frequent translation of both פַּקְדָּה and נָקֵם with ἐκδίκησις in the LXX further attests their close semantic association.
punishing acts as a component part of לֹא מָסַר in contexts of iniquity. However, the contextual analysis presented above also serves to qualify the influential approach of Scharbert. By advocating the Grundbedeutung of מָסַר as the key to unlocking its sense in these passages, Scharbert speaks as if לֹא מָסַר “really” means, or first means, to “inspect or examine” sinners or, to a lesser extent, to “entrust (iniquity with authority/detriment) over” sinners. Here, etymology pushes Scharbert to foreground meaning(s) which the contextual analysis of מָסַר does not identify as present in these contexts. Scharbert’s way of describing לֹא מָסַר in these passages, then, including Exod 20:5 and 34:7, is guilty of what James Barr has branded the “root fallacy.”¹³⁴ Scharbert wrote his essays just prior to Barr’s famous monograph and thus is more excusable in this approach than the many scholars who continue to follow his lead.

A number of factors have been identified and discussed above which point toward “punish” or “visit-in-punishment” rather than “inspect, examine” as the meaning of מָסַר which is active in these contexts. Yahweh’s לֹא מָסַר takes place because of iniquity and according to iniquity, not in order to investigate or examine iniquity; it takes place after Yahweh’s anger has been provoked, not in order to examine a situation to see if anger is warranted; it carries out a punitive sentence which has already been decreed and is the decisive motion and moment of its enactment. It is carried out with instruments of punishment, not with instruments of investigation. The opposed alternatives of forgiving, leaving unpunished, and relenting contrast more directly with punishing than with investigating. These contrasting alternative actions also clarify that מָסַר in these contexts does not mean “to deal with” iniquity in a generic sense, with only a contextual connotation of punishment. Iniquity can be “attended to” and “dealt with” by forgiving it as well as by punishing it, but מָסַר never means to forgive but always to take

action towards sin which is the active expression of not forgiving it, that is, to punish. In particular, Yahweh’s lament that he is “weary of relenting” (Jer 15:6) as an explanation of his פקד על (Jer 15:3) makes perfect sense as a growing dissatisfaction with sin’s impunity, but less sense as a growing dissatisfaction with sin’s non-investigation. Furthermore, when Yahweh declares in Exod 32:34 that he will פקד על the people’s iniquity in the day of his פקד, this can hardly be a commitment to take notice of, investigate, or test. Before this and twice just after this, Yahweh makes clear that he has already taken note of and examined their iniquity: “I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiff-necked people” (Exod 32:9; cf. 33:3, 5). He has already tested them in the narrative (נסה, Exod 15:25; 16:4; 20:20), and they have been found wanting (16:28; 32:7–8). With the statement in 32:34 that one day he will פקד על their iniquity, then, Yahweh does not warn that he will later inspect or test their iniquity, but rather that he will visit-in-punishment against them because of it.

In the single text (Zeph 1:12) which sets Yahweh’s “searching” alongside his וּפְקַד, the searching is prior to the וּפְקַד; the searching serves to locate those who will then be punished (וּפְקַד). In the two passages (Jer 9:6 [Eng 9:7]; 11:20) which set Yahweh’s “testing” alongside his וּפְקַד, this is a punitive smelting-with-fire, a “testing” which comes not to discover sin, but as its negative sanction.

Scharbert’s approach has been helpful in ameliorating the moral offense of Exod 20:5 and 34:7: Yahweh conducts an “inspection” in order to determine whether the descendants are in solidarity with the fathers and presumably takes punitive action only against those who are

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135 Levinson, Legal Revision, 54n54, charges that Scharbert ignores sound philology on this point and “thereby evades the problem of theodicy.” Levinson, 54n54, 84–88, sees the same motivation at work in the paraphrases of the targumim: “By means of their additions, the postbiblical interpreters responsible for Onqelos have God restrict the punishment so that only the guilty, never the innocent, are punished… The actual goal seems to be less to offer an admonition than to rewrite the text in such a way as to eliminate, ex post facto, any notion that the Decalogue might espouse a patently unjust doctrine.” It should be noted, however, that on this point the targumim paraphrase is based on an element which is present in the context of Exod 20:5 (“for those who hate me”), whereas Scharbert reads an assumed “root meaning” into the verb פקד which is not present in this context.
determined to be in solidarity with the mindset and behavior of their sinful fathers. Its usefulness is attested by the many commentators who echo Scharbert’s claim that reading the bare concept “punish” here for וַיִּפְקַד is a misrepresentation or inappropriate constriction of this “prägnant” verb, which contains in its bones notes of inspection and investigation.\footnote{Scharbert, “Verbum PQD,” 292.} Scharbert and his followers are concerned to avoid the impression that Yahweh’s punishing involves a blind rage against the people involved, asserting instead that it always takes for granted that their iniquity would first be determined through “Nachprüfen.”\footnote{Scharbert, “Verbum PQD,” 292.} I would concur that neither the OT in general nor these Exodus texts in particular portray God’s punishment as a blind rage. However, the justice-guaranteeing “examination” which Scharbert wants to find here does not inhere in the contextual meaning of the expression וַיִּפְקַד in the passages examined above.

Gunnel André’s thesis that פֹּקַד expresses Yahweh’s act of “determining the destiny” must be severely qualified or rejected in light of the preceding contextual analysis. The action of פֹּקַד in these passages does not merely declare or determine the fate of those affected (that is, to “pronounce judgment on”\footnote{André, *TDOT* 12:57–58, repeatedly translates וַיִּפְקַד as “pronounce judgment on” or “pronounce judgment over.” André’s own application of this understanding to specific texts reveals the inherent logical problems. She writes: “Three times we read that after seventy years Yahweh will pronounce judgment.” Later in the same paragraph: “The people will be taken to Babylon, where they will remain until Yahweh pronounces a positive judgment on them.” Such a phrasing seems to miss the fact that Yahweh has already “pronounced judgment” against Babylon, and “pronounced a positive judgment” for his people, all of this seventy years *in advance*. What will occur after seventy years is not Yahweh’s “pronouncing” but rather his long-promised “visiting-in-punishment against” (לְמַעַן) Babylon and his “visiting-in-salvation” on behalf of his people (לְמַעַן). In some sense, André seems to recognize this, since the same paragraph says that the king of Babylon and his people will be “punished with destruction” and that the result of Yahweh “pronouncing a positive judgment” will be the return of his people to Jerusalem. But this only invites the question of why André associates פֹּקַד with pronouncing or declaring in these contexts at all, rather than associating it with these concrete acts of punishment and rescue.} them); rather, it actually effects this fate.

Finally, contextual analysis of וַיִּפְקַד strongly supports the existence of the third semantic domain which Lübbe assigns to פֹּקַד: “Events of punishment and reward,” with the possible
glosses “punish, cause to suffer the consequences, chastise.” However, as is argued and demonstrated above, such a meaning is more closely tied to the collocation פקד על than Lübbe recognizes.

5.2.6. Concluding Observations: פקד על as Visit-in-Punishment

In the preceding, I have suggested that פקד על functions consistently as a set collocation with the idiomatic meaning of Yahweh visiting-in-punishment, a proposal which the analysis of its OT contextual usage has confirmed. The expression פקד על is not a cipher for the natural or self-emerging consequences of sinful acts playing out against the sinner or his descendants, nor is it a reference to Yahweh’s providential, hidden management of such an ongoing moral order. The expression פקד על in the OT does not primarily relate to Yahweh’s “inspection, examination, or testing” with respect to iniquity, nor to his “noticing, giving attention to, or dealing with” iniquity in a general sense. Yahweh’s פקד על is his divine, decisive bringing of devastation or death against someone, in punitive repayment of iniquity. This punishment overturns a situation of impunity following a period of apparent divine inaction, inattention, or absence. In light of this, it is probably best rendered in English as “visit-in-punishment.”

Here, it might be objected that, if the contextual usage of פקד על consistently depicts acts of punishment, then “punish” should be a sufficient equivalent. Is not the retention of “visit” in the translation vulnerable to the same charge of “root fallacy” which was leveled against other positions above? I have rejected glosses such as “investigate” or “test” as fallacious because the suggested root meaning does not turn out to be well-fitted to the actual contexts in which פקד על is used. However, the regular contextual use of פקד על as an act of punishment which overturns a situation of impunity following a period of apparent divine inaction, inattention, or absence does seem to assume and to activate certain connotations of פקד grounded in its non-punitive uses. In this respect, other uses of בדajs such as “go to see someone, pay someone a visit” (e.g. Samson
visiting his wife in Judg 15:1) or as “come to aid or rescue” (e.g. God visiting Israel in Egypt in Exod 4:31) may be significant in coloring the punitive acts depicted by פקד על. Such uses, which correspond well with the English word “visit,” connote a sense of *personal arrival and presence* and support the sense of Yahweh’s punishment *bringing to a close a period of inaction or inattention*.

The uses of פקד for Yahweh visiting people with help and rescue are particularly significant in this regard. A striking aspect of Yahweh’s פקד-visitations in the OT is its radical polarity: visiting (פקד) to graciously rescue his people in need or visiting (פקד על) to catastrophically punish iniquity and avenge wrong. The use of פקד in such diametrically related senses invites a comparison of the divine actions associated with Yahweh’s *saving* פקד-actions alongside the actions associated with Yahweh’s *punishing* פקד-actions. A final table in Appendix 2, Table J, represents the contextual analysis of the 15 passages depicting Yahweh’s *saving* פ куд and yields the following observations. First, in these passages, Yahweh’s acts of פקד drastically reverse or overturn a long-standing situation in favor of the recipient of his visitation (the barren conceive and bear sons, the famished are given food, the enslaved are set free, the exiled are returned). Second, such actions are often expressed as words of promise for the future (e.g., Gen 50:24; Jer 27:22), as being carried out in accordance with a previous promise from Yahweh (e.g., Gen 21:1–2), or as both (Jer 29:10). Third, Yahweh’s rescuing פקד is often set alongside verbs of remembering (זכור, compare 1 Sam 1:17–20 and 2:20–21) or verbs of “turning toward, regarding, and seeing” (שבה, 복, ראה). Each of these observations contributes to a picture of Yahweh’s פקד as coming on the heels of a period of hardship and previous divine inactivity or inattention, and ending it. This dynamic is explicit and pronounced in Isa 23:15–17, where Yahweh’s restoring

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“visitation” is portrayed in terms of remembering after seventy years of forgetting:

In that day, Tyre will be forgotten (שׁכח) for seventy years, like the days of a single king. At the end of seventy years, it will be for Tyre like the song of the harlot: “Take a harp! Go all about the city, O forgotten (שׁכח) harlot! Play it well! Sing many songs—so that you may be remembered (זכור)!” And at the end of seventy years, Yahweh will visit (פקד) Tyre, and she will return to her hire and she will play the harlot with all the kingdoms of the earth upon the face of the earth.

Along with this connotation of פקד as action or attention bringing to a close a period of inaction or inattention, the use of פקד within the punitive idiom פֶּרֶשׁ לִי may also suggest that punishment is carried out in a context of personal arrival and presence (which itself suggests bringing to close a period of real or perceived absence). Just as Samson visits (IFn) his estranged wife by going to her father’s house, intending to go in (בוא) to where she is, so also Yahweh arises (שׁת, Zeph 3:8), goes forth (צא, Isa 26:21), and comes (חפ, Isa 13:5) as he visits against (שׁחר) people in punishment. Weinfeld notes that personal presence is one of the most pervasive semantic components of פׁשׂ: “The vast majority of the usages of pqd … involve attention bestowed on someone in his presence.” Even Koch speaks of פׁשׂ as “God’s chastening advent” and as his “theophanic chastisement.”

In support of the root פָּשִׂ connoting divine presence in פֶּרֶשׁ לִי contexts, it is interesting that both Scharbert and André associate Yahweh’s פָּשִׂ with the metaphor of a great king’s punitive military expedition (Strafexpedition). A vassal ruler has withheld tribute or rebelled. Though his guilt is notorious, the vassal may get away with this for a time. Yet at some point the season of campaigning comes, the royal armies march, the great king’s banners appear at the city gates,

140 Weinfeld, Deuteronomy 1–11, 278 (my emphasis).
141 Klaus Koch, “ʿawōn,” TDOT 10:553 (my emphasis).
142 Scharbert, “Verbum PQD,” 291. André, Determining the Destiny, 237–38, “The judge is YHWH as king and military commander. YHWH of hosts comes to court with an army summoned from a distant land, from the end of the heavens. He goes out of his place and descends in the cloud.… The session opens on the day of pqquddah” (author’s emphasis). Oddly, while affirming this metaphor, neither Scharbert nor André accent personal presence as a key connotation from the root פָּשִׂ in punitive פֶּרֶשׁ לִי contexts, instead stressing “investigate, examine” and “determine, declare the destiny” as the core contributions of the root.
and rebellion is redressed. This is the day of “visitation.”

Lübbe also offers some reflection on the connection between divine presence and divine פַּקה, particularly in texts which speak of Yahweh’s *rescuing* visitation. Lübbe groups his first two semantic domains for פַּקה as: “(a) event of association: visit, go and see someone, pay a call on someone” and “(b) event of thinking: be concerned, pay attention, take notice.” His footnotes indicate, however, that he associates both meanings of divine פַּקה with Yahweh’s presence. As he ponders which of these is the most appropriate domain for those texts in which Yahweh brings people aid and rescue (e.g., Sarah in Gen 21:1, Israel in Exod 4:31), Lübbe notes:

> It is uncertain whether [these] should be retained as a clear reflection of ancient anthropomorphic thinking, or whether the meaning of such occurrences is better defined in terms of meaning (b). The latter is apparently preferred, on most occasions, in more modern renderings…. If פַּקה, ‘visit’, has developed as a technical term denoting God’s entering the human scene, it will be necessary to distinguish between ‘visit’ that describes an event of association (our meaning (a)) and ‘visit’ for the purpose of helping or punishing the person to whom God comes. This latter event may be better defined as an event of linear movement, specifically of (God’s) coming to a person in order to help or punish that person.143

For the Exodus פַּקה texts (rescuing in 3:16; 4:31; and 13:19; punishing in 20:5; 32:34; and 34:7), this connotation of divine arrival and presence (in rescue and in retribution) is considerably reinforced by the dynamics and theological emphases of the surrounding narrative.

Thus, while contextually ill-fitted root meanings of פַּקה should not be squeezed into the meaning of פָּקַד, the contextual characteristics of פָּקַד discussed above are well-matched with the פָּקַד connotations of personal arrival and presence and bringing to a close a period of inaction or inattention. To capture the notion of an act of divine punishment which is nuanced in these ways, the English expression visit-in-punishment is useful, since the word “visit” assumes a prior absence, perhaps for some time, and expresses personal arrival, presence, and attention. Think of a doctor making “visits.” English “visit” also corresponds to פָּקַד in other respects. As

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with the dynamic of פקד על discussed above, the word “visit” connotes a momentary intervention into the regular, ongoing state of affairs. Finally, because of the influence of the Bible on English, the language of “visiting” with calamities against sinners suggests a distinctively divine action, which corresponds with the nearly exclusive use of פקד על for the punitive acts of Yahweh in the OT. Thus, I have generally rendered פקד על as visit-in-punishment. Reading Exod 20:5 in this sense, we could translate, woodenly: “visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of the fathers against the sons, against the third and the fourth generations, with respect to those who hate me.” In somewhat smoother English and perhaps with greater semantic precision: “visiting the sons, even the third and the fourth generations, in punishment for the iniquity of the fathers.”

It is for such reasons that English Bibles, following the Vulgate (visitare) have often rendered פקד על, which describes a punishing action of Yahweh, with the verb visit. The traditional German rendering of heimsuchen carries similar associations and achieves a similar semantic effect. The strategies for rendering פקד על in the LXX are particularly illuminating, in this and a number of other respects, and an excursus on that topic will conclude this chapter.

5.3. Excursus: The Rendering of פקד על in the Septuagint

The translation of the collocation פקד על in the LXX generally supports the conclusion that פקד על functions in contexts of iniquity as a consistent idiom for “visiting-in-punishment.” The notion of acting-in-punishment is the primary meaning, but the picture of divine arrival and presence (“visiting”) proper to פקד is also connoted. Thus, the LXX supports my argument that פקד in such contexts should not be primarily or “literally” associated with an act of seeing, giving attention to, showing concern for, examining, or inspecting—but rather with a concrete, decisive,

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144 One hears, “It’s a nice place to visit, but I wouldn’t want to live there.” If a grandmother comes for a few days from out of town, that is a “visit.” If she plans to stay for a few months, one would probably not say, “My grandmother is visiting us,” but rather, “…is staying with us for a while.”
sometimes long-threatened act of punishing.

5.3.1. Four Greek Verbs Rendering הַעַל in the LXX

Within the LXX, four Greek verbs occur more than once as renderings of הַעַל in such contexts: ἀποδίδωμι, ἐπάγω, ἐκδικέω, and ἐπισκέπτομαι. Three of these are frequently used in the sense of repaying for wrongdoing, punishing, or bringing harm upon. The fourth, ἐπισκέπτομαι, did not function in this punitive sense in secular Greek usage; yet precisely this fact suggests that the LXX translators regarded הַעַל as an idiomatic expression and sometimes woodenly maintained this Hebrew idiom in the Greek by rendering it with its standard translational stereotypes (ἐπισκέπτομαι for הַעַל, plus ἐπι for הַעַל).

5.3.1.a. ἀποδίδωμι

The LXX translates הַעַל with ἀποδίδωμι three times, all in the Pentateuch and each representing a nearly identical phrase: הַעַל עֹנֶה אֵב(ו)תּ על־בְּנֵי (ו)על־שְׁלֹשֶׁים (ו)על־רְבִיעָם (Exod 20:5; Deut 5:9; Num 14:18). BDAG defines ἀποδίδωμι in such a context as “to recompense, whether in a good or bad sense, render, reward, recompense.” In Lev 18:25, the LXX renders הַעַל

145 The LXX uses five other verbs one time each to render the expression הַעַל in contexts concerning iniquity. ἀνταποδίδωμι (“repay, requite,” Lev 18:25) is close in form and sense to the more frequent ἀποδίδωμι, discussed below. ἐπισκεπτόμαι (“bring upon,” Lev 26:16) is close in sense to the more frequent ἐπάγω, discussed below. In Isa 13:11, the LXX seems to read הַעַל in its alternative idiomatic sense of appointing, so that God declares his intent to “command (ἐντέλλομαι) evil for the whole world” (most English versions translate הַעַל here as “punish”; NJPS has “requisite”). In Job 36:23, the question is posed: “Who visits upon (הַעַל) God his way, and who says, You have done wrong?” Here, the LXX translates with ἐπίζητεω (“examine, test”), which conurs with Vulg. scrutor. Most English translations render Job 36:23 with “assign,” “prescribe,” or “appoint,” although NJPS has: “Who ever reproached him for his conduct?” The conclusions of the present study regarding the collocation הַעַל suggest a stronger, more hyperbolic translation than any of these: “Who visits-God-in-punishment for his ways?” Finally, הַעַל is translated ἐπιζητεῖω (“seek after”) in 2 Sam 3:8. This passage is the only instance of punitive הַעַל with a human agent, with Abner indignantly rebuking Ish-bosheth that he should “seek to charge” (punish?) Abner concerning indiscretions with one of Saul’s wives. My suggestion for a stronger rendering of “visit-in-punishment” for this instance is discussed above in footnote 82.

with the closely related verb ἀνταποδίδωμι (“repay, requite”). Ἀποδίδωμι and ἀνταποδίδωμι are the most common renderings for לָשׁוֹן הָעֵד in the Pentateuch; that the LXX employs them for לָשׁוֹן הָעֵד nowhere outside the Pentateuch is intriguing, especially in light of the frequent speculation that the Pentateuch served as a kind of lexicon for later LXX translators.\footnote{Emanuel Tov, “The Impact of the Septuagint Translation of the Torah on the Translation of the Other Books,” in The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 183–93. This assumption has been questioned and refined by James Barr, “Did the Greek Pentateuch Really Serve as a Dictionary for the Translation of the Later Books?” in Linguistics and Interpretation, Vol. 3 of The Bible and Interpretation: The Collected Essays of James Barr, ed. John Barton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 87–105.} The common LXX association of ἀποδίδωμι/ἀνταποδίδωμι with the verb ἐκδίκασθαι (“punish, avenge,” discussed below) and especially the noun ἐκδίκησις (“vengeance”) contributes to the conclusion that these verbs are functioning here in the same semantic field.\footnote{The LXX has the construction ἀποδίδομι ἐκδίκησιν (“execute/inflict vengeance”) in Num 31:3; Sir 66:15. Ἀνταποδίδομι is closely associated or paralleled with ἐκδίκασθαι in Deut 32:35; Sirach 35:20LXX=22NRSV; Jer 28:6LXX=51:6MT; Rom 12:19; and Heb 10:30. The theological and literary prominence of this connection is demonstrated by the close paraphrasing of Deut 32:35 in Rom 12:19 and again in Heb 10:30.}

5.3.1.b. Ἐπάγω

While the LXX renders לָשׁוֹן הָעֵד in Exod 20:5 and its echoes in Num 14:18 and Deut 5:9 with ἀποδίδωμι, it translates לָשׁוֹן הָעֵד in Exod 34:7 (the nearest echo of the Exod 20:5 phrase) with ἐπάγω (“bring upon,” implying harm or punishment).\footnote{BDAG, 356, defines ἐπάγω as “to cause a state or condition to be or occur, bring on, bring something upon someone, mostly something bad.”} This alteration is likely occasioned not by a concern to differentiate the meaning of לָשׁוֹן הָעֵד in 34:7 from that in 20:5, but rather by the LXX rendering of לָשׁוֹן הָעֵד with ἐπάγω earlier in the golden calf episode (“I shall bring upon (ἐπάγω) them their sin,” Exod 32:34b), a translation which may itself have been shaped by the use of ἐπάγω in Exod 32:21 where it represents the Hiphil of סָר.\footnote{John William Wevers, Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus, SCS 30 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 538, commenting on the LXX of Exod 32:34, notes, “Exod has adopted the common rendering of ἐπισκέπτομαι for the root סָר for the first case but not for the second where he uses ἐπισκέπτομαι; for the latter note its occurrence in a similar context but with a different subject in v. 21.” Grossfeld, “Translation of Biblical Hebrew סָר,” 95, suggests that the LXX variance of Exod 34:7 (ἐπάγω) from Exod 20:5, Deut 5:9, and Num 14:18 (ἀποδίδομι) “may be attributed to
only in these two Exodus passages and four times in Isaiah (10:12; 24:21; 26:21; and 27:1), a book whose LXX translational style has often been associated with that of the Greek Pentateuch.151 Most commonly, ἐπάγω in the LXX renders the Hiphil of פקד על (55x). While the translator of Jeremiah never glosses פקד על with ἐπάγω, a number of Jeremiah passages closely relate פקד על (Hiphil) with פקד על, and thus closely relate ἐπάγω with other LXX terms for פקד על such as ἐκδικέω and ἐπισκέπτομαι (see Jer 11:22–23; 25:12–13; and 43:31LXX=36:31MT). This close semantic relationship is further reflected in the verbal connections between פקד על and an extensive variety of terms for the bringing of harm throughout the OT (see Table A in Appendix 2, found at the end of this chapter).

5.3.1.c. Ἐκδικέω

Most frequently, the LXX translates פקד על with ἐκδικέω (19x: 8 in Jeremiah and 11 in Hosea, Amos, and Zephaniah combined). Ἐκδικέω, in contexts of offense, means “to inflict appropriate penalty for wrong done…. punish, take vengeance for” something.152 The majority of the occurrences of Ἐκδικέω in the LXX render the Hebrew verb פקד (27x). Its use for פקד without על only in 1 Sam 15:2; Hos 8:13; and Hos 9:9. While lacking על, however, each of these expresses punishment with פקד, using an alternative Hebrew syntactical strategy to indicate the recipient of Yahweh’s visitation in punishment. In 1 Sam 15:2, the recipient of punishment is indicated by the noun acting as the subject of the offending deed within a relative clause. In Hos 8:13 and 9:9, the recipient of punishment is indicated by the third person plural pronominal suffix attached to “sins” (חטאות). In addition to translating פקד על and פקד על.

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152 BDAG, 300, definition 2. Gary Alan Chamberlain, The Greek of the Septuagint: A Supplemental Lexicon (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011), 51, suggests a sub-definition “2.b. punish, condemn,” to account for passages in which the offense is not mentioned in the syntax, but only the recipient of the punishment (that is, Pattern 2 constructions within the schema outlined within Chapter 4 of this study). Example passages include Jer 25:12 (translating פקד) and Ezek 7:7 (translating פקד).

153 Ἐκδικέω renders פקד על in Hos 1:4; 2:15; 4:9; 12:3; Amos 3:2; 14 (twice); Zeph 1:8, 9, 12; 3:7; Jer 15:3; 23:2; 23:34; 25:12; 26:25LXX=46:25MT; 27:18LXX=50:18MT; 28:44, 52LXX=51:44, 52MT. Elsewhere, Ἐκδικέω renders פקד without על only in 1 Sam 15:2; Hos 8:13; and Hos 9:9. While lacking על, however, each of these expresses punishment with פקד, using an alternative Hebrew syntactical strategy to indicate the recipient of Yahweh’s visitation in punishment. In 1 Sam 15:2, the recipient of punishment is indicated by the noun acting as the subject of the offending deed within a relative clause. In Hos 8:13 and 9:9, the recipient of punishment is indicated by the third person plural pronominal suffix attached to “sins” (חטאות). In addition to translating פקד על and פקד על.
employed in the sense of a visitation-in-punishment, the LXX most often translates with ἐκδίκησις (“punishment, vengeance”). Still, ἐκδικέω was clearly not regarded as the standard gloss for the verb פקד generally: only 22 of the of 304 occurrences of פקד appear as ἐκδικέω in the LXX.

In contrast, when we examine the correspondence between נקם and ἐκδικέω, a much tighter word linking obtains. Of the 36 occurrences of the verb נקם, the LXX translates 27 with ἐκδικέω, two with the cognate ἐκδικάζω (“avenge”), and one more with the cognate construction ἐξανίστημι ἐκδίκησιν (“raise up vengeance”). No other Greek verb is used more than once to render נקם, and each of these single-use verbs coheres closely in sense to “avenge.”

The close linkage between נקם and ἐκδικέω extends to cognate nouns as well: the masculine noun נקם is most frequently, and the feminine noun נקמה is always, translated by ἐκδίκησις, “vengeance, punishment.” In most regularly rendering our idiom פקד על with the verb ἐκδικέω, the standard verb for translating נקם, the LXX closely associates פקד על with the meaning of the Hebrew verb נקם, “take vengeance, punish.” A pointed example of such an association can be seen in Jer 50 (LXX 27). The Hebrew text decrees vengeance against Babylon using ב נקם (“take vengeance

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154 Jer 26:21LXX=46:21MT; 27:27LXX=50:27MT; Ezek 9:1; Hos 9:7; and Mic 7:4. In two other passages, נקם appears in the context of punishing visitation and is rendered with ἐπίσκεψις, a cognate noun of ἐπισκέπτομαι.

155 The LXX translates נקם with ἐκδικέω in Gen 4:15, 24; Exod 21:20(2x); 21; Lev 26:25; Num 31:2; Deut 32:43; Judg 15:7; 1 Sam 14:24; 18:25; 24:13; 2 Kgs 9:7; Pss 8:3; 98:8LXX=99:8 MT; Jer 5:9, 29; 9:9LXX=9:9 MT; 26:10LXX=46:10MT; 27:15LXX=50:15MT; 28:36LXX=51:36MT; Ezek 24:8; 25:12(2x); Nah 1:2(3x); with ἐκδικάζω in Lev 19:18 and Deut 32:43; and with the expression ἐξανίστημι ἐκδίκησιν in Ezek 25:15. In addition, three other passages in the LXX seem to read the Hebrew verb as נקם (translating with ἐκδικέω) where the MT has a similarly spelled but different verb: Joel 4:21 and Zech 5:3 (for נקם), and Nah 1:9 (for נקם).

156 These include ἀμύνομαι (“avenge oneself, repay,” Josh 10:13); ἀνταποδίδωμι (“recompense,” Judg 16:28); ποιέω κρίσιν (“execute judgment,” Isa 1:24); πολεμέω (“fight, do battle with,” Esth 8:13); and ἐκδιώκω (“chase away,” Ps 43:17LXX=44:17 MT). In Jer 15:15, the LXX alters the sense of the verse significantly and contains no rendering of the MT’s נקם.
against”) in v. 15 and a double expression of יָה יִפְס (“to visit-in-punishment against”) in v. 18. In the LXX, these differing expressions are translated identically (ἐκδικέω ἐπὶ in each case) and thus equated.

5.3.1.d. Ἐπισκέπτομαι

The final verb frequently used in the LXX to render יָה יִפְס is Ἐπισκέπτομαι (13x: 11 in Jeremiah and once each in Hosea and Zechariah). While only 13 of the 50 occurrences of the collocation יָה יִפְס are translated with Ἐπισκέπτομαι, this verb is a standard translational equivalent (stereotype) for the Hebrew verb יִפְס in general: 112 of the 127 LXX instances of Ἐπισκέπτομαι translate יִפְס, and Grossfeld notes that the LXX employs forms of Ἐπισκέπτομαι as equivalencies for words in the יִפְס group in 56% of their occurrences. It appears that, by the time of the LXX, the translation of יִפְס by Ἐπισκέπτομαι “has become a cliché.”

It is further illustrative here to observe the broad use of Ἐπισκέπτομαι terms in translating the noun form of יִפְס. The multivalent noun יִפְס is rendered by a variety of Greek terms: ἐκδίκησις (“vengeance”), καθίστημι (“put in charge”), ἐγγειρέω (“put into someone’s hands”), ἀριθμός (“number”), προστάτης (“officer”), and ἄρχων (“ruler”). In addition to these, however, the LXX employs a broad array of words all related to Ἐπισκέπτομαι in order to convey meanings of יִפְס: Ἐπίσκεψις as “punishing visitation” (Jer 11:23; 23:12), Ἐπίσκεψις as “oversight” (Num 3:36; 1 Chr 26:30), Ἐπίσκεψις as “counting, reckoning” (1 Chr 23:11; 24:3, 19), Ἐπισκοπή as “punishing visitation” (Num 16:29; Isa 10:3; Jer 10:14; 28:18LXX=51:18MT; 157 Grossfeld, “Translation of Biblical Hebrew יִפְס,” 85, “The Septuagint … employs Ἐπισκέπτεσθαι in the forms of Ἐπισκέπτομαι, Ἐπίσκεψις, Ἐπισκοπεῖ, Ἐπισκοπός, 199 times (56%) as the equivalency for PQD: 105 times with the meaning ‘to muster’, 30 times – ‘to look after/review/examine’, 29 times – ‘to punish’, 14 times – ‘to rule’, 12 times – ‘to seek/miss’, and 9 times – ‘to appoint.’”

158 Wevers, Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus, 205.

159 The LXX renders יִפָּס as ἐκδίκησις in Jer 26:21LXX=46:21MT; 27:27LXX=50:27MT; Ezek 9:1; Hos 9:7; Mic 7:4; as καθίστημι in Num 3:32; ἐγγειρέω in 2 Chr 23:18; as ἀριθμός in 2 Chr 17:14; 26:11; as προστάτης in 2 Chr 24:11; and as ἄρχων in Isa 60:17.
31:44LXX=48:44MT), ἐπισκοπή as “oversight” (Num 4:16; Job 10:12), ἐπισκοπή as “office” (Ps 108:8LXX=109:8MT), and ἐπίσκοπος as “overseer/watchman” (2 Kgs 11:18).

BDAG demarcates three meanings of ἐπισκέπτομαι: “to make a careful inspection…, to go to see a person with helpful intent…, to exercise oversight in behalf of.” These meanings account for the rendering of תֶּפֶן as ἐπισκέπτομαι in a variety of contexts, including instances of gracious divine visitation for provision or rescue (indeed the LXX translates all 16 of such passages with ἐπισκέπτομαι), but the BDAG definitions do not account for the selection of ἐπισκέπτομαι for תֶּפֶן in passages of divine punishment. That is, none of the BDAG meanings apply to the passages with the collocation יַעַנ תֶּפֶן in contexts of iniquity.

Chamberlain, in his supplemental LXX lexicon, remedies this situation with two further entries for ἐπισκέπτομαι, one of which is “5. visit with retribution, punish, repay.” This supplemental definition for ἐπισκέπτομαι coheres with the meanings of the other Greek translational equivalents for תֶּפֶן just discussed (ἀποδίδωμι, ἐπάγω, ἐκδικέω). However, as Chamberlain explicitly notes and as the absence of such a meaning from major lexicons of classical and Koine Greek indicates, secular Greek did not employ ἐπισκέπτομαι in this retributive, punitive sense. Thus, while ἐπισκέπτομαι does mean to “visit with retribution, punish” in these passages, it is important to note that it bears such meaning because of its translational relation to the Hebrew idiom יַעַנ תֶּפֶן which underlies it and toward which it is...

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160 And, more frequently, the Greek noun ἐπίσκοπος is employed to render another תֶּפֶן noun: דֶּפֶן, “commissioner, deputy, overseer” (Judg 9:28; Neh 11:9, 14, 22).

161 BDAG, 378, “1. to make a careful inspection, look at, examine, inspect…, w. acc.; “2. to go to see a pers. with helpful intent, visit τινά someone”; “3. to exercise oversight in behalf of, look after, make an appearance to help, of divine oversight (Gen 21:1; 50:24f; Ex 3:16; 4:31…).”

162 Chamberlain, Greek of the Septuagint, 70.

163 The absence of such a meaning from BDAG has been mentioned. LSI, 656–57 has only positive meanings (the visiting done by a friend, helper, or physician) or neutral meanings (regarding, inspecting, mustering) for ἐπισκόπω and ἐπισκέπτομαι. So also Johan Lust, Erik Eynikel, and Katrin Hauspie, Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint, rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2003), 233.
pointing. This claim is not uncontroversial, and requires further elaboration.

5.3.2. Stereotyping and the Translational Character of the LXX

How should we make sense of the following facts? First, normal Greek usage for ἐπισκέπτομαι did not include a sense of punishing. Second, the LXX most frequently renders the Hebrew idiom יָשָׁפֵל with Greek verbs meaning “to recompense,” “to bring harm,” and to “avenge, punish.” But, third, more than a quarter of the time and in identical contexts, the LXX selects ἐπισκέπτομαι to represent שָׁפֵל.

A common solution has been to take the translation of שָׁפֵל by punitive verbs such as ἀποδίδωμι, ἐπάγω, ἐκδίκεω as an extension or interpretation of the pure and basic meaning of שָׁפֵל, whose “original common denominator” is giving attention or care to something.164 In this view, the rendering of שָׁפֵל with ἐκδίκεω (“avenge, punish”), etc., displays a certain semantic looseness and translational freedom.165 Such a translation, some would maintain, masks the precise sense of the Hebrew source text. On the other hand, when employing ἐπισκέπτομαι for שָׁפֵל, both of which carry the sense of inspecting, visiting, or caring for something, the LXX is being more semantically disciplined and precise. Thus, just as some commentators on the

164 Gehman, “Ἐπισκέπτομαι,” 199, “Pāqād … has a wide range of meanings, all of which can be reduced to an original common denominator: ‘to attend with care.’” Here, Gehman cites approvingly from Speiser, “Census and Ritual Expiation,” 21.

165 Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, Invitation to the Septuagint (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 114, caution that “the characterization of a translation as literal or free … is not sufficiently precise to be useful” without further specificity in terms of the linguistic dimension(s) of the texts being thus evaluated. On this, see James Barr, The Typology of Literalism in Ancient Biblical Translations, MSU 15 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979). Here I use the terms to refer to the precision with which the Greek rendering reproduces, to a Greek reader, the semantic value of the Hebrew term. As I proceed, I will argue that the LXX translations of יָשָׁפֵל pursue two different strategies, both of which could be characterized as strict, but in different senses. The rendering ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπὶ seeks to strictly/literally represent the form of the Hebrew idiom יָשָׁפֵל, using the standard, stereotyped equivalents for each Hebrew word. The renderings ἀποδίδωμι ἐπὶ, ἐπάγω ἐπὶ, and ἐκδίκεω ἐπὶ, likewise strictly represent the Hebrew syntactical structure, yet in contrast to ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπὶ, these other renderings seek to strictly reproduce the semantic content of יָשָׁפֵל as “punish, recompense, bring harm upon.” Of course, this also means that there is a quality of freedom to both strategies. To translate with ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπὶ foregoes semantic precision in terms of the normal Greek usage of ἐπισκέπτομαι, while the other translations lose a strict representation of the Hebrew idiom in the source text, making it less certain to the reader that the LXX passage has יָשָׁפֵל behind it.
Hebrew text assert that in Exod 20:5, for example, פָּקַד “bedeutet nicht ‘strafen’, sondern prüfen, untersuchen, nachsehen,”166 so also Greek lexicons limit the definitions of ἐπισκέπτομαι (even in its LXX renderings of punitive ἔποιευ) to a sense chiefly governed by the action of giving attention or care to something. What BDAG and Lust do implicitly, by not mentioning any punitive sense of ἐπισκέπτομαι, Muraoka’s lexicon does explicitly, tucking the use of ἐπισκέπτομαι for divine punishment under the first definition of the word: “to take interest in, concern oneself with.”167 Under this definition, examples with God as subject—“and with punitive intent”—are listed first.

Such analyses, however, do not sufficiently take an interest in or concern themselves with the distinct characteristics of the paired collocation וב כל רいろ.168 As a result, the denotative sense which they cobble together for וב/ἐπισκέπτομαι sits awkwardly in these punitive passages. As demonstrated previously in this chapter by the contextual analysis of 59 passages with וב וב or the noun וב, the activity described by וב here is not primarily one of cognition (attention or concern), or even of the active display of attention or concern, but rather pointedly of active divine retribution: God bringing harm and acting to punish.

In Exod 32:34, for example, where the MT twice uses וב and the LXX renders the first with ἐπισκέπτομαι, the sense of וב/ἐπισκέπτομαι here can hardly be “in the day when I take notice of,” or “in the day when I examine,” or even “in the day when I give attention to in order to punish.” God has emphatically already taken note of and examined the people and their sin;

166 Schenker, Versöhnung und Widerstand, 85n156.
168 Ad hoc observations are sometimes made regarding the function of וב וב as an idiom for divine punishment in the OT: Joüon and Muraoka, §133.i (2:491); Williams, NIDOTTE 3:659. However, studies dedicated to the multivalence of וב or ἐπισκέπτομαι have consistently failed to note the character of וב וב as a distinct idiom. See, for example, Grossfeld, “Translation of Biblical Hebrew וב,” 84, who speaks of a “theological use” of וב meaning “to punish, avenge, accuse” but makes no mention of the construction וב וב in such passages, instead postulating developments in the meanings of the verb וב in the absolute.
that is the matter under discussion: “I have seen this people, and behold, they are a stiff-necked people” (Exod 32:8). Thus, God’s (admittedly cryptic) reply in Exod 32:34 must mean: “In the day when I punish...” or “In the day when I visit-in-punishment, I will bring calamity upon them for their sin.”

Likewise, it is awkward to crowd the meanings “take notice,” “care for,” or “examine” into the על passages in the Prophets. Consider, as one example, Jer 36:30–31:

Therefore, thus says Yahweh concerning Jehoiakim, the king of Judah: He shall not have anyone sitting on the throne of David, and his corpse shall be thrown out into the heat of the day and the frost of the night. Thus I will visit-in-punishment against him and his offspring and his servants because of their iniquity. I will bring upon them and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem and upon the men of Judah all the calamity which I have declared in threat to them, but they have not listened.

The meaning of על/ἐπισκέπτομαι in the middle of this passage can hardly be that God will “examine” the king and his sin, or that God will “take notice of” or “show concern for” the sin, or even “give attention to the king and his sin and so punish.” Examination and attention have already been given, so much so that God has repeatedly threatened coming punitive calamity. The semantic weight of על/ἐπισκέπτομαι here has to do with the actual coming of punishment, when God will visit the king, Jerusalem, and Judah in punishing acts, so that Jehoiakim’s corpse is cast out into the elements and the people of the land receive and experience the long-threatened calamity (רעה).

However, if the purpose of using ἐπισκέπτομαι was not to express the idea of care, concern, attention, or examination, then why was ἐπισκέπτομαι selected in translating these passages? If the translators of the LXX were familiar with על as a Hebrew idiom of active punishment (as the renderings ἀποδίδωμι, ἐπάγω, and ἐκδικέω suggest), it remains to be explained why they would sometimes render this idiom with ἐπισκέπτομαι, a Greek verb which does not carry such a meaning, selecting it instead of the more semantically proximate alternatives just mentioned.

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I propose that the use of ἐπισκέπτομαι in these passages is a case of translational stereotyping, a way of reproducing in Greek the distinct Hebrew idiom ‏פקד‏ plus ‏על‏ by selecting the stereotyped, clichéd translational term for each. Just as the English versions sometimes translate ‏על ‏פקד‏ with the more English-natural rendering “punish” but at other times retain the Hebrew idiom “visit (= ‏פקד‏) upon (= ‏על‏),” so also the LXX translators sometimes choose more Greek-natural renderings (ἀποδίδωμι, ἐπάγω, or ἐκδικέω) but at other times retain the Hebrew idiom as “ἐπισκέπτομαι (= ‏פקד‏) ἐπὶ (= ‏על‏).” The strict semantic sense of the expression, then, is to be discovered neither in a proper, original meaning for ἐπισκέπτομαι nor for ‏פקד‏, but rather in the contextual meaning of the Hebrew collocation ‏על ‏פקד‏ in situations of iniquity: “to visit-in-punishment (for iniquity) against (someone).”

Chamberlain describes a stereotypical translation as “an otherwise unparalleled meaning due to the translators’ aim consistently to translate the same Hebrew root with the same Greek word-group, regardless of the prior semantic range of the two sets of terms.” Rabin notes that this dynamic emerges less from any translational theory or philosophy and more from the practical nature of the task:

The choice [of a translational equivalent] is in actual fact not made anew every time…. Just as a large part of our sentences are practically automatic responses to certain recurring stimuli, so the translator soon uses words and phrases as responses to verbal stimuli rather than as acts of conscious choice. Practical experience shows that translators tend to render words mechanically by the receptor language term on which they hit first…. One of the sources for such automatic response translations, of course, is the way in which the translator has been taught either of his two languages.

Commenting on the translator of LXX Exodus, Perkins adds:

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169 Different scholars use different terminology to describe the concept of translational stereotyping. Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus*, 205, commenting on Exod 13:19, suggests, “The translation of the root ‏פקד‏ by ἐπισκέπτομαι … has become a cliché, and so here has taken on the meaning of ‏פקד‏; i.e. God not only watches over, but actively comes to his people in redemptive fashion, he visits them.”


For the most part … the translator sought to provide a word-for-word rendering. The terms ‘interlinearity’ or ‘isomorphism’ appropriately describe how the translator seems to have proceeded. Once he connected a Greek term semantically with a Hebrew term, he tended to continue with this equivalency, unless the context led him to gloss the source text in a different way.\textsuperscript{172}

In the LXX, then, such stereotyping was “from the outset … the rule rather than the exception.”\textsuperscript{173} While a number of scholars have emphasized the key role of the LXX Pentateuch in establishing such stereotyped associations, it is likely that the precedent even for these equivalents had been developing for some time prior.\textsuperscript{174} The strong stereotypical (Wevers: clichéd) relationship between רַעַשׁ and ἐπισκέπτομαι, discussed above, is present throughout the Greek OT, beginning in the LXX Pentateuch, most prominently in Numbers.\textsuperscript{175}

In the case of the LXX renderings of punitive לְשׁוֹנ expressions, the translators sometimes abandon stereotypical equivalents, choosing instead a Greek verb directly indicating recompense or punishment. At other times, however, the translators seem to follow the stereotyped associations as a technique by which to intentionally retain the Hebrew idiom. This latter approach was not occasioned by a translator’s ignorance of this common Hebrew expression, so


\textsuperscript{173} Emanuel Tov, “Did the Septuagint Translators Always Understand Their Hebrew Text?” in \textit{The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint} (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 216, “Many translators rendered all occurrences of a given Hebrew word, element (e.g. preposition), root or construction as much as possible by the same Greek equivalent (stereotyping). It is probably true to say that from the outset a tendency toward stereotyping was the rule rather than the exception.”

\textsuperscript{174} Tov, “Impact of the Septuagint,” 184.

\textsuperscript{175} Within the LXX Pentateuch, ἐπισκέπτομαι renders רַעַשׁ in Gen 21:1; 50:24, 25; Exod 3:16; 4:31; 13:19; 32:34; Exod 39:2; and 48 more times in the census, camp arrangement, and duties passages in Num 1–4 and 26. Grossfeld, “Translation of Biblical Hebrew רַעַשׁ,” 86, discusses the LXX translation of the many passages in Numbers in which רַעַשׁ is used in the sense of counting. He observes that in 4 of 114 such passages, the LXX translator uses ἀριθμέω/ἀριθμός, while in 105 of 114 passages the LXX renders ἐπισκέπτομαι/ἐπίσκεψις/ἐπισκοπέω. From this, Grossfeld concludes that the translator does not understand רַעַשׁ to mean “count” in most of these passages, since he is aware of a precise way to express counting in Greek (ἀριθμέω, etc.) but most commonly renders these passages with a Greek word which does not bear this meaning (ἐπισκέπτομαι, etc., which Grossfeld reads here as “to array, muster”). Here, Grossfeld overlooks translational stereotyping as an alternative and more probable explanation. The translator likely selected ἐπισκέπτομαι not for its semantic precision in rendering רַעַשׁ in these passages but simply because it was the ordinary translational stereotype for רַעַשׁ generally.
that he had no choice but to render the strange phrase woodenly. Instead, a stereotyped rendering of the phrase is given in order to alert the reader to, and to provide access for the reader back to, the original Hebrew idiom itself. In their introduction to the *New English Translation of the Septuagint*, Pietersma and Wright argue for “presupposing a Greek translation which aimed at bringing the Greek reader to the Hebrew original rather than bringing the Hebrew original to the Greek reader.” This tension in translation is always debated, especially for traditional, authoritative texts such as the Bible—and the LXX renderings of פקד על suggest that there was some concern for each “direction” within the LXX project—but because the LXX functioned originally as a *Greek* translation for Greek-speaking Jews with some familiarity with Hebrew, the preservation of Hebraic idioms within the Greek text made sense. The following description of the social, religious, and linguistic environment in which the LXX was produced stands as plausible, if somewhat speculative:

The Jew, however, who had no knowledge of Hebrew or Aramaic may have comprehended many passages of Hebraic Greek through his acquaintance with traditional interpretation and the language of the synagogue. Yet it has to be admitted that he would have had numerous difficulties in grasping the exact meaning. Moreover the Hellenic Jew, who still had some knowledge of the original languages of the Old Testament without being able to read them fluently may have preferred to read the LXX by frequent reference to the original. Moreover the translators had a high respect for the original text of Scripture, and their aim was to reproduce the sense of the Hebrew and Aramaic. In consequence, in many instances they wrote a Hebraic Greek and imposed on certain words a Semitic coloring.

The presence of Semitisms in the LXX and their labeling as such has been a matter of

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176 Barr, “Did the Greek Pentateuch Really Serve as a Dictionary?” 96, makes a simple but crucial observation: “The LXX translators were people who knew Hebrew.”


179 Gehman, “Ἐπισκέπτομαι,” 207.
extensive debate in Septuagint studies since the work of Adolf Deissmann and Albert Thumb at the close of the nineteenth century, and the anti-Deissmann reaction by scholars such as Gehman, quoted here, has itself been critiqued as swinging the pendulum too far back toward some kind of unique “Jewish Greek.” The assessment of Jobes and Silva strikes a helpful balance:

> It would be appropriate to describe the language of the LXX as Jewish Hellenistic Greek—but only for the same reasons it is appropriate to use such labels as Stoic Greek or journalistic English. These terms do not suggest that the ‘dialects’ in question possess a unique grammatical structure and that they should be isolated from their respective languages as a whole. Rather, we are merely recognizing that a given group has formed a community of sorts sharing distinctive interests and that these interests are sometimes reflected in its vocabulary (including idioms) and style.

Just as a word is sometimes brought from one language to another as a “loan word” (in English: taco, fiancée, and psalm), the wooden rendering of idiomatic expressions (such as “visit against” for punish) can be thought of as a “loan translation.” Jobes and Silva describe this as “the adoption of a foreign phrase by translating its constituent parts rather than by rendering the meaning of the whole phrase,” and they note that such combinations in the LXX “must have appeared odd or even confusing to Greek readers” but in some cases “became common among Greek-speaking Jews, including the early Christians.”

There are, for example, some scattered indications in the LXX manuscript tradition that the expression ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπὶ became increasingly familiar as a biblical idiom for punitive divine visitation during the Christian era.

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180 For a helpful overview of the issues, scholars, and trends, see Natalio Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Versions of the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 3–17. Marcos stresses the bilingual environment which produced both the Septuagint (Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek) and the secular papyri (Coptic and Greek) and which accounts for the strongly Semitic shaping of these documents, syntactically and semantically. “There is no evidence for spoken Jewish-Greek; instead there must have been a translation Greek in which some peculiar syntactic features emerged due to the source language” (16n52).


183 A quick perusal of the volumes of the Göttingen Septuagint indicates no variants shifting away from ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπὶ as a reading in punitive ἠπέπέπτυμα passages. In contrast, there does seem to have been some modest shifting toward the Hebraicism ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπὶ. Some LXX manuscripts as early as the 6th century substitute ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπὶ for ἀποδίδωμι ἐπὶ (Deut 5:9), for ἀνταποδίδωμι ἐπὶ (Lev 18:25), for ἐπισκέπτομαι (Lev 26:16), and especially for ἐπάγω ἐπὶ (Isa 10:12; 26:21).
Similarly, the renderings of punitive יָרֶשׁ as visitare super in the Vulgate, as heimsuchen an/auf/über in Luther’s Bible, and as visiting upon in the KJV reveal a familiarity with this Hebraic idiom among their target audiences and serve to perpetuate this familiarity among Latin, German, and English-speaking readers.

As a loan translation, then, both the verb יָרֶשׁ and the preposition על are woodenly rendered in the LXX expression ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπί. Pietersma notes that translational stereotyping often extended beyond “content words” such as verbs to impact the rendering of “structure words” as well:

For example, Hebrew articles, notae accusativi, infinitival prefix ה, personal pronouns (even when rendered superfluous by Greek inflection), pronominal suffixes, pleonastic pronouns and adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions are all regularly represented, whether or not such representation results in standard Greek usage.184

Thus, just as the Hebrew is remarkably consistent in the construction יָרֶשׁ (rather than, say, יָרֶשׁ) in marking punitive visitation, the LXX exhibits a remarkable consistency in employing ἐπί to render the על in these constructions.185

The use of ἐπί to mark the recipient of punishment remains consistent even in passages where יָרֶשׁ is rendered by ἔκδικέω or ἀποδίδωμι, which is syntactically unusual in each case. Greek usage indicates the recipient of vengeance with ἔκδικέω plus ἐκ,186 but the translators of


185 There are only four exceptions to this use of ἐπί in the passages rendered with ἀποδίδωμι, ἔπαγω, ἔκδικέω, and ἐπισκέπτομαι. Three times ועל is translated with accusative of recipient of punishment, rather than with ἐπί plus recipient (with ἔκδικέω in Jer 23:34; 25:12; and with ἐπισκέπτομαι in Jer 37:20LXX=30:20MT). In these cases, however, the iniquity being punished, which would normally be marked with the accusative, is not mentioned. Because no clarification is required between cause for punishment and the recipient of punishment, the accusative can be used here in an exceptional way to mark the recipient of punishment. In the fourth passage (Hos 12:2LXX=12:3MT), the iniquity being punished is placed within a prepositional phrase (ἐν = κατα, “according to his ways”), again freeing the accusative to be used to mark the recipient of punishment (τοῦ Ἰακοβ). BDAG, 301, notes, under the second definition of ἔκδικέω (“punish, take vengeance”), “with the person
these הַעֲשִׂי passages retain some feel of the Hebrew idiom by translating with ἐκδίκεω plus ἐπί. In his study on Hebraic influence in the syntax of the Septuagint, Helbing regards the use of ἐπί with ἐκδικεῖν when rendering יִשָׁר as occasioned by the Hebrew Grundlage, that is, as a Hebraicism, and he notes that he has been unable to locate any uses of ἐκδικέω with ἐπί in secular Greek texts outside of the LXX. In the same way, each of the three LXX instances of ἀποδίδωμι for יִשָׁר mark the recipient of recompense with ἐπί plus accusative. Apart from these three passages, no other use of ἀποδίδωμι in the LXX or NT employs ἐπί to mark the recipient of the repaying act, utilizing instead the dative without preposition for this purpose. In fact, of the four Greek verbs most commonly used to render יִשָּׁר, only the use of ἐπάγω with ἐπί conforms to expected Greek usage.

On one level, then, the LXX rendering of ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπί can be construed as a more wooden and evident placeholder than ἀποδίδωμι ἐπί, ἐπάγω ἐπί, or ἐκδικέω ἐπί for the Hebrew idiom of visiting-in-punishment, יִשָּׁר. At the same time, whichever of the four verbs is employed, each of these renderings maintains the basic syntax of the Hebrew idiom—verb of punishment with accusative of iniquity and ἐπί (= יִשָּׁר) plus the recipient of punishment—even when this syntax ignores Greek usages (as with ἐκδικέω ἐπί).

The choice between ἀποδίδωμι, ἐπάγω, ἐκδικέω, and ἐπισκέπτομαι as equivalents for יִשָּׁר in these contexts seems to arise more from translator preference than from any specific factor in the contexts. For example, what rationale is used by the translator(s) of Jeremiah for selecting either ἐπισκέπτομαι or ἐκδικέω? Each is used eight times in Jeremiah to render punitive יִשָּׁר constructions. No pattern of usage emerges based on syntax structures or based on differences in the nature or the recipient of the divine punishment being expressed. Interestingly, the one

pattern that does emerge is location within the book. Passages occurring in Chapters 5–11 and 34–51 (according to the LXX sequencing) are translated by ἐπίσκεπτομαι.\textsuperscript{188} Passages occurring in Chapters 15–28 are translated by ἐκδικέω.\textsuperscript{189} The distribution in LXX Jeremiah of ἐπίσκεψις/ἐπισκοπή and ἔκδικησις for the Hebrew noun פָּדַע matches this pattern roughly, but not precisely.\textsuperscript{190} Multiple explanations for this grouping of translation choices are possible. Different translators may be responsible for different portions of Jeremiah.\textsuperscript{191} Or, the same translator may have hit upon one equivalency for פָּדַע and reproduced that for a while, drifted into a different equivalency and followed that for a while, and then drifted back to the initial equivalency toward the end of the book. In any case, the renderings of ἐκδικέω and ἐπίσκεπτομαι are not set in semantic contrast to one another, but stand as basically equivalent alternatives for the same idiom in the Hebrew source text.

5.3.3. The Semantic Breadth of פָּדַע: Both Visiting and Punishing

The above discussion has sought to establish that the translators of the LXX consistently read פָּדַע as a paired collocation with the idiomatic sense of “punish.” They understood the expression to refer primarily to a punitive act, the bringing-upon of harm in repayment for


\textsuperscript{189} These include: Jer 15:3; 23:2, 24; 25:12; 26:25LXX=46:25MT; 27:18LXX=50:18MT; 28:44LXX=51:44MT; 28:52LXX=51:52MT.

\textsuperscript{190} LXX Jeremiah has ἐπισκοπή in 10:15 and ἐπίσκεψις in 11:23 and 31:44LXX=48:44MT. It uses ἔκδικησις in 26:21LXX=46:21MT AND 27:27LXX=50:27MT. The passages which violate the pattern have ἐπίσκεψις in 23:12 and 28:18LXX=51:18MT, within the chapters (15–28) which always render פָּדַע as ἐκδικέω.

wrongdoing.

Even when rendering the expression with ἐπισκέπτομαι, a Greek verb which does not carry the meaning of “punish,” the LXX translators were not seeking to alter or qualify the act being depicted, which also in these ἐπισκέπτομαι renderings has a sense equivalent to ἀποδίδωμι, ἐπάγω, or ἐκδικέω elsewhere. Rather, the passages with ἐπισκέπτομαι were transparently reproducing the Hebrew construction with stereotyped equivalents (ἐπισκέπτομαι = יְדִּב, ἐπί = יָע), in a sense leading the Greek-speaking Jewish audience back to the Hebrew idiom which, in this case, loaned its meaning to the Greek. By the time of the Vulgate translation, this idiom had become familiar enough to non-Jewish readers of the Scriptures that יָע יְדִּב in punitive contexts is almost exclusively translated with the stereotyped Latin equivalent: visitare super.192

It remains to be asked, however, why translators sometimes chose to preserve this יָע יְדִּב idiom—the LXX occasionally (ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπί), the Vulgate regularly (visitare super), and even later translations such as Luther’s German Bible (heimsuchen) and KJV (visit upon).193 Perhaps the resilience of this expression across languages indicates some semantic value, rooted in the Hebrew verb יְדִיב, connoting something in these contexts beyond the bare sense of acting-in-punishment. Above, I have argued against the assumption that יְדִיב “literally” means seeing, giving attention to, showing concern for, examining, or inspecting. Such meanings do not match

192 The three exceptions to the use of visitare—twice reddere (“repay,” Exod 34:7; Deut 5:9) and once ulcisere (“avenge,” Exod 32:34)—all appear in the Pentateuch. Rabin, “Translation Process,” 16, concurring with an unpublished thesis by B. Kedar, The Vulgate as a Translation (Jerusalem, 1967), notes that the Pentateuch, along with Joshua and Esther, may well have been undertaken at the end of Jerome’s translation series. In these final portions of Vulgate translation “we can observe how with time he overcame the difficulties of the Hebrew manner of presentation and sentence structure and found ways to recast the material into acceptable Latin without loss of information content.” This might explain the occasional shift away from the Hebraic visitare super to the more straightforward Latin verbs reddere and ulcisere.

193 Osborne and Hatton, Handbook on Exodus, 474, open their discussion of the expression in Exod 20:5 with the comment: “Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children is quite literal from the Hebrew and is difficult to understand” (my emphasis). Indeed, it is quite literal, in the sense that it woodenly reproduces a Hebrew idiom. However, to biblically literate English speakers, the phrase is not necessarily “hard to understand.” Most readers assume that it means to punish. The irony is that after describing this phrase as “quite literal from the Hebrew,” Osborne and Hatton proceed, following in the train of Scharbert and others, to explain that “visiting the iniquity is literally ‘attending to [or, searching out] the evil.’”
the OT contexts in which פקד appears. A more tenable suggestion is that פקד (ἐπισκέπτομαι, visitare, heimsuchen, visit) connotes and suggests a sense of divine visitation-in-punishment, that is, with an accent on divine arrival and presence (presumably following a period of absence). It may be that LXX Jeremiah (so also LXX Hosea), with its varied use of both ἐκδίκω and ἐπισκέπτομαι, exhibits both the concern to clearly convey an act of punishment and the concern to maintain the note of visitation present in the Hebrew construction.

A more dramatic illustration of this two-fold concern appears in LXX and Vulgate renderings of Exod 32:34b. The Hebrew text here twice expresses פקד as a punitive idiom: “In the day of my visiting-in-punishment, I will visit-in-punishment their sins against them.” While most major modern English translations preserve the tautological force of the Hebrew by repeating “punish … punish” or “visit … visit,”¹⁹⁴ both the LXX and the Vulgate translate the double use of פקד in Exod 32:34 with two different verbs. In light of the two-fold translation of פקד elsewhere in the LXX and the rarity of non-visitare renderings of פקד in the Vulgate, this distinction seems to be more than a translational penchant for introducing variety into repeated words.¹⁹⁵

MT: ווים פקד על הם והם פקד (but in the day when I visit-in-punishment, I will visit-in-punishment against them their sins)

¹⁹⁴ The NLT ascribes the same basic sense for both uses of פקד in Exod 32:34, but chooses to render this repeated sense with two different English expressions: “When I come to call the people to account, I will certainly hold them responsible for their sins.” One English version, the paraphrased TLB, renders the verse in a manner equivalent to the LXX: “When I come to visit these people, I will punish them for their sins.”

¹⁹⁵ Perkins, “Exodus: To the Reader,” 43, observes, “The translator uses various approaches to bring liveliness to the text. For example, in some contexts where the same Hebrew term is used repeatedly, the translator selected different Greek terms as glosses for the same Hebrew.” Gehman, “Ἐπισκέπτομαι,” 202, ascribes the use of ἐπάξω in Exod 32:34 merely to this, the translator’s desire to avoid repetition. An additional argument against this view is the fact that no such variation is employed in a very similar construction in the following chapter. In Exod 33:19 the verbs ἐλεέω and οἰκτίρω are both used twice, once in the first person present subjunctive and once in the first person future indicative. In Exod 32:34, however, instead of rendering the repeated Hebrew verb with a repeated Greek verb, the LXX uses different verbs: ἐπισκέπτομαι (present subjunctive) and ἐπάξω (future indicative).
LXX: ἡ δ’ ἄν ἡμέρα ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπάξω αὐτοὺς τὴν ἁμαρτίαν αὐτῶν
(but in the day when I visit, I will bring upon them their sin)

Vulg.: autem in die ultionis visitabo et hoc peccatum eorum
(but in the day of avenging, I will visit this sin of theirs)

In both the LXX and the Vulgate, one verb conveys ἃσ as an act of punishment, while the other more explicitly conveys the note of “visitation,” thus preserving the broader connotation of the Hebrew לְע as idiom. The Greek and the Latin differ in which occurrence of לְע is assigned an explicitly punitive term (ἐπάγω, ultio) and which is rendered with a verb expressing visitation (ἐπισκέπτομαι, visitare). However, the interchangeability of these terms in both the Vulgate and LXX may suggest a shared translational strategy: to express the two-fold sense of the idiom לְע as an act of punishment connoting visitation, that is, visiting-in-punishment.

196 The New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS) renders the first part of this phrase in Exod 32:34 as “on whichever day I concern myself,” which is an insufficient rendering of ἐπισκέπτομαι here. While I have argued above that the LXX translators seek to capture a fuller meaning than simply “punish” by rendering לְע as “ἐπισκέπτομαι...ἐπάξω,” the use of ἐπισκέπτομαι (=לְע) in contexts of punishment expresses something more than divine perception; it expresses the moment of decisive divine action, a divine approach-to-act, that is, divine visitation. Ἐπισκέπτομαι here indicates more than divine attention, but rather divine attendance.
5.4. Appendix 1: Syntax Patterns of פקד על as an Idiom of Punishment

**Pattern 1** (20x): Verb פקד, Person Punished as Object of על, Iniquity-Word.

**Pattern 1A: Verb פקד + Iniquity-Word + על-Person Punished**

- **Exod 20:5**
  
  פקד_UON_ אבות על בנים
  ("[I am Yahweh, your God, a jealous God,] visiting-in-punishment iniquity of fathers against sons.")

- **Exod 34:7**
  
  פקד_UON_ אבות על בנים
  ("visiting-in-punishment iniquity of fathers against sons and against sons of sons")

- **Lev 18:25**
  
  התנהה הארץ ועל עוניה
  ("And the land became unclean, and so I visited-in-punishment its iniquity against it.")

- **Num 14:18**
  
  פקד_UON_ אבות על בניהם
  ("visiting-in-punishment iniquity of fathers against sons")

- **Deut 5:9**
  
  פקד_UON_ אבות על בנים
  ("visiting-in-punishment iniquity of fathers against sons")

- **Isa 26:21**
  
  לפקד_UON_ על הצאר עוניה
  ("in order to visit-in-punishment the iniquity of the inhabitant of the earth against him")

- **Hos 1:4**
  
  פקד_UON_ על המוטיב עוניה
  ("And I will visit-in-punishment the bloodshed of Jezreel against the house of Jehu.")

- **Amos 3:14**
  
  בימים_UON_ על הרעמה ועל הרעמות_UON_ על המוטיב עוניה
  ("in the day when I visit-in-punishment the rebellions of Israel against them")

**Pattern 1B1: Verb פקד על-Person Punished + Iniquity-Word**

- **Exod 32:34**
  
  בימים_UON_ על המוטיב עוניה
  ("In the day when I visit-in-punishment, I will visit-in-punishment against them their sin.")

- **2 Sam 3:8**
  
  הפקד על הנאה הנשה
  ("And do you visit-in-punishment against me the iniquity of this woman today?"")

- **Isa 13:11**
  
  פקד_UON_ על המוטיב על המוטיב עוניה
  ("And I will visit-in-punishment against the evil world and against the wicked their iniquity.")

- **Hos 4:9**
  
  פקד_UON_ על המוטיב עוניה
  ("And I will visit-in-punishment against him [them] his [their] ways.")
מי־פקד עליו דרכה
(Job 36:23)
(“Who visits-in-punishment against him his ways?”)

Pattern 1B2: Verb פקד + על - Person Punished + célib - Iniquity - Word

והוה פקד עליכם את־ר מעליכם
(Jer 23:2)
(“Behold, I am about to visit-in-punishment against you the evil of your deeds.”)

אפקד על־מלך־בבל ועל־הגוי ההוא נאם־יהוה את־עונם ועל־ארץ כשׂדים
(Jer 25:12)
(“I will visit-in-punishment against the king of Babylon and against that nation, says Yahweh, their iniquity, and against the land of the Chaldeans.”)

ופקדתי עליו ועל־זרעו ועל־עבדיו את־עונם
(Jer 36:31)
(“And I will visit-in-punishment against him and against his offspring and against his servants their iniquity.”)

אפקד עליכם את כל־עונתיכם
(Amos 3:2)
(“I will visit-in-punishment against you all your iniquities.”)

Pattern 1B3: Verb פקד + על - Person Punished + célib - Iniquity - Word

וכמה פקד עליכם מפרים מעליכם
(Jer 21:14)
(“And I will visit-in-punishment against you according to the fruit of your deeds.”)

ורבים ידוהו טעמי־רודו ואת־פך על־זיתם קרכין
(Hos 12:3)
(“Yahweh has a dispute with Judah and will visit-in-punishment against Jacob according to his ways.”)

197 Eng Hos 2:13.
198 Eng Hos 12:2.
Pattern 2 (20x): Verb פקד, Person Punished as Object of על, No Iniquity-Word.

Pattern 2: Verb פקד + על - Person/Object Punished

Isa 24:21
“Yahweh will visit-in-punishment against the host of the heights, and against the kings of the earth upon the earth.”

Isa 27:3
“lest anyone should visit-in-punishment against [the vineyard]”

Jer 11:22
“ Behold, I am about to visit-in-punishment against them.”

Jer 23:34
“And I will visit-in-punishment against that man and against his house.

Jer 29:32
“Behold, I am about to visit-in-punishment against Shemaiah the Nehelamite and against his offspring.”

Jer 30:20
“And I will visit-in-punishment against all who oppress him.”

Jer 44:29
“I will visit-in-punishment against you in that place.”

Jer 46:25
“Behold, I am about to visit-in-punishment against Amon of No’ and against Pharaoh and against Egypt and against its gods and against its kings—yes, against Pharaoh and against those who trust in him.”

Jer 50:18
“Behold, I am about to visit-in-punishment against the king of Babylon and against his land, just as I visited-in-punishment against the king of Assyria.”

Jer 51:44
“And I will visit-in-punishment against Bel in Babylon.”

Jer 51:47
“And I will visit-in-punishment against the idols of Babylon.”

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199 No’ refers to the Egyptian city of Thebes, the capital city of Upper Egypt. Amon (or Amun) was its chief god. Along with the sun-god Re, the god Amon was closely connected with Egyptian Pharaoh-theology. See Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *God, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 80–81.

200 At the time of Jeremiah, Bel (“lord”) had become an appellation of Marduk, chief god of Babylon. See Jer 50:2, which parallels Bel with Marduk (Hebrew: מָרֹד). Theodore Laetsch, *Jeremiah*, ConcCC (St. Louis: Concordia, 1952), 365, notes the word play with the verb לבע which follows in Jer 51:44b.
And I will visit-in-punishment against her idols.

And I will visit-in-punishment against the altars of Bethel.

And I will visit-in-punishment against the officials and the against the sons of the king and against all who wear foreign clothes.

And I will visit-in-punishment against all who leap over the threshold.

And I will visit-in-punishment against all the men who are ‘thickening on the lees’ [complacent]."

“all which I have visited-in-punishment against her”

Against the shepherds my anger burns, and against the he-goats [leaders] I will visit-in-punishment.

“I will not visit-in-punishment against your daughters when they play the whore nor against your wives when they commit adultery.”

“And I will visit-in-punishment against all those circumcised [merely] in the flesh.”

Eng Jer 9:25.
Pattern 3 (6x): Verb פקד, Person Punished as Object of על, Means of Punishment.

Pattern 3A: Verb פקד + על-Person Punished + בְ-Punishment/Means of Punishment

 Jer 44:13
פקדתי על הורשעים באערים מצרים כשחר פקדו על־יריחון בחור ברעב ובזרע
(“And I will visit-in-punishment against those who dwell in the land of Egypt, just as I visited-in-punishment against Jerusalem, with sword, with famine, and with pestilence.”)

Pattern 3B: Verb פקד + על-Person Punished + בְ-Punishment/Means of Punishment

 Isa 27:1
פקד יהוה בחרבו הקשה והבדולה והחזקה על לויתן
(“Yahweh will visit-in-punishment with his hard, great, strong sword against Leviathan.”)

Pattern 3C: בְ-Punishment/Means of Punishment + Verb פקד + על-Person Punished

 Jer 27:8
בחרב וברעב ובדבר אפקד על־הגוי ההוא
(“With the sword and with famine and with pestilence I will visit-in-punishment against that nation.”)

Pattern 3D: Verb פקד + על-Person Punished + Punishment/Means of Punishment (without בְ)

 Lev 26:16
ורפכחדת乐园כמ ב地中 תسوء והיתו העדיעות והעדיות
(“And I will cause to visit-in-punishment against you sudden panic, the wasting disease and the fever.”)
(Note: פקד here is Hiphil.)

 Jer 15:3
ורפכחדת乐园כמ ארכי ומפחתות
(“And I will visit-in-punishment against them [with] four kinds of punishments.”)

 Num 16:29
ורפכחדת乐园כמ ומפחתות
(“and if the visitation-in-punishment of all men is visited-in-punishment against them”)
(Note: פקד here is Niphal.)

Note: On Pattern 3D, see also Ps 89:33 [Eng 89:32], which uses פקד פקד without על, but uses instrumental ב after פקד to describe the means of punishment (with the rod, with stripes) and expresses iniquity (פשע, עון):

 Ps 89: 33
(“And I will visit-in-punishment with the rod their rebellion, and with blows their iniquity.”)
Pattern 4 (1x or 4x): Verbعقد, Iniquity-Word as Object ofעל.

Pattern 4A: Verbعقد + Iniquity-Word

‘عقد על־עפריריון על־מלך־אשור ועל־תפארת רום עינו Isaiah 10:12
(“I will visit-in-punishment against the fruit of the pride of the heart of the king of Assyria, and against the splendor of the haughtiness of his eyes.”)

(?) Pattern 4B: Iniquity-Word + Verbعقد

‘عقد על־אלה לא־عقد נאם־יהוה Jeremiah 5:9
(“Against these [previously mentioned offenses] shall I not visit-in-punishment? says Yahweh.”)

‘عقد על־אלה לא־عقد נאם־יהוה Jeremiah 5:29
(“Against these [previously mentioned offenses] shall I not visit-in-punishment? says Yahweh.”)

(?) Pattern 4C: Iniquity-Word + Verbعقد + Person Punished

‘عقد על־אלה לא־عقد רב־עמיוהו Jeremiah 9:8
(“Against these [previously described offenses] shall I not visit-in-punishment against them? says Yahweh.”)

5.5. Appendix 2: Contextual Analysis Tables for פקד על and פְּקֻדָּה as Punitive Expressions

The idiom פקד על in the sense of “visiting-in-punishment” is employed 49 times with Yahweh as the subject, and 12 passages express this same action nominally, using פְּקֻדָּה. Within many of these passages, other acts of Yahweh are mentioned alongside his act of פקד על. Tables A–D below list verbs and verbal constructions which Yahweh performs in such contexts in association with his acts of פְּקֻדָּה.

These associated acts fall naturally into three general categories of meaning: to bring ruin (Table A, 94x); to execute justice, vengeance, or discipline (Table B, 30x); and expressions of negative personal regard (Table C, 15x). In a more limited number of passages, associated acts of Yahweh are presented as opposites or antitheses to Yahweh’s פְּקֻדָּה acts (Table D).

Some of the associated actions occur in the same verse as Yahweh’s act of פְּקֻדָּה. In other cases, they occur in nearby verses within a unified passage. When this is the case, the table cites both the biblical verse of the related verb, as well as the verse of the פְּקֻדָּה act of Yahweh with which it is closely associated. Passages in which the associated verb not only occurs in the same verse but also stands as a precise syntactic parallel to פְּקֻדָּה are marked with an asterisk.

Table E lists other verbs which express the impact upon the recipients of Yahweh’s visitation in clauses which do not have Yahweh as the subject noun. Tables F–I in this appendix broaden the focus to include other related words and phrases which are found with regularity alongside פְּקֻדָּה. While Tables A–E inventory related verbs, Table F inventories nouns expressing the nature, content, or instruments of Yahweh’s פְּקֻדָּה acts. Table G lists the general and specific references to iniquity in the contexts and highlights the various syntactical constructions used to characterize Yahweh’s acts of פְּקֻדָּה as “because of” or “according to” the recipients’ iniquity. Table H documents the frequent association of Yahweh’s פְּקֻדָּה acts with his anger and jealousy. Table I documents the frequent references to a future “day,” “hour,”
“year,” or “time” of Yahweh’s act of פקד על, as well as the less frequent references which relate his visitation-in-punishment to words of warning previously spoken, both of which may suggest that Yahweh’s act of פקד על occurs after and brings to a close a period of impunity, before and/or during which Yahweh has given verbal warning but has withheld decisive punishment.

Finally, Table J shifts the focus of analysis away from the 59 passages of punitive פקד על and פקד, and instead examines 15 instances where Yahweh’s act of פקד brings rescue or provision. Table J catalogs the associated divine actions depicted alongside Yahweh’s saving פקד in these passages, and notes other relevant contextual features.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Subgroup</th>
<th>Specific Verb Construction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Verse(s) Reference</th>
<th>Associated פָּקַד Verse</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1. Bring or Send Harm</td>
<td>יָצָא...ל</td>
<td>come forth to…</td>
<td>Isa 26:21</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td>“come forth to punish (פקד) “</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>בָּא...ל</td>
<td>come to…</td>
<td>Isa 13:5</td>
<td>Isa 13:11</td>
<td>“come to destroy ( لماן Piel) the whole earth”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>קם...ל</td>
<td>arise for…</td>
<td>Zeph 3:8</td>
<td>Zeph 3:7</td>
<td>“arise for the prey” (taking רַע as booty/prey, with ESV, NKJV; contra LXX; cf. Table B., B.1. below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>בָּאוּ על</td>
<td>bring against</td>
<td>Lev 26:25</td>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
<td>“bring the sword”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lev 5:15</td>
<td>Jer 5:15</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td>“bring a nation from afar”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 11:11.23</td>
<td>Jer 11:22</td>
<td>“bring disaster”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 15:8</td>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
<td>“bring a destroyer”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 23:12</td>
<td>same verse (פקד)</td>
<td>Jer 23:12</td>
<td>“bring disaster”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 25:13</td>
<td>Jer 25:12</td>
<td>“bring all the words I have spoken”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 36:31</td>
<td>same verse (פקד)</td>
<td></td>
<td>“bring all the evil I have spoken”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 48:44</td>
<td>same verse (פקד)</td>
<td></td>
<td>“bring upon Moab the year of their visitation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>בָּאוּ (H)</td>
<td>bring forth</td>
<td>Jer 50:25</td>
<td>Jer 50:27</td>
<td>“has brought forth the instruments of his indignation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>מָלַל על (H)</td>
<td>cause to fall upon</td>
<td>Jer 15:8</td>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
<td>“make anguish and terror fall upon”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>נָתַן על</td>
<td>bring upon</td>
<td>Jer 23:40</td>
<td>Jer 23:34</td>
<td>“bring everlasting reproach upon”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>נָתַן ב</td>
<td>give into</td>
<td>Jer 27:8</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td>“give them into [enemy’s] hand,” if read as נתן with BHS note (c)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 46:26</td>
<td>Jer 46:25</td>
<td>“give into hand of those seeking life”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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203 In Zeph 3:8, Yahweh speaks of a day when he will “arise לעד.” Most modern versions read ₛ here as expressing purpose, but they part ways in reading לע as לע “witness, testimony” (so ESV and NKJV, following the LXX) or as “prey, plunder” (that is K-B ₛ II: booty, much less common than לע; so NIV, following the MT). Adele Berlin, Zephaniah, AB 25A (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 133, represents a third possibility, reading לע in a temporal sense as לע (that is, K-B ₛ III: lasting, future time) and translating as “once and for all.” On this, Berlin claims agreement with Vulg.; however, while the Vulg.’s in futurum does read לע in a temporal sense, this does not mean “once and for all.” The Vulg.’s in futurum seems redundant in an expression which begins with “in the day when I arise,” and Berlin’s “once and for all” seems to overread the expression. In my analysis, I include both of the first two senses: to arise to testify, to arise to (seize) the plunder.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Subgroup</th>
<th>Specific Verb Construction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Verse(s) Reference</th>
<th>Associated פקדHEN Verse</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A2. Stretch out, strike against</td>
<td>נבוק (H)</td>
<td>strike, plague</td>
<td>Ex 32:35(^{204}) Exod 32:34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>נשביה על</td>
<td>stretch out</td>
<td>Jer 15:6 Jer 15:3</td>
<td></td>
<td>“stretch out hand against”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>נבוק (H)</td>
<td>strike, kill</td>
<td>Lev 26:21, 24 Lev 26:16</td>
<td>Amos 3:15 Amos 3:14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total verses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3. Kill</td>
<td>הרג</td>
<td>slay</td>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ריק אחור (H)</td>
<td>draw (sword) after</td>
<td>Lev 26:33 Lev 26:16</td>
<td></td>
<td>“draw the sword after”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>שלך (D)</td>
<td>bereave</td>
<td>Jer 15:7 Jer 15:3</td>
<td></td>
<td>“bereave of children”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total verses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4. Bring to an End</td>
<td>דמה</td>
<td>cause to cease, cut off</td>
<td>Hos 4:5 Hos 4:9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>คลהת (D)</td>
<td>bring to an end</td>
<td>Isa 10:18 Isa 10:12</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 9:15MT Jer 9:24MT</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 5:10.18 Jer 5:9,29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Here, Yahweh will</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{204}\) On the link between the threat of “visitation” in Exod 32:34 and Yahweh’s plaguing of the people in 32:35, see Enns, Exodus, 577. Umberto Cassuto, Commentary on Exodus, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 424, emphasizes that the time of the plague in Exod 32:35 is unspecified; it did not necessarily take place immediately that day. Cornelis Houtman, Exodus, trans. Sierd Woudstra, 4 vols., HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 1993–2002), 3:675, understands 32:35 as “a note with preceding verses, perhaps from the hand of the last editor of the text. He interrupts the reporting and announces that the hour of visitation has indeed arrived. Perhaps he thought of the demise of northern Israel…, but he may also have thought of the judgment upon all Israel.” Whatever the timeline, Enns, Cassuto, and Houtman all read הרג as a manifestation of Yahweh’s פקד announced in the previous verse. In contrast, Dohmen, Exodus 19–40, 328, asserts that הרג does not refer to an act of punishment in 32:35, since it “sehr oft nicht als Bezeichnung des Strafens, sondern des Eingreifens JHWHs zugunsten seines Volks bzw. zur Wendung des Geschehens … gebraucht wird.” Dohmen’s interpretation, however, privileges the use of הרג in one far-removed passage (Isa 19:22) over the prominent use of the root previously in the Exodus narrative and legislation (e.g. Exod 12:23, 27; 21:22, 35), where it consistently means “afflict” or “strike.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Subgroup</th>
<th>Specific Verb Construction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Verse(s) Reference</th>
<th>Associated Verse</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>פקד על (H)</td>
<td>cut off, exterminate</td>
<td>Lev 26:20</td>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
<td><em>not</em> make a full end of Judah, yet the prospect is still thereby raised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cut off, exterminate</td>
<td>Lev 26:20</td>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lev 44:11</td>
<td>Jer 44:13</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zeph 1:3–4</td>
<td>Zeph 1:8,9,12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zeph 3:6</td>
<td>Zeph 3:7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>רוח (H)</td>
<td>put an end to, sweep away</td>
<td>Zeph 1:2–3</td>
<td>Zeph 1:8,9,12</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zeph 1:18</td>
<td>Zeph 1:8,9,12</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>והשל...כל (H)</td>
<td>make an end of</td>
<td>Hos 1:4</td>
<td>same verse</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hos 2:13MT</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>סוף (H)</td>
<td>put an end to, sweep away</td>
<td>Zeph 1:2–3</td>
<td>Zeph 1:8,9,12</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zeph 1:18</td>
<td>Zeph 1:8,9,12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hos 1:4</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hos 2:13MT</td>
<td>Hos 2:15MT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>חנך</td>
<td>finish off</td>
<td>Jer 27:8</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Codex L reads כنحن; BHS note (c) suggests reading מנה with the Syriac and the targumim.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A5. Destroy</td>
<td>אבד (D)</td>
<td>cause to perish, destroy</td>
<td>Jer 51:55</td>
<td>Jer 51:44,47,52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 15:8</td>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>אכל</td>
<td>devour</td>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td>(as predator)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
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<td>Isa 13:11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>חבר (D)</td>
<td>destroy, ruin</td>
<td>Jer 51:40</td>
<td>Jer 51:44,47,52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 15:4</td>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“make into heaps,” “make a desolation,” “make a horror,” reading with Qere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>הר (H)</td>
<td>bring down</td>
<td>Lev 26:31</td>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jer 9:10MT</td>
<td>Jer 9:8MT</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>נитесь</td>
<td>make into…</td>
<td>Lev 26:19</td>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
<td>“make into ruins”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 15:4</td>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>בטיה...לשממה</td>
<td>make a desolation</td>
<td>Isa 13:11</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 25:12</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>עשה</td>
<td>break</td>
<td>Hos 1:5</td>
<td>Hos 1:4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 51:55</td>
<td>Jer 51:44,47,52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ירדה</td>
<td>devastate, destroy</td>
<td>Jer 15:8</td>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 51:55</td>
<td>Jer 51:44,47,52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ביקה (D or H)</td>
<td>destroy</td>
<td>Jer 5:10</td>
<td>Jer 5:9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>ביקה (H)</td>
<td>destroy</td>
<td>Lev 26:30</td>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isa 13:11</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ישמש (H)</td>
<td>make desolate</td>
<td>Lev 26:31,32</td>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hos 2:14MT</td>
<td>Hos 2:15MT</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ישפל (H)</td>
<td>lay low</td>
<td>Isa 13:11</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total verses: **17**

Total verses: **22**
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Subgroup</th>
<th>Specific Verb Construction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Verse(s) Reference</th>
<th>Associated Verse Reference</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A6. Drive Out, Scatter</td>
<td>בָּרָה (Q or D)</td>
<td>scatter</td>
<td>Lev 26:33</td>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>דָּרָה (H)</td>
<td>drive out</td>
<td>Jer 15:7</td>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>סָחַב (H)</td>
<td>drag away</td>
<td>Jer 27:10,15</td>
<td>Jer 27:8</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>פָּשַׁח (H)</td>
<td>scatter</td>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>תָּשַׁח (D)</td>
<td>drive out</td>
<td>Jer 15:6</td>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>פָּשַׁח (H)</td>
<td>scatter</td>
<td>Jer 9:15MT</td>
<td>Jer 9:24MT</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>דָּרָה (H)</td>
<td>drive out</td>
<td>Lev 18:24</td>
<td>Lev 18:25</td>
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<td><strong>8</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7. Kindle, Burn, Consume</td>
<td>אֲכָל (H)</td>
<td>consume (as fire)</td>
<td>Isa 10:17</td>
<td>Isa 10:12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>בֹּשֶׁר (H)</td>
<td>burn</td>
<td>Jer 5:14</td>
<td>Jer 5:9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>הֶרֶב (H)</td>
<td>burn</td>
<td>Jer 44:6</td>
<td>Jer 44:13</td>
<td>“my anger burned against the cities of Judah...”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>הָרַע (H)</td>
<td>burn</td>
<td>Zech 10:3</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>מֶסֶת (H)</td>
<td>kindle</td>
<td>Jer 5:9</td>
<td>Jer 21:14</td>
<td>same verse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>נָשַׁת...לַאֲשֶׁר (H)</td>
<td>make ... a fire</td>
<td>Jer 5:14</td>
<td>Jer 5:9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total verses</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A8. Metaphors of Destruction</td>
<td>אֶכָל (H)</td>
<td>feed</td>
<td>Jer 9:14MT</td>
<td>Jer 9:24MT</td>
<td>“feed with bitter food”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>הָרָב (H)</td>
<td>dry up</td>
<td>Jer 51:36</td>
<td>Jer 51:44,47,52</td>
<td>“dry up her sea”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>בָּשָׁב (H)</td>
<td>make dry</td>
<td>Jer 51:36</td>
<td>Jer 51:44,47,52</td>
<td>“make her fountain dry”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>בָּל (H)</td>
<td>make drunk</td>
<td>Jer 51:39,57</td>
<td>Jer 51:44,47,52</td>
<td>“make them drunk”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>שֵׁקֵת (H)</td>
<td>give to drink</td>
<td>Jer 9:14MT</td>
<td>Jer 9:24MT</td>
<td>“give poisonous water to drink”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total verses</strong></td>
<td><strong>7</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL “BRING RUIN” VERBS</strong></td>
<td><strong>94</strong></td>
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Table B. Associated Acts of Yahweh: Judgment, Vengeance, or Discipline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Group</th>
<th>Specific Verb Construction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Verse(s) Reference</th>
<th>Associated פקד עלי Verse</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B1. Contend, Have Suit Against</td>
<td>ריב...ריב</td>
<td>prosecute a legal dispute</td>
<td>Jer 51:36</td>
<td>Jer 51:44,47,52</td>
<td>Yahweh pledges to prosecute Judah’s complaint against Babylon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[ריב ליהוה עם]</td>
<td>[have] a dispute with</td>
<td>Hos 4:1</td>
<td>Hos 4:9</td>
<td>“Y. has a dispute with the inhabitants of the land”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>קום...לעד</td>
<td>arise to testify</td>
<td>Zeph 3:8</td>
<td>Zeph 3:7</td>
<td>“arise to testify” (י as witness; so LXX, NIV; see note 203 above)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hos 12:3MT</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td>“…with Judah”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Total verses 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2. Judge</td>
<td>עשה משפט</td>
<td>do (justice)</td>
<td>Jer 9:23MT</td>
<td>Jer 9:24</td>
<td>Don’t boast in riches, God warns, but boast in knowing Yahweh, who does צדק, משפט, and כיון in the earth. Then, his acts of judgment against Israel and the nations are threatened, highlighting the latter two terms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>נתן משפט לארור</td>
<td>bring justice to light</td>
<td>Zeph 3:5</td>
<td>Zeph 3:7</td>
<td>Zeph 3:5 asserts: “Yahweh is righteous (צדק) within her.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>לא עשה יলדה</td>
<td>not do injustice</td>
<td>Zeph 3:5</td>
<td>Zeph 3:7</td>
<td>“My משפט (justice, decision) is to gather nations.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>אסף</td>
<td>gather (for judgment)</td>
<td>Zeph 3:8</td>
<td>Zeph 3:7</td>
<td>“My משפט (justice, decision) is … to assemble kingdoms.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>كبץ</td>
<td>assemble (for judgment)</td>
<td>Zeph 3:8</td>
<td>Zeph 3:7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total verses 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3. Refine, Test, Examine</td>
<td>בקן</td>
<td>test (lit.: by smelting)</td>
<td>Jer 9:6MT</td>
<td>Jer 9:8MT</td>
<td>The testing here is with a presumption of guilt and due punishment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 11:20</td>
<td>Jer 11:22</td>
<td>The testing here is with a presumption of guilt and due punishment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning Group</td>
<td>Specific Verb Construction</td>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>Verse(s) Reference</td>
<td>Associated Verse(s)</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>פקד על (D)</td>
<td>search thoroughly</td>
<td>Zeph 1:12</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td>“search thoroughly with lamps”—this act is not parallel to or a part of פקד על, but rather precedes Yahweh’s act of פקד על.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>זָרַק</td>
<td>refine, smelt</td>
<td>Jer 9:6MT</td>
<td>Jer 9:8MT</td>
<td>The sense here is a judicial testing, with a presumption of guilt and due punishment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B4. Watch over (for Harm), Take Notice</td>
<td>זכור</td>
<td>remember</td>
<td>Hos 9:9</td>
<td>Hos 9:7 (פקדה)</td>
<td>“remember their iniquity” (*) In v.9, זכור is in parallel with פקד על: “He will remember their iniquity… visit their sins.” In v. 7, פקד על is in parallel with שִׁלומים: “days of visitation have come … days of recompense have come.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>שׁקד</td>
<td>watch over</td>
<td>Jer 44:27</td>
<td>Jer 44:29</td>
<td>“watch over for harm, not for good” (Cf. Jer 5:6, “a leopard watching over (שׁקד) cities” so all who go out are torn to pieces)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B5. Repay</td>
<td>גמל</td>
<td>render, treat</td>
<td>Jer 51:56</td>
<td>Jer 51:44,47,52</td>
<td>Yahweh is אֵל גְמַל, a God of reprisals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>שׁוב (H)</td>
<td>repay</td>
<td>Hos 4:9*</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td>“repay to him his deeds” (*) close syntactic parallel to פקד על</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>הֶבָל</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hos 12:3MT*</td>
<td>“repay according to deeds” (*) close syntactic parallel to פקד על</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>שׁלם (D)</td>
<td>repay</td>
<td>Jer 25:14</td>
<td>Jer 25:12</td>
<td>“repay according to deeds”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 50:29</td>
<td>“repay according to her deeds”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 50:27 (פקדה)</td>
<td>“repay according to her deeds”</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“repay according to her deeds”</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>“repay according to her deeds”</td>
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<td>“repay according to her deeds”</td>
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<td>“repay according to her deeds”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>“repay according to her deeds”</td>
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Total verses: 4

Total verses: 2

Total verses: 6
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<tr>
<th>Meaning Group</th>
<th>Specific Verb Construction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Verse(s) Reference</th>
<th>Associated Verse(s) Reference</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B6. Avenge</td>
<td>נקם (D or HtD)</td>
<td>avenge</td>
<td>Jer 51:36</td>
<td>Jer 51:44,47,52</td>
<td>(D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Jer 5:9*</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td>(HiD) (*) close syntactic parallel to פקד על in this verse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 5:29*</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td>(HiD) (*) close syntactic parallel to פקד על in this verse</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 9:8MT*</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td>(HiD) (*) close syntactic parallel to פקד על in this verse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 11:20</td>
<td>Jer 11:22</td>
<td>“let me see your vengeance (נכרים) upon them”</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 50:15</td>
<td>Jer 50:18</td>
<td>“for this is the vengeance of Yahweh”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total verses</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B7. Discipline</td>
<td>יסר (D)</td>
<td>discipline</td>
<td>Lev 26:18,28</td>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
<td>God’s goal is to turn Israel back to himself, but the emphasis is the severity (sevenfold, Lev 26:18, 21; continue striking, Lev 26:21; etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL “JUDGMENT, VENGEANCE, ETC.” VERBS</strong></td>
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<td>Associated פָּדָּה Verse</td>
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<td>------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>השׁכת</td>
<td>forget</td>
<td>Hos 4:6</td>
<td>Hos 4:9</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>C2. Be weary of</td>
<td>לאָה (N)</td>
<td>be(come) weary</td>
<td>Jer 15:6</td>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
<td>“I am weary of relenting (הֵנָחֵם).” Cf. Jer 6:11,15 where Yahweh’s visitation (פקדה) is coming: “he is weary of holding back his anger.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>C3. Loathe</td>
<td>נעל</td>
<td>loathe, abhor</td>
<td>Lev 26:30</td>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>שָפֵך צָעִים</td>
<td>pour out indignation</td>
<td>Zeph 3:8</td>
<td>Zeph 3:7</td>
<td>“pour out on them my indignation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total verses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>C4. Oppose</td>
<td>אני נפשי אל</td>
<td>not be “towards”</td>
<td>Jer 15:1</td>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
<td>“my רוח would not be toward this people”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>הָנְנִי אליך</td>
<td>be against</td>
<td>Jer 21:13</td>
<td>Jer 21:14</td>
<td>“Behold, I am against you”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>נָמְנִי פֵּנִי בָּכֶם</td>
<td>set face against</td>
<td>Lev 26:17</td>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
<td>“I will set my face against you”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>שָמְנִי פֵּנִי בָּכֶם</td>
<td>set face against</td>
<td>Jer 44:11</td>
<td>Jer 44:13</td>
<td>“I will set my face against you”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>הלך עָמֶכֶם בָּקָרָי</td>
<td>walk contrary to</td>
<td>Lev 26:24,28</td>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
<td>“I will walk contrary to you”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total verses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>C5. Reject</td>
<td>לאָס</td>
<td>reject</td>
<td>Hos 4:6</td>
<td>Hos 4:9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>נָטֶש</td>
<td>cast off, abandon</td>
<td>Jer 23:33,39</td>
<td>Jer 23:34</td>
<td>Classified here as a metaphor of Yahweh’s rejection of his people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>לאָ רִיח</td>
<td>not smell (the aroma of your sacrifices)</td>
<td>Lev 26:31</td>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Total verses</strong></td>
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<td><strong>TOT. VERBS OF NEGATIVE PERSONAL REGARD</strong></td>
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### Table D. Associated Acts of Yahweh: Verbal Opposites or Antitheses

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb Construction</th>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Verse(s) Reference</th>
<th>Associated Reference</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>אָשֹׁד חֲסֹדָה</td>
<td>show lovingkindness</td>
<td>Exod 20:5</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>נָצַר חֲסֹדָה</td>
<td>preserve lovingkindness</td>
<td>Exod 34:7</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>נָצַר</td>
<td>watch over</td>
<td>Isa 27:3 (2x)</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td>Yahweh is the “watcher/keeper” of his vineyard. He watches over it day and night <em>lest anyone should visit/punish it</em>. In the context, however, and in view of the related passage in Isa 5:1–7, the warded-off visitation is Yahweh’s own. In this sense, Yahweh’s posture of נצָר stands as an alternative and an antithesis to the prospect that he would פקַד על the vineyard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>נָחַם</td>
<td>relent</td>
<td>Jer 15:6</td>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
<td>“I am weary of relenting” (15:6) explains why Yahweh will punish them with four destroyers (15:3). If Yahweh <em>relents</em>, he forestalls <em>visiting</em>; when He <em>grows weary of relenting</em>, then He <em>visits/punishes</em>. Cf. Exod 32:12,14.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>נָקַּה (D)</td>
<td>leave unpunished</td>
<td>Exod 20:7</td>
<td>Exod 20:5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>נָכַּה (D)</td>
<td>leave unpunished</td>
<td>Exod 34:7</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>לָשָׁה</td>
<td>forgive, bear</td>
<td>Exod 34:7</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>לָשָׁה</td>
<td>forgive</td>
<td>Exod 34:9</td>
<td>Exod 34:7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>לָשָׁה</td>
<td>forgive</td>
<td>Jer 5:7</td>
<td>Jer 5:9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table E. Verbs Describing the Impact of Yahweh’s Acts of פקד על

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning Subgroup</th>
<th>Verb Construction</th>
<th>Translation (with context)</th>
<th>Verse(s) Reference</th>
<th>Associated Verse(s)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Coming of Harm</strong></td>
<td>בוא</td>
<td>(ruin) will come (from afar)</td>
<td>Isa 10:3</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(death) has entered (our palaces)</td>
<td>Jer 9:20MT</td>
<td>Jer 9:24MT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(the day of their calamity) has come</td>
<td>Jer 46:21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(their day) has come</td>
<td>Jer 50:27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(the day of your watchmen, of your visitation) has come</td>
<td>Mic 7:4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>נתן בי</td>
<td>be given into the hand (of a people from the north)</td>
<td>Jer 46:24</td>
<td>Jer 46:25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>עלה</td>
<td>(death) has come up (into windows)</td>
<td>Jer 9:20MT</td>
<td>Jer 9:24MT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Strike</strong></td>
<td>נכה</td>
<td>(a lion) shall strike (them)</td>
<td>Jer 5:6</td>
<td>Jer 5:9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Kill</strong></td>
<td>חרב</td>
<td>Kill (the inhabitants)! Kill (their bulls)!</td>
<td>Jer 50:21,27</td>
<td>Jer 50:27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>מות</td>
<td>(the young men) shall die (by the sword)</td>
<td>Jer 11:22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(sons/daughters) shall die (by famine)</td>
<td>Jer 11:22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(those who go to Egypt) will die (by sword and famine)</td>
<td>Jer 44:12</td>
<td>Jer 44:13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Bring to an End</strong></td>
<td>דמה (N)</td>
<td>(my people) are destroyed</td>
<td>Hos 4:6</td>
<td>Hos 4:9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(people of Canaan (?) are no more)</td>
<td>Zeph 1:11</td>
<td>Zeph 1:8,9,12</td>
<td>There are textual questions regarding the subject noun here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>כלת</td>
<td>(until they) come to an end</td>
<td>Jer 44:27</td>
<td>Jer 44:29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>רנס (N)</td>
<td>(silver-laden) will be cut off</td>
<td>Zeph 1:11</td>
<td>Zeph 1:8,9,12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(your dwelling would not be cut off)</td>
<td>Zeph 3:7</td>
<td></td>
<td>same verse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>רנס (H)</td>
<td>(death) cutting off (children)</td>
<td>Jer 9:20MT</td>
<td>Jer 9:24MT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning Subgroup</td>
<td>Verb Construction</td>
<td>Translation (with context)</td>
<td>Verse(s) Reference</td>
<td>Associated Verse(s)</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>龙泉 (H)</td>
<td>(do evil … against yourselves) so that you cut off man and woman</td>
<td>Jer 44:7</td>
<td>Jer 44:13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>סוח</td>
<td>(great houses) will come to an end</td>
<td>Amos 3:15</td>
<td>Amos 3:14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>חנס</td>
<td>(those who go to Egypt) will be finished off (by sword and famine)</td>
<td>Jer 44:12</td>
<td>Jer 44:13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>חנס</td>
<td>(men of Judah in Egypt) will be finished off (by sword and famine)</td>
<td>Jer 44:27</td>
<td>Jer 44:29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Destroy</td>
<td>אבד (you) will perish</td>
<td>Lev 26:38</td>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(the land) is ruined</td>
<td>Jer 9:11MT</td>
<td>Jer 9:24MT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(they) will perish</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(you) will perish</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(they) will perish</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(houses of ivory) will perish</td>
<td>Amos 3:15</td>
<td>Amos 3:14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>אכל</td>
<td>(land of your enemies) will consume (you)</td>
<td>Lev 26:38</td>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(nation from afar) will eat up (food, sons, flocks, etc.)</td>
<td>Jer 5:17 (4x)</td>
<td>Jer 5:9,29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>נגד (N)</td>
<td>(Babylon, the hammer of the whole earth) is hewed off</td>
<td>Jer 50:23</td>
<td>Jer 50:27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(horns of the altar) will be hewed off</td>
<td>Amos 3:14</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>דם (N)</td>
<td>(let us) be silenced / perish (there)</td>
<td>Jer 8:14</td>
<td>Jer 8:12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>be silenced / destroyed</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ש绗 (N)</td>
<td>become a desolation</td>
<td>Jer 50:13</td>
<td>Jer 50:18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>לאחרים לא איש (H)</td>
<td>(Shemaiah) will have no one (dwelling)</td>
<td>Jer 29:32</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>לאחרים שאביר</td>
<td>there will not be a remnant (for you)</td>
<td>Jer 11:23</td>
<td>Jer 11:22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>חרם (H)</td>
<td>devote (them, her) to destruction</td>
<td>Jer 50:21,26</td>
<td>Jer 50:27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>חרם (N)</td>
<td>(her walls) are thrown down</td>
<td>Jer 50:15</td>
<td>Jer 50:18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>שרח (N)</td>
<td>(everyone who goes out) will be torn to pieces</td>
<td>Jer 5:6</td>
<td>Jer 5:9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning Subgroup</td>
<td>Verb Construction</td>
<td>Translation (with context)</td>
<td>Verse(s) Reference</td>
<td>Associated פקד עיל Verse</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>פקד על (N)</td>
<td>for there is no one, for there is no inhabitant</td>
<td>Zeph 3:6</td>
<td>Zeph 3:7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>רדף (D)</td>
<td>(their cities) are laid waste</td>
<td>Zeph 3:6</td>
<td>Zeph 3:7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>רץ (D)</td>
<td>(nation from afar) will beat down (fortified cities)</td>
<td>Jer 5:17</td>
<td>Jer 5:9,29</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>קרב (N)</td>
<td>(Babylon, hammer of whole earth) is broken</td>
<td>Jer 50:23</td>
<td>Jer 50:27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>קרב (Dp)</td>
<td>(a wolf) shall devastate (them, Jerusalem)</td>
<td>Jer 5:6</td>
<td>Jer 5:9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>קרב (N)</td>
<td>(Zion’s wailing: we) are ruined!</td>
<td>Jer 9:18MT</td>
<td>Jer 9:24MT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>שופט (N)</td>
<td>(Moab) will be destroyed</td>
<td>Jer 48:42</td>
<td>Jer 48:44 (פקדה)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>שופט (N)</td>
<td>(their towers) are desolate</td>
<td>Zeph 3:6</td>
<td>Zeph 3:7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Drive out, scatter</td>
<td>קדה (N)</td>
<td>be driven (into slippery paths)</td>
<td>Jer 23:12</td>
<td>same verse (פקדה)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>נדום...נימס (H)</td>
<td>turn and flee</td>
<td>Jer 46:21</td>
<td>same verse (פקדה)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>רחק (H)</td>
<td>(in order to) remove you far (from your land)</td>
<td>Jer 27:10</td>
<td>Jer 27:8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Kindle, burn, consume</td>
<td>אכל (N)</td>
<td>(God’s words will become a fire and) will consume (this people)</td>
<td>Jer 5:14</td>
<td>Jer 5:9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>אכל (HtD)</td>
<td>(Yahweh will kindle a fire and it) will consume</td>
<td>Jer 21:14</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>אכל (N)</td>
<td>(all earth) will be consumed (in fire of God’s jealousy)</td>
<td>Zeph 1:18</td>
<td>Zeph 1:8,9,12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>אכל (N)</td>
<td>(all earth) will be consumed (in fire of God’s jealousy)</td>
<td>Zeph 3:8</td>
<td>Zeph 3:7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>יצת (N)</td>
<td>be burned up</td>
<td>Jer 9:9MT</td>
<td>Jer 9:8MT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>יצת (N)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Jer 9:11MT</td>
<td>Jer 9:24MT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Stumble, totter, fall</td>
<td>נשא (N)</td>
<td>(you and the prophet) shall stumble</td>
<td>Hos 4:5</td>
<td>Hos 4:9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>נשא (N)</td>
<td>(they) shall be overturned</td>
<td>Jer 8:12</td>
<td>same verse (פקדה)</td>
<td>Cf. Jer 6:15.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>נשא (HtD)</td>
<td>(the earth) moves to and fro</td>
<td>Isa 24:20</td>
<td>Isa 24:21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>קטן (HtD)</td>
<td>(the earth) totters</td>
<td>Isa 24:20</td>
<td>Isa 24:21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning Subgroup</td>
<td>Verb Construction</td>
<td>Translation (with context)</td>
<td>Verse(s) Reference</td>
<td>Associated Verse(s)</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>פָּקַד</td>
<td>(altar horn) shall fall (to the ground)</td>
<td>Amos 3:14</td>
<td>Amos 3:15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(they) shall fall (among the slain)</td>
<td>Isa 10:3</td>
<td>Isa 10:4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(the earth) falls</td>
<td>Isa 24:20</td>
<td>Isa 24:21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(they) shall fall (among the fallen)</td>
<td>Jer 8:12</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(dead bodies of men) shall fall</td>
<td>Jer 9:21MT</td>
<td>Jer 9:24MT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(they) will fall (in slippery paths)</td>
<td>Jer 23:12</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(remnant of Judah in Egypt) shall fall</td>
<td>Jer 44:12</td>
<td>Jer 44:13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(one fleeing) will fall (into the pit)</td>
<td>Jer 48:44</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(her bulwarks) have fallen</td>
<td>Jer 50:15</td>
<td>Jer 50:18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(her young men) will fall (in streets)</td>
<td>Jer 50:30</td>
<td>Jer 50:27</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Babylon’s wall, her slain, Babylon) will fall</td>
<td>Jer 51:44,47,49</td>
<td>Jer 51:44,47,51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>לא...עמד</td>
<td>(they) did not stand</td>
<td>Jer 46:21</td>
<td>same verse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>לא...קום</td>
<td>(earth) did not rise (again)</td>
<td>Isa 24:20</td>
<td>Isa 24:21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Be Found, Caught, Shut In, Gathered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb Construction</th>
<th>Translation (with context)</th>
<th>Verse(s) Reference</th>
<th>Associated Verse(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>אָסַף (Dp)</td>
<td>be gathered (in prison)</td>
<td>Isa 24:22</td>
<td>Isa 24:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>לָכַד (N)</td>
<td>be captured (in a snare)</td>
<td>Jer 48:44</td>
<td>same verse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>לָכַד (N)</td>
<td>be captured (in a snare)</td>
<td>Jer 50:24</td>
<td>Jer 50:27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>מְצַח (N)</td>
<td>be found</td>
<td>Jer 50:24</td>
<td>Jer 50:27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>מִרְרָה (Dp)</td>
<td>be shut in</td>
<td>Isa 24:22</td>
<td>Isa 24:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>הָפַש</td>
<td>be caught</td>
<td>Jer 50:24</td>
<td>Jer 50:27</td>
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</table>

10. Disgrace

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb Construction</th>
<th>Translation (with context)</th>
<th>Verse(s) Reference</th>
<th>Associated Verse(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>בָּרַש</td>
<td>be ashamed</td>
<td>Jer 9:18MT</td>
<td>Jer 9:24MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>בָּרַש (H)</td>
<td>be put to shame</td>
<td>Jer 46:24</td>
<td>Jer 46:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>הָפַש</td>
<td>be disgraced</td>
<td>Jer 15:9</td>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. Reveal, uncover

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb Construction</th>
<th>Translation (with context)</th>
<th>Verse(s) Reference</th>
<th>Associated Verse(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>גָּלַה (D)</td>
<td>(earth) will reveal (the blood shed)</td>
<td>Isa 26:21</td>
<td>same verse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>לא...מש</td>
<td>(earth) will not cover (its slain)</td>
<td>Isa 26:21</td>
<td>same verse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning Subgroup</td>
<td>Verb Construction</td>
<td>Translation (with context)</td>
<td>Verse(s) Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Know</td>
<td>ידע</td>
<td>(you) shall know (these men have despised Yahweh)</td>
<td>Num 16:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(and the remnant of Judah) will know (whose word will stand, mine or theirs)</td>
<td>Jer 44:28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table F. The Nature and Results, the Instruments and Agents, of Yahweh’s פקד על Acts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse (*)</th>
<th>Nouns expressing the nature, content, or result of Yahweh’s פקד על</th>
<th>Agents, instruments or instrumental phrases associated with Yahweh’s פקד על</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exod 20:5</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exod 32:34</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exod 34:7</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 18:25</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>בהבה, sudden panic (v.16) שׁחפת, wasting disease (v.16) קדחת, fever (v.16) יָרֵד, a sword (agent) (vv.25,33) זְרֵע, pestilence (v.25)</td>
<td>The sword in v. 25 is described with נָקִים and its cognate accusative: “I will bring upon you a sword which avenges the vengeance of the covenant.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num 14:18</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num 16:29</td>
<td>בָרָאָה, a new thing, creation (v.30)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>“If Yahweh creates a new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deut 5:9</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 10:3</td>
<td>שׁואָה, calamity, destruction (v.3)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 10:12</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 13:11</td>
<td>כָׁנֶשׁ מְשׁיֶרֶת, as devastation from the Almighty (v.6) שׁממה, desolation (v.9)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 24:21</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 26:21</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 27:1,3</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>בָרָה, with his sword (v.1)</td>
<td>(lit: with his hard, big, strong sword)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 5:9,29</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>יֵגְרוּ מִפְּרָקִים, a nation from afar (agent) (v.15) יָרֵד, with the sword (v.17)</td>
<td>Note the cynicism of the people in v.12: “No disaster (רעה) will come upon us, nor shall we see sword (חרב) or famine (רעב)”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 8:12</td>
<td>אֵין שָׁרָה, no good (v. 15) בָּשָׂת, terrors (v. 15)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 9:8MT</td>
<td>גְלִיל, heaps (v.10MT) מַעֲצַת עֵצֶם, lair of jackals (v.10MT) שׁמָמָה, desolation (v.10MT)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 9:24MT</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>מַתּוּ, death (agent) (v.20MT)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 10:15</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 11:22</td>
<td>תִּרְצָת, disaster (vv.11,12,23) פָּגְעָה, vengeance (v.20)</td>
<td>בָּרָה, by the sword בְּרֵעַ, by famine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 11:23</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
<td>בָּשָׂת, terrors (v.8) בָּשָׂת, terrors (v.8)</td>
<td>מַתּוּ, death (v.2) דָּרֶך, sword (v.2.9) דָּרֶך, famine (v.2) שׁבִּיר, captivity (v.2) יָרֵד, a sword (agent) קלָבָּש, dogs (v.3) (agent) עָדוֹת השמים (v.3) (agent)</td>
<td>Here, the first four terms in the instrument column could have been listed in the result column. Yahweh answers the hypothetical question of his people (Whither...).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse (Jer)</th>
<th>Nouns expressing the nature, content, or result of Yahweh's action</th>
<th>Agents, instruments or instrumental phrases associated with Yahweh's action</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jer 21:14</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>למאים האריים, הבאר, a destroyer (v.8) (agent)</td>
<td>should we go?): “to death, to sword,” etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 23:2</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>אש, fire (agent)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 23:12</td>
<td>אפלת, darkness, calamity (v.12)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 23:34</td>
<td>סרפת, everlasting reproach (v.40)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 25:12</td>
<td>שׁמדמה עולם, everlasting desolation</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 27:8</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>בחרב, רערע, ררב, בדיר, by the sword (v.8), by famine (v.8), by pestilence (v.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 29:32</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 30:20</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 36:31</td>
<td>רעה, disaster</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 44:13</td>
<td>הרמה, שׁפממה, גלול, a curse (v.8,12)</td>
<td>בחרב, רערע, ררב, בדיר, by the sword (v.8), by famine (v.12), by pestilence (v.12)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 44:29</td>
<td>רעה, disaster (v.27)</td>
<td>בחרב, רערע, ררב, by famine (v.27)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 46:21</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 46:25</td>
<td>ר.EndsWith, distress, calamity (v.21)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 48:44</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>פחד, פיט, פז, terror, pit, and snare (v.43)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 50:18</td>
<td>שׁמדמה כלהל, utter desolation (v.13)</td>
<td>בחרב, רערע, ררב, בדיר, the weapons of his indignation (v.25) (cf. Isa 13:5)</td>
<td>In v.25, Yahweh brings forth weapons of his indignation for (מ) he “has a work (מלאכה) in the land of the Chaldeans.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 50:27</td>
<td>שׁמדמה כלהל, vengeance (v.15, 28)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 51:18</td>
<td>שׁמדמה כלהל, vengeance (v.6, 11)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 51:44</td>
<td>שׁמדמה, object of horror (v.41, 43)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>On the “destroyers” as agents of Yahweh,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>Nouns expressing the nature, content, or result of Yahweh’s প্রেরণ</td>
<td>Agents, instruments or instrumental phrases associated with Yahweh’s প্রেরণ</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hos 1:4</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>note that v.55 predicates שׁבֹד of Yahweh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hos 2:15MT</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hos 4:9</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hos 4:14</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hos 9:7 (*)</td>
<td>שׁלֹם, recompense</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Precise parallel with প্রেরণ here: “The days of visitation have come; the days of recompense have come.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hos 12:3MT</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amos 3:2</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amos 3:14</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micah 7:4 (*)</td>
<td>מַבּוֹחַ, confusion, confounding</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeph 1:8,9,12</td>
<td>שׁמָשָׁה, desolation (v.13) שׁמָשָׁה, desolation (v.13) כְּלָה אַרְבּוֹנָה, sudden and complete destruction (v.18)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeph 3:7</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zech 10:3</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job 36:23</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table G. Iniquity in the Context of Yahweh’s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Terms for Iniquity</th>
<th>Markers that פָּדָה פָּדָה is “Because of” Iniquity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exod 20:5</td>
<td>עָּוֹן, iniquity</td>
<td>הָּעֵגֶל, the calf</td>
<td>“iniquity of fathers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exod 32:34</td>
<td>חֲטָּאָה/חטא, sin (v. and n.)</td>
<td>עשׂו את־העגל על אשׁר, because they made the calf</td>
<td>The verb and noun forms of חטא are used 8x in Exod 32:30–34.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 18:25</td>
<td>עָּוֹן, iniquity</td>
<td>והָּעֵגֶל, the calf</td>
<td>“iniquity of fathers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
<td>[not listening to Yahweh, n, breaking his covenant, etc.]</td>
<td>לא תשׁמעו לי, if you will not listen to me, etc. (vv. 14–15)</td>
<td>“the land became unclean, and (so) I punished”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num 14:18</td>
<td>עָּוֹן, iniquity</td>
<td>רשׁעים, wicked (adj., v. 26)</td>
<td>“iniquity of fathers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num 16:29</td>
<td>פָּדָה, bloodshed</td>
<td>[Leviathan the dragon]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deut 5:9</td>
<td>עָּוֹן, iniquity</td>
<td></td>
<td>“iniquity of fathers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 10:12</td>
<td>turn from justice (v. 2)</td>
<td>The boasts of the king of Assyria are rebuked in vv. 13–15.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 13:11</td>
<td>רָּעָּה, evil</td>
<td>MT has רעה as an adj. (“evil world”). BHS suggests הרעה or רעה (“punish against the world its evil”)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 24:21</td>
<td>פָּשׁע, transgression (v. 20)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 26:21</td>
<td>דָּּמִים, bloodshed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 27:1,3</td>
<td>ישע, do abomination</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 5:9,29</td>
<td>[They were not ashamed when they did abomination:] therefore they will fall among the fallen, at the time of their visitation.</td>
<td>They have forsaken Yahweh and sworn by those who were no gods, played the whore, see v. 7.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 8:12 (*)</td>
<td>וְהָּעֵגֶל</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 9:8MT</td>
<td>עָּוֹן, iniquity (Hiph verb), v. 4MT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 9:24MT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>because they have forsaken my law, not obeyed my voice, followed own hearts and gone after Baals, as their fathers taught them (vv. 12–13MT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>Terms for Iniquity</td>
<td>Markers that is “Because of” Iniquity</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 10:15 (*)</td>
<td>שקר, false (v. 14)</td>
<td>שבר על ידי העונות בא hôד ההשש, work of delusion/delusion</td>
<td>The “iniquities of the forefathers” in v. 10 are specified as refusing to hear Yahweh’s words, going after and serving other gods, and breaking Yahweh’s covenant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 11:22 Jer 11:23 (*)</td>
<td>יין, iniquity</td>
<td>יין, iniquity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
<td>דרכים, ways (v. 7)</td>
<td>because of Manasseh (v. 4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 21:14</td>
<td>פניםת, fruit of your deeds, פניםת, evil of their deeds (v.12)</td>
<td>according to the fruit of your deeds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 23:2</td>
<td>יין, evil of your deeds</td>
<td>גל, fruit of your deeds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 23:12 (*)</td>
<td>מנסים, ways (v. 10), מנסים, their course is evil (v. 10), נערים, not right (v. 10), חנף, be godless, profane (v. 11)</td>
<td>יין, their evil (v. 11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 23:34</td>
<td>[false prophecy]</td>
<td>because you have said [false prophecy] (v.38)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 25:12</td>
<td>יין, iniquity</td>
<td>יין, iniquity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 27:8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 29:32</td>
<td>[false prophecy]</td>
<td>because Shemaiah [falsely prophesied]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 30:20</td>
<td>“against all who oppress (NSDictionary) Jacob”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 36:1</td>
<td>יין, iniquity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 44:13</td>
<td>הוה, evil (v. 3)</td>
<td>because of their evil which they did (v. 3)</td>
<td>Specifically includes provoking Yahweh to anger by serving other gods (see 44:3, 8, 15–19).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 44:29</td>
<td>[trust in own word above word of Yahweh]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 46:21 (*)</td>
<td>[against false gods of Egypt, Pharaoh, and all who trust in them]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 48:44 (*)</td>
<td>ועל־יהוה הגדיל, he magnified himself above Yahweh (v. 42)</td>
<td>because he magnified himself above Yahweh (v. 42)</td>
<td>Babylon is “plunderer of Yahweh’s heritage” (v. 11), and their king is accused of devouring the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verse (Pekudim)</td>
<td>Terms for Iniquity</td>
<td>Markers that is “Because of” Iniquity</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 50:27 (*)</td>
<td>שקר, false (v. 17)</td>
<td>because you challenged Yahweh (v.24)</td>
<td>bones of the scattered sheep of Israel (v. 17). They may protest “we have committed no wrong since Israel sinned against Yahweh” (v. 7), but Yahweh accuses them of sinning against him by mistreating Israel (v. 14).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 51:18 (*)</td>
<td>שקר, vanity/worthless, work of delusion/derision</td>
<td>because of the greatness of your iniquity and the greatness of your enmity</td>
<td>“Ways, deeds” are neutral terms, but in this context sinful (see catalog of sins in 4:1b-2, 6, 7, 8).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hos 1:4</td>
<td>דמים, bloodshed</td>
<td>because you have rejected knowledge (v.6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hos 2:15MT</td>
<td>ימי הבעלים, days of the Baals</td>
<td>according to his ways</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hos 4:9</td>
<td>רדסים, ways, deeds</td>
<td>according to his deeds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hos 4:14</td>
<td>[the men go off with prostitutes and offer sacrifices with temple prostitutes]</td>
<td>Here, as punishment, against these men, Yahweh threatens that he will not visit against their daughters / brides when they play the whore.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hos 9:7 (*)</td>
<td>רדסים, ways, deeds</td>
<td>because of the greatness of your iniquity and the greatness of your enmity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hos 12:3MT</td>
<td>רדסים, ways, deeds</td>
<td>according to his ways</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amos 3:2</td>
<td>עונת, iniquity</td>
<td>“transgressions of Israel”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amos 3:14</td>
<td>עונת, transgressions, altars</td>
<td>“altars of Bethel”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mic 7:4 (*)</td>
<td>עונת, sin (verb, v. 17)</td>
<td>because of your sin (6:13) [you walked in their counsels] so that I make you a desolation (6:16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeph 1:8,9,12</td>
<td>חטא, sin (verb, v. 17)</td>
<td>because they have sinned against Yahweh (v.17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeph 3:7</td>
<td>חטא, unjust one (v. 5)</td>
<td>because they have sinned against Yahweh (v.17)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zech 10:3</td>
<td>[false prophecy]</td>
<td>“The arose early to corrupt their wanton deeds” (v. 7).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job 36:23</td>
<td>דרך, way</td>
<td>wrongdoing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here, “way” is understood alongside “wrong” in the second clause. The sense
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse שָׁפָא</th>
<th>Terms for Iniquity</th>
<th>Markers that פָּקַד is &quot;Because of&quot; Iniquity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

is hypothetical: if Yahweh had done עָלָה, who could punish (פָּקַד עָלָה) his way against him and rebuke him, saying “You have done wrong”?
Table H. Yahweh’s פקד על and Yahweh’s Anger, Jealousy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse (ֶל)</th>
<th>Terms for Anger, Passion</th>
<th>Translation in context</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exod 20:5</td>
<td>קנא, jealous</td>
<td>“a jealous God”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exod 32:34</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exod 34:7</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 18:25</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
<td>חֵמָּה, wrath (v.28)</td>
<td>“I will walk with you in opposing wrath” (v.28)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num 14:18</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num 16:29</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deut 5:9</td>
<td>קנא, jealous</td>
<td>“a jealous God”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isa 10:3 (*)</td>
<td>ṣא, anger (v.4)</td>
<td>“his anger has not turned back” (v.4)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ḍבָּה, rod of my anger (v.5)</td>
<td>“Assyria is the rod of my anger; the staff in their hands is my indignation” (v.5)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isa 10:12</td>
<td>Ø</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 13:11</td>
<td>יַכְזָרִי, cruel (v.9)</td>
<td>“the day of Yahweh comes, cruel, with fury and burning anger” (v.9)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>עֶבְרָה, fury (v.9,13)</td>
<td>“at the fury of Yahweh of hosts in the day of his burning anger” (v.13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isa 24:21</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>“hide yourselves until fury / indignation passes by” (v.20)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isa 26:21</td>
<td>אַכְזָרִי, fury (v.20)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isa 27:1,3</td>
<td>חֵמָּה, wrath (v.3)</td>
<td>“I have no wrath” (v.3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 5:9,29</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 8:12 (*)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 9:8MT</td>
<td>Ø</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 9:24MT</td>
<td>Ø</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 10:15 (*)</td>
<td>חֵמָּה, wrath (v.10)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>אַכְזָרִי, fury (v.10)</td>
<td>“lend my wrath go forth like fire” (v.12)</td>
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<td>Jer 11:22</td>
<td>Ø</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 11:23 (*)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 21:14</td>
<td>חֵמָּה, wrath (v.12)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 23:2</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 23:12 (*)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 23:34</td>
<td>חֵמָּה, wrath (v.19)</td>
<td>“wrath has gone forth” (v.23)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 25:12</td>
<td>Ø</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 27:8</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 29:32</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 30:20</td>
<td>חֵמָּה, wrath (v.23)</td>
<td>“the burning anger of Yahweh”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Verse</td>
<td>Terms for Anger, Passion</td>
<td>Translation in context</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<td>-------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 36:31</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>will not turn back until he has acted and established the intentions of his heart” (v.24)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 44:13</td>
<td>חֵמָּה, wrath (v.6) אֵשׁ קנאת, anger (v.6) כעס (H, v.8)</td>
<td>“my wrath and my anger poured forth and burned against” (v.6) “Why do you provoke me to anger by the works of your hands” (v.8)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 44:29</td>
<td>Ø</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 46:21 (*)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 46:25</td>
<td>Ø</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 48:44</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 50:18</td>
<td>חֵמָּה, wrath (v.13)</td>
<td>“because of the wrath of Yahweh she will not be inhabited” (v.13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 50:27 (*)</td>
<td>城墙יו, weapons of his wrath (v.25)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 51:18 (*)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>“save your lives from the burning anger of Yahweh” (v.45)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 51:44,47,52</td>
<td>חרון אף, burning anger (v.45)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hos 1:4</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hos 2:15MT</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hos 4:9</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hos 4:14</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hos 9:7 (*)</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hos 12:3MT</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Amos 3:2</td>
<td>Ø</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amos 3:14</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mic 7:4 (*)</td>
<td>עשנה, causing indignation (6:10) צעם, rage (7:9)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Zeph 1:8,9,12</td>
<td>חֵמָּה, wrath (vv.15,18) אֵשׁ קנאת (v.18)</td>
<td>“a day of wrath” (v.15) “on the day of the wrath of Yahweh” (v.18) “consumed … in the fire of his jealousy” (v.18)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zeph 3:7</td>
<td>חרון אף, indignation (v.8) אֵשׁ קנאת, burning anger (v.8) אש קנאת, fire of jealousy (v.8)</td>
<td>“to pour out upon them my indignation, all my burning anger, for in the fire of my jealousy all the earth will be consumed” (v.8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zech 10:3</td>
<td>אֵשׁ, anger</td>
<td>“my anger burns against the shepherds”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job 36:23</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table I. Yahweh’s_words פקד על Acts Come after Period of Delay, in Fulfillment of Yahweh’s Words of Warning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse (*1)</th>
<th>References to a Coming Day or Time of Yahweh’s_words פקד על</th>
<th>Yahweh’s_words פקד על as Fulfillment of His Words of Warning</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exod 20:5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exod 32:34</td>
<td>בזוב פקד ו, in the day when I visit (v.34)</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exod 34:7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lev 18:25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lev 26:16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>[words of warning which Yahweh’s_words פקד על will fulfill]205</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Num 14:18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Num 16:29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deut 5:9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 10:3</td>
<td>ליום פקדה, on the day of visitation (v.3)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 10:12</td>
<td>וביבצע אדוני אתכלילטח/sm ו, when Adonay has finished all his work against Mount Zion…</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>…he will visit-in-punishment … the king of Assyria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 13:11</td>
<td>ימי enlarge, the day of Yahweh (vv.6,9)</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 24:21</td>
<td>ימים להא in that day (v.21) after many days (v.22)</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 26:21</td>
<td>ימים להא in that day (27:1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isa 27:1,3</td>
<td>ימים להא in that day (vv.1,2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 5:9,29</td>
<td>בימים להה, in those days (v.18)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 8:12</td>
<td>הבן פקד וה, at the time of their visitation (v.12)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 9:8MT</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 9:24MT</td>
<td>ימים באים, the days are coming (v.24MT)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 10:15</td>
<td>הבן פקד וה, at the time of their visitation (v.15)</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 11:22</td>
<td>הנפש פקד וה, the year of their visitation (v.23)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 11:23</td>
<td>הנפש פקד וה, the year of their visitation (v.23)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 15:3</td>
<td>לאיהלתי להה, I am weary of relenting (v.6)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 21:14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 23:2</td>
<td>ימים באים, the days are coming (vv.5,7)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 23:12</td>
<td>הנפש פקד וה, the year of their visitation (v.12)</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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205 This passage, like many of the later prophetic oracles which echo it, does not mention Yahweh’s “words” in connection with his פקד על; however, this passage and such oracles function as the words of Yahweh’s warning which his “visitation-in-punishment” will bring about.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse (Verse (*))</th>
<th>References to a Coming Day or Time of Yahweh’s Words of Warning</th>
<th>Yahweh’s Words as Fulfillment of His Words of Warning</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jer 23:34</td>
<td>פַּקַּד עֲלֵי References to a Coming Day or Time of Yahweh’s Words of Warning</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>In v.26, Yahweh asks, “How long will there be no false prophecies in the hearts of the prophets?” In v. 34, he then threatens to פַּקַּד עֲלֵי the prophets and priests who falsely speak in his name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 25:12</td>
<td>פַּקַּד עֲלֵי References to a Coming Day or Time of Yahweh’s Words of Warning</td>
<td>“I will bring against this land all the words which I have threatened against it, all which are written in this scroll, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations.” (v.13)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 27:8</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 29:32</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 30:20</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 36:31</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 44:13</td>
<td>פַּקַּד עֲלֵי References to a Coming Day or Time of Yahweh’s Words of Warning</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 44:29</td>
<td>פַּקַּד עֲלֵי References to a Coming Day or Time of Yahweh’s Words of Warning</td>
<td>“and the remnant of Judah [in Egypt] shall know whose word will stand, mine or theirs” (v.28) “in order that you may know that my words will surely stand against you for harm.” (v.28–29)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 46:21 (*)</td>
<td>פַּקַּד עֲלֵי References to a Coming Day or Time of Yahweh’s Words of Warning</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>The coming visitation of Yahweh upon Egypt and the fugitives of Judah in Egypt will give such knowledge. (See note above.) On “my word vs. theirs,” see Jer 5:12.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 46:25 (* )</td>
<td>פַּקַּד עֲלֵי References to a Coming Day or Time of Yahweh’s Words of Warning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 48:44 (*)</td>
<td>פַּקַּד עֲלֵי References to a Coming Day or Time of Yahweh’s Words of Warning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 50:18</td>
<td>פַּקַּד עֲלֵי References to a Coming Day or Time of Yahweh’s Words of Warning</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Jer 50:31 uses a similar construction:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psalm Verse</td>
<td>References to a Coming Day or Time of Yahweh’s Visitation</td>
<td>Yahweh’s Visitation as Fullfillment of His Words of Warning</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>visitation (v.27)</td>
<td></td>
<td>“your day (יום) has come, the time (עת) when I have visited you.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jer 51:18 (*)</td>
<td>untu utiten...laron; the time of Yahweh’s vengeance (v.6)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jer 51:44,47,52</td>
<td>the days are coming (vv.47,52)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hos 1:4</td>
<td>yet a little while (v.4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hos 2:15MT</td>
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<td>Hos 4:9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hos 4:14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hos 9:7 (*)</td>
<td>the days of the visitation [have come] (v.7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hos 12:3MT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amos 3:2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Amos 3:14</td>
<td>the day of your watchmen</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micah 7:4 (*)</td>
<td>the day of your watchmen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Zeph 1:8,9,12</td>
<td>the day of Y is near (v.7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zeph 3:7</td>
<td>the day when I arise</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

206 Reading with the emendations suggested by BHS, Mic 6:10–11 prefaces this visitation with Yahweh’s query: “Shall I forget (נשׁה) or forgive (שׂנ) any longer (עוד) the wicked treasure in the house of the wicked, and the accursedly scant measure? Acquit (ジーוח) a man with wicked scales and bag of dishonest weights?” Cf. ESV, NIV.

207 On the expression “day of your watchmen” in Mic 7:4, see Hans Walter Wolff, Micah: A Commentary, CC, trans. Gary Stansell (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1990), 207, who sees it as designating “Yahweh’s prophets who have declared the very disaster which is ‘now’ taking place ( היום).” On כנף as prophetic watchman, see Isa 21:6, as well as Jer 6:17; Ezek 3:17; 33:2, 6, 7; Isa 52:8; and Hos 9:8.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>References to a Coming Day or Time of Yahweh’s Words of Warning</th>
<th>Yahweh’s as Fulfillment of His Words of Warning</th>
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<td>Zech 10:3</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Job 36:23</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Subgroup</td>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>Translation (with context)</td>
<td>Verse(s) Reference</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Verbs of Action</td>
<td>ילדה</td>
<td>(Sarah) conceived and bore (a son)</td>
<td>Gen 21:1–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>הרה</td>
<td>(Hannah) conceived and bore (three sons and two daughters)</td>
<td>1 Sam 2:21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ישע</td>
<td>(visit me with) your salvation, (or:) (visit me when) you save</td>
<td>Ps 106:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>נקם</td>
<td>take vengeance (for me against my persecutors)</td>
<td>Jer 15:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>נתן</td>
<td>(Yahweh had visited his people) by giving (food to them)</td>
<td>Ruth 1:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>עלה</td>
<td>(God will surely visit you and) bring you up (from this land to the land…)</td>
<td>Gen 50:24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>עלה</td>
<td>(I will) bring you up (from the affliction of Egypt to the land…)</td>
<td>Exod 3:16–17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>עשה</td>
<td>(Yahweh) did (for Sarah just as he had)</td>
<td>Gen 21:1–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subgroup</td>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>Translation (with context)</td>
<td>Verse(s) Reference</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Verbs of Speech</strong></td>
<td>אמר</td>
<td>(Yahweh visited Sarah just as he) <strong>had said</strong></td>
<td>Gen 21:1–2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(And I) <strong>have said</strong>, (“I will bring you up from the affliction of Egypt”)</td>
<td>Exod 3:16–17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ברך</td>
<td>(And Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and) <strong>say</strong>, (“May Yahweh give you offspring from this woman”)</td>
<td>1 Sam 2:20–21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>דבר</td>
<td>(Yahweh did for Sarah just as he) <strong>had promised</strong></td>
<td>Gen 21:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Sarah … bore for Abraham a son at the appointed time which God) <strong>had promised</strong> (him)</td>
<td>Gen 21:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(I will visit and I will uphold my good word concerning you, by returning you to this place)</td>
<td>Jer 29:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Verbs of Perception</strong></td>
<td>זכר</td>
<td>(Yahweh) <strong>remembered</strong></td>
<td>1 Sam 1:19–20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subgroup</td>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>Translation (with context)</td>
<td>Verse(s) Reference</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Hannah … and she conceived)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Remember</td>
<td>(me and visit me and take vengeance for me against my persecutors)</td>
<td>Jer 15:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Remember</td>
<td>(me, O Yahweh, with the favor you show your people)</td>
<td>Ps 106:4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>זכור (N)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(…in order that you (Tyre) may) be remembered. (At the end of 70 years, Yahweh will visit Tyre.)</td>
<td>Isa 23:16–17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ראה</td>
<td></td>
<td>(when they heard that Yahweh had visited the sons of Israel and that he had) seen (their affliction)</td>
<td>Exod 4:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ראָה, נְבַע</td>
<td></td>
<td>(O God of hosts, turn, look from heaven,) see, (and visit this vine!)</td>
<td>Ps 80:15MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>שָׁב</td>
<td></td>
<td>(O God of hosts,) turn, (look from heaven, see, and visit this vine!)</td>
<td>Ps 80:15MT</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER SIX

METODOLOGY OF NARRATIVE AND RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

In this dissertation, the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons to the third and fourth generation” is examined within the speeches of Yahweh in which it occurs (Exod 20:2–6 and 34:6–7) from three interrelated angles of approach. First, the phrase has been considered from a lexical-grammatical standpoint, examining the component words and syntactic structures, with particular attention to the verb פקד and an extensive analysis of the meaning and usage of the construction פקד על. Second, in the chapters which follow, consideration will be given to the occurrence of this phrase within a story, bringing insights from a narrative analysis of Exodus to bear on the contextual meaning and function of the phrase. Third, Exod 20:2–6 and 34:6–7 will be approached from the standpoint of rhetorical criticism, analyzing them as strategic utterances of the character Yahweh within the rhetorical situation constructed by the narrator.

The methodology and results of lexical-grammatical analysis have been presented in Chapters 4 and 5 above, with particular focus on a fresh semantic analysis and description of the collocation פקד על in contexts of iniquity. The present chapter now lays out a broad rationale and methodology for the narrative analysis and rhetorical analysis of the visiting phrase.

6.1. Narrative Analysis

Within Pentateuch studies, the fracturing of the Wellhäusern consensus and the emergence of new literary approaches in the 1970s are well-known. This new literary interest views Pentateuch texts not only as narrative wholes, but also as narrative wholes, with keen interest in the elements and artistry of narration. J. P. Fokkelman, in answering the question “What is the
text saying?” takes an “apparent detour, by asking: how is it saying it?”1 Contemporary literary criticism regards “the biblical narrative … as being a work of literature itself. The aspects of plot, theme, character, narrator, structure, literary patterns, and contextual setting are taken seriously as the essential ingredients of the intended meaning of a text.”2

The present study employs insights regarding the traits and conventions proper to ancient Hebrew narration, yet also assumes the broad applicability of the categories of narrative analysis developed in the Western literary tradition. This eclectic perspective lies behind the works of Robert Alter, Meir Sternberg, J. Fokkelman, Shimon Bar-Efrat, and Yairah Amit.3 The advice of Leland Ryken is to the point:

In the final analysis, any canon of literature is a blend of the unique and the archetypal, the original and the conventional. Instead of exempting biblical literature from the usual forms of Western literature, I suggest a critical procedure that begins by placing the biblical literature in the familiar framework of Western literature and then observes where and how biblical literature breaks out of this framework.4

From this vantage, Exod 20:5b and 34:7b will be read as statements within the Exodus story,5 surrounded by and participating in the elemental features of narrative: plot, characterization,

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5 Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 35, “One of the advantages of the term ‘story’ is that it is conveniently vague about the precise nature of the material to which it is applied but focuses rather on those elements which bring a narrative to life—plot, irony, suspense, climax, etc.—and which involve the reader imaginatively in the material.” R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34*, JSPOTS 22 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1983), 35, argues against prematurely identifying literature
setting, point of view, themes, and narrative devices such as repetition, key words, concentric structures, irony, reversal, foreshadowing, allusion, etc.  

6.1.1. The Parts in View of the Whole

The most basic assumption from which narrative analysis proceeds is the unity of the story and, thus, the importance of reading the constituent parts in relation to one another and in relation to the whole. A second assumption is equally fundamental: a story has progression, forward movement, so that the description of a beautiful waterfall is not a story, nor even is a listing of sequential events without a meaningful shape and direction to the action. Bar-Efrat’s characterization of OT narrative supports both assumptions:

There are very few events in the biblical narrative which have neither a causal nor a sequential role to play in the chain of the narrative. The task of those incidents, which are not essential to the structure of the plot and could be omitted, is to emphasize aspects, expand situations, illuminate characters, deepen significance, etc. Because there are so few of them, the biblical narrative is not diffuse but is cohesive, concise and very tightly constructed.

Without the paired assumptions of narrative unity and progression, readings of a text may interrelate the parts of the text in interesting ways, generative of meaning, but such readings are no longer reading the story as story. Heavily diachronic readings eliminate the assumption of

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according to a narrow generic category which then becomes determinative of meaning. “It may be suggested … that for many narrative portions of the OT, including Ex. 32–34, questions of literary genre are of comparatively little significance for arriving at the meaning of the story, and assume more importance in discussions of the story’s origin or historicity. Obviously, one must make some kind of a genre assessment at the outset, but this is true of any literature and is no difficulty if one has been properly taught to read.”


7 Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., Interpreting the Historical Books, HOTE (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 25, has a summative statement regarding historical narratives which captures this dual emphasis: “The interpreter’s task is to explain the story line [progression] of the literature and to show how the variety of material contributes to the whole [unity]” (my emphasis). Aristotle, Poetics, 1:7, makes his well-known observation that a story has three parts—a beginning, a middle, and an end—which clearly expresses the basic principle of unity but also implies this second universal tendency of narrative progression.

8 Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art, 96.
unity and transfer the assumption of progression to the compositional history, socio-political history, or history of religious thought behind the text. Consider the strongly narrative aspect of Noth’s “path” in this description of Exodus:

The path from the living narratives of the oldest literary strata, still recognizably rooted in the formative period of oral tradition, to the rationalizing theology of ordinances which is advanced in the latest writing is a significant one, whose course has left its traces in the final form of the book in a number of decisive moments. It is a path which even within the Book of Exodus leads us into central concepts of the faith of the Old Testament.

Such approaches abandon the storyline of the narrative, which plainly exists, for a speculative substitute narrative of the texts’ origins. Other approaches, form criticism primarily, attend to recurring forms or themes appearing in scattered passages, interpreting them en masse in their cumulative and comparative significance (thereby assuming a certain kind of textual unity), but ignoring the location and function of these passages within the narrative progression.

9 Hafemann, Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel, 191, notes that in historically driven approaches since the mid-eighteenth century, “the narrative itself is largely ignored or devalued as simply the ultimate deposit of these prior, and implicitly more important, oral, written, and historical sources. For the historian, the real subject matter of the text is no longer the text’s story, but rather the story of the text.” This itself is but one facet of the great hermeneutical shift diagnosed by Hans Frei, The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974). Frei notes (pp. 124, 130) that “In the second half of the eighteenth century when general (nontheological) biblical hermeneutics developed rapidly in Germany, its principles of exegesis were pivoted between historical criticism and religious apologetics. The explicative meaning of the narrative texts came to be their ostensive or ideal reference…. It is no exaggeration to say that all across the theological spectrum the great reversal had taken place; interpretation was a matter of fitting the biblical story into another world with another story rather than incorporating that world into the biblical story.”


11 Thomas W. Mann, The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 5, “Can we be certain that ‘J’ wrote during the Davidic-Solomonic empire, and even if we can, should we then base our interpretation of the meaning of say, his Abrahamic stories, on that historical context? It should at least give us pause that one can easily make much of the ‘call’ of Abram (Gen 12:1–3) by a ‘J’ who wrote in the heady days of the tenth century or one who wrote to the distraught exiles in the sixth.”

12 For a critique of this approach, see Robert Polzin, “‘The Ancestress of Israel in Danger’ in Danger,” Semeia 3 (1975): 82. More recently, John Ronning, “The Naming of Isaac: The Role of the Wife/Sister Episodes in the Redaction of Genesis,” WTJ 53 (1991): 6, critiques a scholarly discussion of these “endangered ancestress” episodes which debates minor variables but which shares an “automatic assumption that the object of study is to find out how the three episodes relate to each other, more than to their differing contexts. Our disagreement is more fundamental. The only relationship that we positively know existed among the three accounts is the one that now exists in the book of Genesis: a literary one, where they are three different episodes in the lives of the patriarchs separated from each other by many years and considerable narration. Any other relationship among them is, and can only be, hypothetical, and the wide divergence of opinion as to such hypothetical relationships does not give much confidence in the certainty of any one position.” Dale Patrick, The Rendering of God in the Old Testament, OBT
With the assumption of narrative unity and narrative progression (or shape) in place, a number of specific interrelationships between the parts, and between parts and the whole of the narrative, can also be assumed. First, earlier elements in the story will often anticipate or lay the groundwork for later elements through prolepsis, other types of foreshadowing, or conscious deferral of information. In the analysis of Exod 20:5b and 34:7b in their narrative context, such anticipatory functions of earlier passages will be directly relevant.

Second, later elements in the narrative assume the reader’s knowledge of previous elements. While such an assumption may seem self-evident to the tellers and readers of stories, it has been anything but self-evident in historical-critical analyses of Exodus. In many ways, this simple observation stands at the fulcrum of Moberly’s fruitful and somewhat subversive study, At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34. “In the exegesis of Ex. 32–34 it is proposed that frequently sense may best be made on the assumption of a knowledge of the preceding narrative in Ex. 19–24; (25–31); and more generally Ex. 1–18.” Moberly explains this assumption, and contrasts it with other prevalent approaches:

A writer will frequently be allusive in style. He will not want or need to elaborate on matters of which the reader is presumed already to possess knowledge, either through general knowledge or through what the writer himself has previously said. The preoccupation of historical-critical analysis with penetrating behind the text makes

(Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 96–97, interprets as a group passages in Exod 19–24 with passages in Exod 34. In Patrick’s view, the highly complex and speculative nature of source analysis makes an exposition of the text on that basis “too treacherous…. However, it would be just as confusing to yield to the extant story line.” The effect of Patrick bucking the story line, however, is the homogenization of related but narratively distinct texts, e.g. “ratification of the covenant” texts in Exod 24:1–11 and 34:29–35.

Prolepsis provides the reader explicit information with which to anticipate or understand a coming event, such as the pattern of rebellion and rescue established in Judg 2 or the prefatory comment to the binding of Isaac in Gen 22:1. See Fokkelman, Reading Biblical Narrative, 133. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 46, observes that when proleptic passages occur “they replace the kind of suspense deriving from the question ‘what will happen next?’ by another kind of suspense, revolving around the question ‘how is it going to happen?’” Amit, Reading Biblical Narratives, 112, notes that in biblical literature, prolepsis often supports the emphasis on God’s control over history. Four dramatic Pentateuchal examples of prolepsis are analyzed by Laurence Turner, Announcements of Plot in Genesis, JSOTSup 96 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990).

Moberly, Mountain of God, 32.
difficult an appreciation of this aspect of literary style. Silence about, or only a brief reference to, some feature in the preceding narrative is customarily taken as showing either ignorance of this feature, thus constituting evidence for the discernment of sources, or else a secondary gloss or harmonization, thus providing evidence for redactional compilation. To interpret silence or allusions as assuming a knowledge of the preceding narrative may have far-reaching implications.\textsuperscript{15}

Biblical narratives, then, like all stories, advance “themes and ideas worked out in more than one story throughout the narrative, often providing consummation of an earlier idea in a later pericope.”\textsuperscript{16}

Third, smaller episodes within larger narratives are fruitfully interpreted in light of their own story shape (initial situation, conflict, climax, and resolution) yet are also assumed to stand in a hermeneutically crucial dialectic relationship with the overall narrative.\textsuperscript{17} Large narratives are comprised of “stories within stories”—not in the sense of imbedded tales told by characters (à la \textit{Don Quixote} or \textit{The Canterbury Tales}) but in the sense of scenes or episodes which have an independently interesting and satisfying narrative arc yet also participate in the unfolding of a larger macro-arc or macro-plot.\textsuperscript{18} “In most prose books of the Old Testament,” Fokkelman notes, “the story is used as a basic literary unit. But the stories combine in groups (which may be called

\textsuperscript{15} Moberly, \textit{Mountain of God}, 32 (author’s emphasis).

\textsuperscript{16} Jonathan T. Pennington, \textit{Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction} (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 190–91. For example, Pennington lists seven ways in which the conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel (28:18–20) assumes and interacts with preceding Matthean texts. Similarly, the closing scene of Exodus in 40:34–38 assumes, resonates with, and concludes several elements from the previous narrative: the cloud, the glory of Yahweh, Moses’ role as intimate confidant of Yahweh and mediator, the theme of limited access to Yahweh and its danger, the association of “journeys” both with the previous land-promise and with the checkered past in chapters 15–17, the theophanic fire, the expression “in the eyes of … Israel” (cf. 24:17), and even the previous usage of the word “house” evoked by the designation of the people as the “house” of Israel.

\textsuperscript{17} According to George A. Kennedy, \textit{Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times}, rev. and enl. ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 182, Saint Augustine accented this concentricity of contexts, teaching that “interpretation should be based not only on an understanding of the context in which a … passage occurs but also on the overall meaning and structure of the work in which it occurs.”

\textsuperscript{18} Amit, \textit{Reading Biblical Narratives}, 147, emphasizes that “an examination of the [episodic] story in its various contexts becomes a two-way process of enrichment: it enhances the framework, which in turn enhances and deepens the [episodic] story itself.”
acts); these groups often constitute a section or cycle, and the sections form a book.”

Fourth, “non-narrative” elements within the book such as genealogies, songs, and laws are to be read as part of the story. Embedded within the narrative, they participate in a complex of interrelationships driven primarily by the narrative framework. Exodus 20:5 occurs within the Decalogue, a block of legal material. A narrative analysis of the meaning and function of Exod 20:5 and 34:7 certainly must attend to the the narrative parts and narrative whole of Exodus, but also to ways in which the themes and functions of the genealogies, songs, and laws may illumine the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons.” The legal sections, in particular, stand in interpretively fruitful relation to Yahweh’s character (as the lawgiver) and to the plot of the Exodus story.

Fifth, the robust consideration of the story’s many constituent interrelationships requires and assumes multiple re-readings. The most basic reading strategy for appreciating and appropriating Biblical narratives, then, is to read them in their entirety, to read them repeatedly, and thus to read them from a posture of deep familiarity. This is not to deny that narrative is a sequential form of art; the telling of the story unfolds within “time of narration” and the primary interaction assumed of the reader or hearer is that they will encounter the narrative in such a sequential unfolding. Narrative impact is dulled when the deferral of information,

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20 The embedded laws participate in the plotline of Exodus along multiple narrative trajectories. First, the laws advance the storyline of the revelation of the divine name and character, reflecting the will and character of their giver. Second, the storyline of Yahweh’s mighty deliverance of his people from Pharaoh’s rule and yoke, bringing them up from the land of Egypt, both occasions and justifies his extensive commanding at Sinai (Exod 19:4; 20:2). Third, the laws relate to the narrative arc of Yahweh creating for himself a holy and priestly people (Exod 19:5–6). Finally, many laws look ahead to life in the land, thus participating in the storyline of Yahweh’s quest to fulfill the promises to the fathers by leading the people into the land of promise as a perpetual inheritance (for example, Exod 16:32–33; 20:12; 23:23–24; 34:24).


22 For helpful elaborations of the relationship between narratives and time, see Amit, Reading Hebrew Narratives, 104–10; Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art, 142–43.
suspense, mounting tension, and elements of surprise or misdirection are not experienced as such. Thus, Laurence Turner’s suggestion of focusing on the “meaning of an element ‘in the story so far’” is a valuable initial interpretive posture.\(^{23}\) Still, a well-told tale often strews elements along the way which arouse expectation of some as-yet-undisclosed significance which the later narrative will bring to light. An engaged reader will reflect backward at these later junctures, especially at the end, to reconsider and re-evaluate earlier elements. The “retrospective” meaning of each narrative element is thus also a natural component of its overall function and meaning within the narrative whole. All this confirms the assumption of multiple re-readings and a deep familiarity with the narrative as the foundation for the integration of the parts and the whole, the essential task of narrative analysis.

6.1.2. Method, Reading, and Subjectivity

The best narrative analysis has engaged in the close reading of texts with attention to widely recognized literary categories and features, but has not yoked itself to a mechanical, objective *Methode* which promises identically reproducible results.\(^{24}\) The critic’s perception of narrative artistry and its significance is itself an art. Pennington writes, “The nature of good storytelling … is that it contains levels of interconnectivity within the storyline.… Discerning the “accuracy” of such interconnections is not mechanistic but is a matter of judgments made as we read more and learn to be sensitive readers.”\(^{25}\)

This theme of gradual, acquired competence in the perceptive reading of narratives is a

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\(^{23}\) Turner, *Announcements of Plot*, 17.

\(^{24}\) Patricia K. Tull, “Rhetorical Criticism and Beyond in Second Isaiah,” in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Marvin A. Sweeney & Ehud Ben Zvi (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 334, strikes a helpful and realistic note when she writes, “Fortunately, just as we do not have to find the one prototypical tree to know we are in a forest, we also do not have to find the one pure definition of method to know we are doing exegesis.”

\(^{25}\) Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely*, 191 (my emphasis).
commonplace in the literature of narrative criticism. Moberly speaks of the advantage and
natural access to the basic connections in a story enjoyed by the critic who “has been properly
taught to read”—a reference not to initiation into arcane theory but to extensive exposure to the
fundamental and recurring qualities of narrative literature.26 Grant Osborne writes, “The basic
method by which we are to study biblical narratives is simple: we are asked to read them!”27

Narrative-contextual readings are not demonstrable in a hard, objective sense. Such
interpretations are necessarily selective in their evidence and emerge from an actively construed
framework of significance.28 Humphreys connects such active involvement with the inescapable
subjectivity of interpretation: “Our experiences as individuals, and the cultural conventions and
norms we share with others, shape both what we observe in life or story as significant as well as
the particular significance or meaning we make of what we observe.”29

At their best, however, narrative interpretations seek to be more than merely ingenious or
even influential projections of the reader’s own self—they appeal for recognition as plausible,
persuasive, and even preferable explanations of the text’s own dynamic and significance by
rooting their demonstration in the features of the text itself. Fokkelman speaks of the two sides of

to the sheer wonder and delight of literature” prevalent in historical-critical biblical scholarship, and he
enthusiastically invites literature professors to join the discussion of biblical texts with confidence in their own
background, competence, and approach.

27 Grant R. Osborne, The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation

Narratives, ed. Kenneth R.R. Gros Louis, James S. Ackerman, and Thayer S. Warshaw, BLC (Nashville: Abingdon,
1974), 17, “By means of what it does say and what it does not say the Bible arouses us to share with it in the
creation of its meaning. To read the Bible in a passive way, expecting everything to be explicit, is to transfer to the
study of biblical literature habits and postures acquired through overexposure to our visual media. We are
accustomed to being observers, not participants in the creative act which produces art. Yet this is precisely what is
called for in reading Scripture as literature.”

29 W. Lee Humphreys, The Character or God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal (Louisville:
meaning: “the reader who bestows it, and the text which ‘has’ it.” Amit refers to the saying of the Jewish sages that the Bible has seventy faces, but stresses that this does not suggest the equal validity of all readings. “Some faces illustrate what the story’s interpreters wish to find in it, while others shed light on the integration of the story’s components,” Amit notes, and the best readings are those “that strive to remain faithful to the significance that arises from the fashioning of the story.” Clines’s discussion of literary theme strikes this same chord:

There is no way of demonstrating a theme to everyone’s satisfaction. The only formal criterion for establishing a theme is: the best statement of the theme of a work is the statement that most adequately accounts for the content, structure and development of the work. To state the theme of a work is to say what it means that the work is as it is.

This is in contrast to crassly ideological readings in which “the boundary between criticism and creative writing often blurs as new readings generate new texts.”

The present study makes no claim to be comprehensive or objective, yet it aims to offer an interpretation which the reader will find plausible, persuasive, and even preferable because it “sheds light on the integration of the text” and “arises from the fashioning of the story.” To borrow a line from Viktor Ber, it seeks to offer a reading of the Exodus narrative, and of the visiting phrase within that narrative, which is “enriching and adequate.”

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30 Fokkelman, Reading Biblical Narrative, 24–25. According to Fokkelman, in the reading process, “there is a fusion of a speaking subject (the text) and a listening subject conferring meaning (the reader) which is hard to fathom or describe,” so that, even with all this “intersubjectivity,” Fokkelman can still argue for the demonstrability (sometimes more “soft” than “hard”) of narrative features and functions.


6.1.3. The Book of Exodus as Story

For the sake of analysis, the present study considers the “narrative context” of Exod 20:5 and 34:7 to be the book of Exodus, rather than one portion of Exodus or a larger swath such as the entire Pentateuch. Mann notes that the text of Exodus itself “forces us to read it as a unity.” Utzschneider and Oswald note, “Notwithstanding the fact that the exodus narrative has been integrated into the narrative continuum of the Old Testament narrative traditions, there are good literary reasons for viewing and interpreting it as an independent entity.” Expounding on these, they examine “clear opening and closing signals,” theme words spanning the narrative, the literary genre underlying the narrative, and the shape of the plot. Kürle notes the narrative break at the end of Exodus indicated by the structuring device of epipher in 40:34–38, with the echoed final elements “and the glory of Yhwh filled the tabernacle” (vv. 34, 35) and “on all their journeys” (vv. 36, 38).

The all-of-Exodus and only-Exodus posture in this study is largely heuristic, however, and

35 Mann, Book of the Torah, 78. Three unifying elements listed by Mann constitute only a partial list: (1) The mountain of God promise, designated as the sign that Yahweh has sent Moses in Exod 3:12, is fulfilled in Exod 19–40, confirming that “the goal of chapters 1–15 is not simply escape from Egyptian servitude; it is servitude to Yahweh by the covenant community constituted at Mt. Sinai (chapters 19–40).” (2) “The opening words of Yahweh’s revelation of law at Mt. Sinai [Exod 20:2] are predicated on the preceding story and incomprehensible without that predication.” And (3) the ending of the book is finally necessary for the entire story: “At the end of the book (40:34–38) the tabernacle is erected and at once infused with the theophanic cloud of Yahweh’s presence, continuing a theme that began with the ‘exodus’ (13:21–22) and continued at Sinai (19:9; 24:15–18). The conclusion of the Exodus story does not come with the defeat of Pharaoh or with the revelation of the law at Sinai, but with the advent of the glory of Yahweh in the midst of the covenant community.” See also Arie C. Leder, “The Coherence of Exodus: Narrative Unity and Meaning,” CTJ 36 (2001): 251–69; Nahum M. Sarna, “The Book of Exodus,” ABD, 2:690; and Stefan Kürle, The Appeal of Exodus: The Characters God, Moses and Israel in the Rhetoric of the Book of Exodus, PBM (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2013), 20–28.

36 Helmut Utzschneider and Wolfgang Oswald, Exodus 1–15, IECOT (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2015), 23–32. When they speak of “exodus narrative,” Utzschneider and Oswald are focusing on the account of the deliverance from Egypt in Exod 1–15, which they characterize as an “action novel.” However, their literary criteria for establishing Exod 1–15 as a coherent narrative are easily extended and applied to the book of Exodus as a whole. In fact, this is necessary in the present study with its focus on texts in Exod 20 and 34, since, while Exod 1–15 can be analyzed narratively in its own right, Exod 16–40 (or 19–40) is narratively dependent upon the opening chapters of the book and cannot be reckoned separately as a coherent narrative in the same sense as 1–15.

37 Kürle, Appeal of Exodus, 24, explains, “An epipher is also known as an antistrophe, epistrophe, and as conversio and is defined as a repetitio, with the repeated elements positioned at the end of two or more (sentence) units.”
not rigorous. The Gen 50 to Exod 1 connections, the self-characterization of Yahweh as “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” in Exod 3, and other backwards references in Exodus suggest that the implied reader\textsuperscript{38} of the book of Exodus knows the book of Genesis.\textsuperscript{39} Here, Dale Patrick’s discussion of characterization is significant:

Adequate characterization must give each persona a particular past. This past must accompany the persona like an alter ego through time. Yahweh’s past deeds function in much the same way in the rendering of Yahweh as a dramatis persona as does a human persona’s biography. The God who confronts the reader in the narrative present brings his past with him. He is recognizable because he is the same as the one known in the stories of his deeds.\textsuperscript{40}

While this study assumes the Genesis background of the Exodus story, and does not intend to deny important interrelationships between Exod 20:5 and 34:7 and the Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy narratives which follow,\textsuperscript{41} it focuses on the book of Exodus itself as a unified narrative with its own plot structure, patterns of characterization, significant settings, and distinct themes.

Perhaps surprisingly, the book of Exodus is not a well-worn path in terms of narrative analysis. While the patriarchal narratives of Genesis,\textsuperscript{42} the Joseph cycle, the narratives of Joshua

\textsuperscript{38} M. H. Abrams and G. G. Harpham, A Glossary of Literary Terms, 9th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009), 299–300, reference Wolfgang Iser, who makes the important distinction “between the implied reader, who is established by a particular text itself as someone who is expected to respond in specific ways to the ‘response-inviting structures’ of the text, and the actual reader, whose responses are inevitably colored by his or her accumulated private experiences.” James Phelan, Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996), 215, offers a simpler definition: “The hypothetical, ideal audience for whom the author constructs the text and who understands it perfectly.” So also Gerald Prince, Dictionary of Narratology, rev. ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 43, “The audience presupposed by a text … and inferrable from the entire text.” This last point is crucial, that the implied reader is “implied” by features within the text itself. Synonymous terms for implied reader include “authorial audience” and “postulated reader.”

\textsuperscript{39} For further connections between Genesis and Exodus, including judicious reflections on the interpretive significance of these for the Exodus narrative, see Kürle, Appeal of Exodus, 20–23.

\textsuperscript{40} Patrick, Rendering of God, 34.

\textsuperscript{41} For example, note the important interrelation with Num 13–14 traced by Widmer, Moses, God, and the Dynamics, 254–349.

\textsuperscript{42} Hawk, “Literary/Narrative Criticism,” 538, notes that in the developing field of Hebrew poetics, “Genesis became a particular focal point for analysis, with comprehensive studies … supplementing a burgeoning corpus of articles and essays.” Hawk’s own discussion of the discipline and categories of narrative analysis of the Pentateuch is almost exclusively oriented around Genesis.
and Judges, and the David narratives from 1–2 Samuel have all factored largely in the burgeoning literary approaches to the Hebrew Bible in recent decades, the Exodus story continues to beg for scholarly attention.43

One feature distinguishing the book of Exodus from biblical texts with more narrative-critical foot traffic is its extensive legal and cultic instruction. As Josef Scharbert notes, “Charakteristic für das Buch Exodus ist die enge Verbindung von Erzählung und Recht.”44 The interplay between law and narrative is a fertile topic in OT studies today.45 Thus, the narrative analysis of this study will examine the ways in which the character, ways, and purposes of God, portrayed not only within the most “story-like” parts of book of Exodus, but also within its legal

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43 The work of Fokkelman is typical. In Reading Biblical Narrative, 161, he describes the “final level” of narrative organization as “that at which cycles are organized into compositions that sometimes coincide with an entire Bible book. This is the case with Genesis and Exodus.” Yet he proceeds with an analysis of Genesis as a narrative whole, without further attention to Exodus. Contrast might also be drawn between Fokkelman’s book-length narrative study of Genesis and his ten-page, chapter-length narrative overview of Exodus in his other works. See Jan P. Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis, BibSem 12 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004); “Exodus,” 56–65. Likewise, Amit, Reading Biblical Narratives, devotes no discussion to the Exodus narrative as a whole, and relatively few examples of narrative features are drawn from the Exodus narrative. A major recent contribution, however, is Kürele, Appeal of Exodus.

44 Josef Scharbert, Exodus, NEchtB (Würzburg: Echter, 1989), 8 (author’s emphasis). For Scharbert, however, such combination was most properly ascribed not to the entire corpus of Exodus law within the final form narrative, but rather to the interweaving of both law and narrative within J, E, and P: “Alle drei Hauptquellen haben die Setzung von Recht mit den Ereignissen am Sinai verbunden und Jahwe als dem Bundesgott zugeschrieben, und zwar so, daß dieser durch Mose die Gebote verkündet.” Similarly Joel S. Baden, The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis, ABRL (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 26–27. In contrast, Joe M. Sprinkle, Biblical Law and Its Relevance: A Christian Understanding and Ethical Application for Today of the Mosaic Regulations (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005), 66, cautions, “The practice of many traditional exegetes and critical scholars of reading laws apart from the narrative context in the final form of the text distorts to some degree the meaning of both law and narrative.” See also Sailhamer, Pentateuch as Narrative, xix, “If we read the collections of laws in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy apart from their context within the overall Pentateuchal narrative, we can easily fail to appreciate the many and varied links between these laws and their narrative framework.”

material, resonate with and help to shape our hearing of God’s self-description, “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons, even against members of the third and fourth generations.” Furthermore, such legal passages, including Exod 20:5 and the Decalogue in which it appears, will be interpreted within their literary context, that is, as constituent elements within the overall Exodus narrative.46

6.1.4. Rationale for a Final Form (MT) Focus

A focus on the so-called final form (Masoretic Hebrew text) of OT narratives has become standard and no longer requires extensive justification. Some combination of the following points, many of which are closely related, appear in most treatments and account for the focus in the present study on the final form of the book of Exodus:

1. The final form of the text is a “meaningful communication” with its own internal logic.47
2. Compared to hypothetical previous stages, the final form has the most—or only—meaningful arrangement.48
3. The final form is a text which actually exists in contrast with hypothetical sources.49


47 Dale Patrick, The Rhetoric of Revelation in the Hebrew Bible, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999), 6. See also Roland Meynet, Rhetorical Analysis: An Introduction to Biblical Rhetoric, JSOTSup 256 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 180; John T. Willis, Yahweh and Moses in Conflict: The Role of Exodus 4:24–26 in the Book of Exodus, BH 8 (Bern: Lang, 2010), 202. Thomas B. Dozeman, God on the Mountain: A Study of Redaction, Theology, and Canon in Exodus 19–24, SBLMS 37 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 9–10, notes that, despite their differing approaches, one shared assumption of source criticism, literary history, and tradition history has been “a negative literary judgment concerning the canonical text as being incomprehensible.” He views “the rise of a variety of literary criticisms in contemporary biblical studies” as presenting a legitimate challenge on this point, recognizing that their “demand to interpret the canonical text runs counter to the presupposition of incomprehensibility that is so central to the Documentary Hypothesis.”

48 Polzin, “The Ancestress of Israel,” 82–83, “Traditional biblical scholarship has spent most of its efforts in disassembling the works of a complicated watch before our amazed eyes without apparently realizing that similar efforts by and large have not succeeded in putting the parts back together again in a significant or meaningful way.” The speculative basis, insufficient evidence, and lack of consensus for identifying source divisions has compounded this problem. See also Wilfried Warning, “Terminological Patterns and the Decalogue,” ZAW 118 (2006): 521–22.

49 Turner, Announcements of Plot, 17, “I am concerned entirely with the final form of the text. As such, source-critical and traditio-historical considerations are largely irrelevant for and counter-productive to my present
4. The final form is a public text, recognized as a “classic in the culture at large,” rather than a scholarly construct familiar to only a few.\textsuperscript{50}

5. The final form is a text of actual religious communities, the Holy Scripture of Jews and Christians, the “mature and proper datum for theological … reflection.”\textsuperscript{51}

6. The genre of storytelling which predominates in Exodus has significance for how we receive the text, and encourages us to read it as a (final) whole.\textsuperscript{52}

7. The final form has narrative coherence.\textsuperscript{53}

interests…. There is such a thing as the book of Genesis, while the sources which went into its composition, and the reconstructed history of the book’s redaction are hypothetical and are once again the centre of intense debate. That is to say, we do know what the book of Genesis is; whether we will ever know how it came into being is another matter.” R. W. L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism*, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 179, asks, “How far is it genuinely possible to distinguish between tradition (the basic content of the story as originally told), literary source (the retelling of the story in written form), redaction (the further reworking of the stories and their linkage to a wider literary context), and supplementation (the addition of yet further material)?” Clines, “Theme in Genesis 1–11,” 307, speaks similarly, “Since in the case of the Pentateuch we have little hard evidence concerning its historical and literary origins, we do better, I think, to rest the weight of our study largely upon what we do have—the work itself—however subjective our understanding of it has to be, than upon hypotheses, however much they deal with ‘objective’ data like dates and sources.”

\textsuperscript{50} See Patrick, *Rhetoric of Revelation*, 6, 18.

\textsuperscript{51} J. Gerald Janzen, “What’s In a Name? ‘Yahweh’ in Exodus 3 and the Wider Biblical Context,” *Int* 33 (1979): 230. Also Patrick, *Rhetoric of Revelation*, 18. Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster, 1974), 610, following a diachronic analysis of Exod 32–34, observes, “In the end, the redactional structuring … produced a superb, new literary composition which went far beyond the individual elements of the earlier sources. Moreover, this new composition, both by its scope and depth, offered a profoundly theological interpretation of the meaning of the Sinai covenant which left a decisive stamp on the entire Old Testament.” Moberly, *Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 182, “The point of this is not to abandon a critical-historical perspective, for it will always be appropriate in any analysis to draw attention to factors such as common language and concepts in different stories and to formulate corresponding explanatory hypotheses. But categories of analysis that relate in the first instance to the Pentateuch as it stands, rather than to hypothetical stages of its possible prehistory, will provide a firmer foundation for studies of every kind, historical as well as theological.”


\textsuperscript{53} Such an assessment is admittedly subjective. Thomas L. Thompson, “How Yahweh Became God: Exodus 3 and 6 as the Heart of the Pentateuch,” *JSOT* 68 (1995): 66, writes, “The final form of the text, so central to more modern literary critics, is nearly impenetrable as a narration. One can hurry by the difficulties in some leveling translations and paraphrases, but in Hebrew we do not have a story. The call of Moses from Exod 3:1–7:1 has so little coherence and makes so little sense that the question whether narrative sense was ever intended in this text’s composition is both immediate and patent.” For a similar view that the narrative progression of Exodus is “imperfect,” “far from clear,” and beset with “problems and difficulties which are not easily solved,” see Driver, *Book of Exodus*, 346. Baden, *Composition of the Pentateuch*, in his recent apology for the four-source Documentary Hypothesis, is unwilling to grant narrative artistry or theological intention to the hand responsible for the final form of the text, consistently designating the final writer a mere “compiler.” Baden highlights the coherence of the narrative arc and historical claims of the four documentary sources underlying the Pentateuch as the chief evidence of their existence and the validity of the Documentary Hypothesis, but he judges the final form of the narrative to
8. The final form exhibits high literary artistry.\footnote{54}

9. Combined approaches (diachronic and synchronic) contribute little to the explication of the final form of the text, and often obscure it.\footnote{55}

In view, then, of the theological standing and the narrative form, artistry, and coherence of the final text, an analysis focused on the final form is consistent with the narrative-rhetorical-theological aims of this study.

6.2. Rhetorical Analysis

Dale Patrick has contributed fruitful studies on Exod 3, Exod 20, and particularly the first

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\footnote{54} Ryken, “Literary Criticism of the Bible,” 40. As with unity, so also “artistry” is in the eye of the beholder. Warning, “Terminological Patterns and the Decalogue,” 521, “It must be emphasized that the literary artistry of the Endgestalt comes into view only if we take the transmitted text at face value.” William Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, AB 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 53, concurs that “the end product is art of the highest caliber,” yet qualifies this with “…or so our Judeo-Christian conditioning obliges us to feel.” He judges that the final redactor was not an artist nor a genius nor even really an author, but a mere “writer, i.e., scribe…. His raw materials were already highly polished works of art, which he had but to transcribe. As for the arrangement of the text, most of his decisions were dictated by his sources.”

\footnote{55} Bernhard W. Anderson, “The New Frontier of Rhetorical Criticism: A Tribute to James Muilenburg,” in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. Jared J. Jackson and Martin Kessler, PTMS 1 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 1974), xvii, after mentioning source- and form-critical approaches, notes, “The question that many are raising these days, however, is: What is the relative value of going behind the final text into previous levels of tradition that can be reconstructed only hypothetically? How much light does the prehistory of the text throw upon the final text—the one that has functioned in Judaism and Christianity and the one that we read today?” As a recent example, see Ina Willi-Plein, “Der Sinai als Kristallisationspunkt von Israels Gotteserfahrung und Gottesdienst: Eine Lektüre von Ex 19–40,” *BK* 4 (2007): 241–46. At the outset, Willi-Plein promises, “Wichtige Ergebnisse historisch-kritischer Forschung können zur Erschließung der Tieferdimension des Endtextes und seiner Einzelstimmen genutzt werden” (241). However, by the end of the article, it remains unclear how these depth dimensions serve to enrich our understanding of the text’s final form in any way.
commandment, employing insights of rhetorical criticism and speech act theory.\footnote{Patrick, \textit{Rhetoric of Revelation}.} James Watts has written on the rhetorical strategy of Exod 32–34.\footnote{James W. Watts, “Aaron and the Golden Calf in the Rhetoric of the Pentateuch,” \textit{JBL} 130 (2011): 417–30.} Neither, however, gives attention to the rhetorical function of the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons.” The present study, then, takes up this question. Beyond filling this gap, however, this dissertation seeks to demonstrate the fruitfulness of a particular approach to rhetorical criticism, or, more precisely, a particular object of rhetorical study: the rhetorical goals and strategy of a narrative character’s utterance within a narrative situation addressing (an)other character(s) within that narrative.

6.2.1. Persuasion and Pragmatics

The contemporary turn towards rhetorical analysis in OT studies is routinely attributed to James Muilenburg’s Society of Biblical Literature presidential address, “Form Criticism and Beyond.” Muilenburg noted the way in which form criticism, for all its contributions, flattened texts, and he appealed for greater attentiveness to the distinct elements in individual texts.\footnote{James Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” \textit{JBL} 88 (1969): 5: “There has been a proclivity among scholars in recent years to lay such stress upon the typical and representative that the individual, personal, and unique features of the particular pericope are all but lost to view…. Form criticism by its very nature is bound to generalize…. It does not focus sufficient attention upon what is unique and unrepeatable, upon the particularity of the formulation.”} His rhetorical analysis, and that of his students, was especially interested in stylistics and structure, and in the relationship between form and meaning.\footnote{Muilenburg, “Form Criticism,” 5, writes, “Form and content are inextricably related. They form an integral whole. The two are one…. It is the creative synthesis of the particular formulation of the pericope with its content that makes it the distinctive composition that it is.” Patricia K. Tull, “Rhetorical Criticism and Beyond,” 330, “Rhetorical criticism in the Muilenburg style has often verged on aesthetic formalism that loses sight of rhetorical environment.”}

Subsequent developments in OT rhetorical criticism have broadened this focus on structure and style to an analysis of the persuasive goals and strategies of the text.\footnote{Dale Patrick and Allen Scult, \textit{Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation} (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990), 25, argue that biblical narrative “has persuasion as its primary objective…. [So] examining the text as rhetorical or
persuasive dynamic of utterances has brought OT rhetorical criticism into closer relation with the classical rhetorical tradition and contemporary rhetorical theorists.⁶¹

Greco-Roman rhetoricians understood that an effective speaker does not merely inform, but also delights and moves his audience. And within real life situations, speakers find themselves informing, delighting, and moving their hearers for a purpose, toward a particular end or ends, with a particular goal or goals in mind.⁶² This study, then, will probe the contribution of the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” to the pragmatic function⁶³ of Exod 20:2–6 and 34:6–7. Rhetorical style, structure, and artistry of language may be noted as indicators of these

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⁶² Kennedy, Classical Rhetoric, 2: “A speaker or writer has some kind of purpose, and rhetoric includes the ways of accomplishing, or attempting to accomplish, that purpose within a given culture…. Purposes cover a spectrum from converting hearers to a view opposed to that previously held, to implanting a conviction or belief not otherwise entertained, to teaching or exposition, to entertainment and demonstration of the cleverness of the speaker.”

⁶³ In the late twentieth century, the speech act theory of performative language pioneered by J. L. Austin proved helpful in bringing the consideration of pragmatics into biblical scholarship. The rhetorical analysis in this study, however, will not use speech act categories or terminology. Richard S. Briggs, Words in Action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation: Toward a Hermeneutic of Self-Involvement (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), outlines Austin’s original thought and refinements by John Searle. Briggs then proposes Donald Evans’ idea of the “the logic of self-involvement” as an important ingredient in a coherent speech act theory. In my estimation, the theoretical subtleties involved do little to make the theory more accessible, workable, or fruitful in actually illuminating the meaning and function of utterances. Dale Patrick, Rhetoric of Revelation, 7–12, outlines his intention to utilize speech act theory in his rhetorical analysis, including Austin’s “five categories of illocution.” However, his rhetorical analysis which follows is, in large part, an application of common sense and shared human experience as the lens in which to examine the persuasive and pragmatic dimension. When he does attempt to wield the “categories of illocution” (verdictives, exercitives, commissives, behabitives, and expositives), it often seems forced and does little to serve the understanding of the text’s function. Patrick himself (pp. 10, 12) recognizes that speech act theory does not go very far in a full rhetorical analysis and that “we need … to move from viewing the illocutionary act as a performance of a speaker to a transaction between speaker and addressee…. The fact that the addressee of discourse is free to respond inappropriately produces the need of rhetoric…. The rhetorical dimension of performative utterances has not been on the minds of the philosophers who have been developing this [speech act] theory of discourse. It may in fact not be relevant to the ‘idea’ in itself, but it is highly relevant to the practice of social intercourse. Speech acts are pragmatic, and that requires speakers to calculate strategies for achieving desired results.” The concepts (although not necessarily the terminology) of illocutionary and perlocutionary force have often been helpful in biblical interpretation, but in the end seem to add little to the now-fully revived consciousness among biblical scholars that texts often do more than “say” or “mean,” but that language often bears a pragmatic-persuasive-rhetorical force. This is the focus of rhetorical analysis, with or without the terminology of Austin and Searle.
goals, but this study will focus on the persuasive, audience-changing, situation-changing function of the phrase. What purposes are the words of Exod 20:5b and 34:7b seeking to accomplish?

6.2.2. The Rhetorical Situation

The question as just posed, however, is still too vague. The function or intended function of these words depends upon who is speaking them, to whom they are spoken, and the situation in which they are spoken. J. L. Austin, in *How to Do Things with Words*, attempts to describe the way in which the “total speech act in the total speech situation”\(^64\) determines the value and function of words. Austin illustrates, “An exceedingly important aid is the circumstances of the utterance. Thus we may say, ‘coming from him, I took it as an order, not as a request.’”\(^65\) We must ask, then, as Watts succinctly puts it, “Who is trying to persuade whom of what?”\(^66\) The complete rhetorical situation is determinative, so the question must be extended to ask: Who is speaking, what is said (and how), in what situation, in order to persuade whom, and toward what end? In considering the situation, Lloyd Bitzer has stressed that particular attention should be paid to the problem or need (the “exigency”) which necessitates the rhetorical utterance.\(^67\)

Pinpointing the rhetorical situation within which to understand the function of words can be slippery, however. Consider, for example, Leah Ceccarelli’s critique of Edwin Black’s rhetorical analysis of the Gettysburg Address:

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\(^{65}\) Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 76.


\(^{67}\) Lloyd F. Bitzer, “The Rhetorical Situation,” in *Rhetoric: A Tradition in Transition*, ed. Walter R. Fisher (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1974), 251–53, builds on the insight that great rhetorical speeches have been “called forth by a specific union of persons, events, objects, and relations, and by an exigency which amounted to an imperative stimulus” (my emphasis). An exigency is “an imperfection marked by urgency,” and “an exigency is rhetorical when it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse.” Bitzer’s view relates directly to the commonplace view that “rhetoric is pragmatic; it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world; it performs some task” (p. 250).
Throughout his essay, Black shifts between conjectures about how an audience in 1863 would have experienced the text and claims about the experience of today’s readers. Sometimes he notes the way in which Lincoln’s contemporaries would be sensitive to resonances in the text that a modern audience might miss. But most of the time, Black talks about auditors in a vague sense that does not distinguish between Lincoln’s contemporaries and today’s readers.68

There is a warning here that, in examining the persuasive, pragmatic interchange between a speaker and audience via a text, the rhetorical critic must be precise and consistent in naming the audience and situation in which the text is functioning.

In his introduction to Dale Patrick’s book *The Rhetoric of Revelation in the Hebrew Bible*, Walter Brueggemann states that Patrick “deftly brackets out and moves beyond any ‘original audience,’ thereby skillfully leaping over the critical issues commonly linked to positivistic history.”69 At times, Patrick seems to reflect on the persuasive function of words *within the biblical narrative itself*, but more often he speculates regarding the force of the text in addressing readers stationed at later points in history. In discussing Yahweh’s Exod 3 promise to bring the people into the land of the Canaanites, for example, Patrick does not reflect on the performative, persuasive force of this promise to Moses or to the oppressed Israelites *within the narrative*. Instead, he discusses its varying persuasive force for readers prior to the exiles of 722 and 587 BCE, Jews after the Exile, and even modern Israelis on the “religious right.”70 Later, he reflects on the manner in which a modern Christian hearer is addressed by the text.71 James Watts, another pioneer in OT rhetorical criticism, also centers his analysis of the rhetoric of Pentateuchal narrative upon *a rhetorical audience outside of that narrative*.72

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72 For example, Watts, “Aaron and the Golden Calf,” argues that Exod 32 has been retained and redacted by
In contrast, the present study focuses not on the rhetoric of narration, but on the rhetoric of a character’s speech within the narrative, and it consistently grounds its rhetorical analysis **within the narrative**. That is, the **narrative identity of the speaker**, and the **narrative identity of the audience**, and the **narrative presentation of the situation in which words are spoken** along with the **narrative goals of the speaker within that situation** will constitute the primary context for rhetorical analysis.  

This is not to deny or denigrate the genuinely rhetorical transaction of post-exilic Aaronide priests to subtly exonerate Aaron and lay principle blame on the people in the narrative, to persuade post-exilic Judahites that, while the priests may have been complicit in the pre-exilic calf cults which led to the exile, they were merely giving the people what they wanted and are no more to blame than Aaron in the story. See also Watts, *Reading Law: The Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999).

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73 It might also be mentioned that this orientation toward the rhetorical goals and dynamics **within the narrative** eschews, in the present study, any deliberate effort to focus on the rhetorical goals and dynamics of the critique itself. Many rhetorical critics adopt and advocate a posture which might be described as “the rhetorical application of rhetorical criticism.” Here, one’s critique of a rhetorical artifact is so developed and disposed that the critique itself fosters change, serving the critic’s own persuasive purposes toward some (usually social-political) end. Since all rhetoric is ultimately political, it is argued, and since even rhetorical criticism is a rhetorical act, there is not merely the opportunity but also the responsibility to marshal one’s critique as a kind of activism. Compare, for example, the shift in emphasis in the chapter on “Rhetorical Criticism” between the two editions of Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R Haynes, *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and their Application* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993; rev. and enl. ed., 1999). In the 1993 edition, Yehoshua Gitay’s chapter on “Rhetorical Criticism” (pp. 135–49) focuses squarely on the “oratorical” nature of the Hebrew Bible and it persuasive and didactic dynamics. The revised 1999 edition replaces Gitay’s chapter with Patricia K. Tull’s “Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality” (pp. 156–80), who characterizes “rhetoric” as “an open, dialogical, inter-textually laden practice, filled with ideological commitments and charges” so that “without neglecting the style and structure of biblical passages and their persuasive elements, many rhetorical critics also attend to issues lying beyond the boundaries of the text immediately in front of them” (p. 163). Don H. Compier, *What Is Rhetorical Theology? Textual Practice and Public Discourse* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 24–25, aligns his hermeneutical approach to the work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Rebecca Chopp, and he notes that “the category of the political is now located in the foreground.” His summary of the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition (pp. 10–11) highlights that it was active, “a form of praxis, a way of effecting desirable private and public consequences,” and polemical, in the sense that “wise rhetors must join the fray if the right is to prevail.” Compier then applies this to the work of the rhetorical critic himself, characterizing this political, polemical posture as a continuation of the classical tradition. Compier also cites Frank Lentricchia, *Criticism and Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1983), 10, 12: “The point is not only to interpret texts, but in so interpreting them, change our society…. Does one’s approach to the text enable or disable—encourage or discourage—one self and one’s students and readers to spot, confront, and work against the political horrors of one’s time?” For a recent example from Exodus scholarship, see Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan, “How Liberating Is the Exodus and for Whom? Deconstructing Exodus Motifs in Scripture, Literature, and Life,” in *Exodus and Deuteronomy*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Gale A. Yee, texts@contexts (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 3–28, who judges that the Exodus narrative “failed to invoke an all-embracing or durable liberty” (p. 26) and encourages readings that “push toward inclusivity, mercy, justice, and love” (p. 27), lest critics become “complicit in the harm done to oppressed peoples somewhere” (p. 28). Jim A. Kuypers, “Must We All Be Political Activists?” *ACJ* 4, no. 1 (2000), [http://ac-journal.org/journal/vol4/iss1/special/kuypers.htm](http://ac-journal.org/journal/vol4/iss1/special/kuypers.htm), offers an incisive critique of this posture from a humanist perspective: “Aside from the fact that this type of action is not rhetorical criticism, but a mode of practice bordering on mendacity or dissimulation, it presents the critic as a partisan political actor—a social activist … playing politics within the comparative safety of the academy instead of taking their chances in the rough-and-tumble world of real politics.” More importantly, Kuypers warns, “Finally, this perspective will encourage those embracing it to turn a blind eye toward the
narration itself with its (implied and actual) audience outside the narrative\textsuperscript{74}, or to deny the validity of rhetorically analyzing the encounter of later audiences with an old text (e.g., contemporary hearers of the Gettysburg address, or a modern Israeli hearing of Exod 3). For a character’s speech within the Exodus narrative, however—prior to asking how it addresses a post-exilic audience and situation, or how it addresses the narrative’s implied audience—the primary rhetorical situation for analysis is \textit{within the narrative itself}.\textsuperscript{75} The extension of the persuasive force of the words beyond and outside of the narrative world of the text grows from and depends upon the rhetorical function of the utterance \textit{within the narrative}, since its words are addressed to the reading audience not independently or directly but \textit{as a constituent part of a narrative which in turn determines the significance of the rhetoric employed within it}.\textsuperscript{76}
In the case of Exod 20:2–6 and Exod 34:6–7, the speeches in which the visiting phrase is employed, this means that the characterization of Yahweh, Moses, and the sons of Israel within the Exodus story, as well as the situation and goals of those characters as related to the plot of the Exodus story, will be directly relevant to determining the rhetorical function of these utterances.

6.2.3. Basic Steps of Rhetorical Analysis

Like narrative criticism, rhetorical criticism is an art, not a science. At the same time, the basic steps or fundamental concerns of this analysis are described in similar terms by a number of practitioners. W. M. W. Roth, synthesizing articles by Martin Kessler, Wilhelm Wuellner, and C. Clifton Black, lists five steps: (1) determination of the extent of the unit; (2) identification of the rhetorical situation; (3) identification of the rhetorical disposition, that is, the structure and arrangement; (4) determination of rhetorical technique; and (5) review of the analysis in terms of overall results and significance. Douglas Miller suggests a nearly identical approach, but (like Bitzer) makes explicit the crucial dimension of determining the particular problem or issue which the speech seeks to redress. All of this coheres perfectly with Patricia Tull’s summary of undertaking such an analysis, since the narrator may provide not only abundant context regarding the rhetorical situation but may in fact provide commentary regarding the specific intention of the speaker, response of the people, etc. For example, regarding Yahweh’s speech in Exod 20, the character Yahweh prefaces these words by naming one reason for his speaking and the manner of his speaking: that the people may trust in Moses forever (19:9). After Yahweh’s speech, Moses gives an additional purpose behind Yahweh’s words: to instill the fear of Yahweh so that the people will not sin (20:20).

77 Much of the discussion under narrative analysis above (in particular, §6.1.2. Method, Reading, and Subjectivity, and §6.1.4. Rationale for a Final Form (MT) Focus) is relevant also for rhetorical analysis and will not be rehashed here.


George Kennedy’s method, which will generally guide the present study:

First, a determination of the rhetorical unit to be studied; and second, a determination of the rhetorical situation, that is, the condition or situation that invited this utterance, with the particular problem that the author is seeking to overcome. Next comes the study of the material’s arrangement and its stylistic devices, and finally, a review of the unit’s success in addressing the rhetorical problem. Sensitivity is shown to the text’s strategies of argumentation (including stylistic devices) and to the ways in which the author, through the text, posits, persuades, and even rhetorically manipulates the intended audience.  

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CHAPTER SEVEN
THEMES RELATED TO THE VISITING PHRASE

The purpose of the present chapter is to lay out in some detail how Yahweh’s self-description as “visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons, even against members of the third and fourth generations” resonates with thematic elements in the surrounding Exodus narrative. I have demonstrated above that the history of research on Exod 20:5 and 34:7 is remarkable for its inattention to such narrative-contextual relationships and their significance for understanding this phrase. Given such inattention, the present chapter discusses extensively the narrative theme of fathers, sons, and generations—both in the Genesis backstory and throughout the Exodus narrative (§7.1). A number of other significant themes are then addressed more briefly: divine absence/presence and divine action (§7.2); punishment as lex talionis (§7.3); punishment as withdrawal/reversal of divine gift (§7.4); corporate action and corporate guilt

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1 Robert Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 95, explains “theme” as “an idea which is part of the value-system of the narrative—it may be moral, moral-psychological, legal, political, historiosophical, theological—and is made evident in some recurring pattern.” James Phelan, Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996), 220, defines “thematic” as “the component of character directed to its representative or ideational function; more generally, that component of a narrative text concerned with making statements, taking ideological positions, teaching readers truths.” See also M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham, A Glossary of Literary Terms, 9th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009), 205 (the entry “motif and theme”). Literary theorists differ in their use of the term “theme,” especially around the question of whether “theme” properly describes the single, unifying topic or issue in a work or whether the term describes any significant ideas, thoughts, and subjects of a work, which may be numerous. In this chapter, I employ the term “theme” in this second, more general sense (that of Alter and Phelan), so that my use of the terms “theme(s)” and “thematic element(s)” are equivalent. Some of the themes addressed in this chapter could perhaps be categorized as “motifs” or even as “recurring dynamics.” The aim of this part of the study is to cast the net widely for all related themes, thematic elements, motifs, and recurring dynamics in order to offer narrative-contextual reflection on the visiting phrase.

2 William H. C. Propp, Exodus 1–18 and Exodus 19–40, AB2–2A (New York: Doubleday, 1999–2006), as just one example, does not once mention Exod 20:5 or the visiting phrase in his entire first volume. When he comes to Exod 20:5 in the second volume, he offers a three-page explanation of the visiting phrase which matrixes its interpretation with 40 other OT passages, only two of which are from Exodus (3:15 and Exod 34:7) and neither of which discusses the connection of the visiting phrase with any Exodus event or theme.
(§7.5); concern for individual justice (§7.6); and the hiddenness and freedom of Yahweh (§7.7), as each is developed within the book of Exodus. To anticipate this final theme, the profound reality that Yahweh’s person and ways are, in the final sense, hidden from Israel and all creatures provides a crucial narrative backdrop for interpreting the visiting phrase: Exod 20:5 and 34:7 are utterances of the God who conceals even as he reveals himself. As this chapter proceeds, the explication of each theme is followed by reflections on how it may sharpen or qualify the reader’s hearing of the visiting phrase.

7.1. Fathers, Sons, and Generations

The Exodus narrative—in continuity with the Genesis narrative which precedes it—displays a consistent interest in families and lines of descent, and it characterizes God’s dealings with people as regularly oriented around these family connections. Because Yahweh is the “everlasting God (אל עולם)” (Gen 21:33) who reigns “forever and ever (לעולם ועד)” (Exod 15:18), he has the power and the prerogative to pursue purposes, to make promises, to establish statutes, and to enforce sanctions which endure (לעולם) and to generation after generation (לדר דר).

7.1.1. Generations in the Genesis Backstory

Exodus opens with reference to “the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob,” tying the Exodus narrative directly back to Genesis, especially around the theme of fathers and sons.

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3 The Hebrew word וניל is difficult to gloss with a single English term. HALOT gives, as a first definition, “long time, duration (usually eternal, eternity, but not in a philosophical sense).” In Exod 21:6, it refers to permanent slave status (“and thus he will serve him permanently (לעולם)”). However, more regularly in Genesis and Exodus, וניל refers to a period of time spanning human generations. In fact, 20 of the 29 uses of וניל in Genesis and Exodus explicitly relate the word to “generations” (דור, Gen 9:12; 17:7; Exod 3:15; 12:14, 17; 27:21; 30:21; 31:16; 40:15), “offspring” (זרע, Gen 13:15; 17:7; 8; 19; 48:4; Exod 28:43; 30:21; 32:13), “son(s)” (בן, Gen 17:19; Exod 12:24; 27:21; 28:43; 29:9, 28; 31:17), or “one who is born” (=son, ילד, Gen 17:13). Of the remaining nine occurrences in Genesis and Exodus, five contrast Yahweh’s enduring life and reign with that of humans. Whereas humans are flesh and have forfeited the right to live “forever” (לעולם), Yahweh is “the eternal God” (אל עולם, Gen 21:33). In contrast to the Egyptian foes, with whom Israel will not have to contend “ever again forever” (לעולם ועד, Exod 14:13; cf. 14:30), Yahweh reigns as Israel’s mighty and faithful king “forever” (לעולם, Exod 15:18).
No biblical book is so thoroughly occupied with birth and lineage as Genesis, where *God’s intentions for and dealings with human beings constantly have a succession of generations in view*. There is hardly a chapter in Genesis which does not pursue this interest. As Mann notes, when Yahweh announces to Abram his intention to bless all the families of the earth (Gen 12:3), this “reflects a theological concern that runs throughout [Genesis], beginning with the blessing pronounced on all humankind (1:28) and ending with the last words of Joseph, evoking a divine promise to his great-grandfather (50:24).”

Alexander proposes a compositional unity to Genesis centered around this theme, focusing especially on the תוֹלֵדוֹת (“the generations of”) formulae and the repeated use of the word זֶרֶע (seed, offspring). The latter “is a Leitwort or keyword in Genesis, occurring 59 times compared to 170 times in the rest of the Old Testament.” Fishbane identifies “blessing” (ברכה) and “birthright” ( (?,כַּפּוֹר) as keywords in Genesis, terms sharing not only the same Hebrew consonants but also the same transgenerational perspective.

Related father-child terms appear as keywords or recurring formulae in specific Genesis episodes. The formula “you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives” recurs throughout the Flood cycle (Gen 6:18; 7:7, 13; 8:16, 18). “Father” is employed four times in two verses in the account of Ham dishonoring his drunken father, Noah (Gen 9:22–23). The birth of Isaac is related with seven repetitions of “son” (Gen 21:1–7). In the binding of Isaac, the poignant

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5 T. Desmond Alexander, “Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional Unity of Genesis,” *TynBul* 44 (1993): 255–70. On the concept of Leitwort, see Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 92–96, who regards this literary device as a distinctive trait of biblical literature. Mann, “‘All the Families,’” 343, likewise speaks of the toledoth (“generations”) formulae and divine promises (which center on offspring) as the two literary devices uniting the book.


repetition of “Abraham his father” (22:7), “Isaac his son” (22:3, 6, 9), “my father” (Gen 22:7), “my son” (22:7, 8), and “your son, your only son” (22:2, 12, 16) is one of the most notable features. When Jacob encounters Esau, the narrative captures his paternal concern by repeating the word “children” (⼄ָלִים) seven times in seven verses (Gen 33:1–7).

Then there are the genealogies in Genesis, which, beyond simply delineating names and relationships, convey a theological or theocentric perspective.

The organic and orderly succession of generations is not an expression of thematically empty biological necessity but of God’s initial creative activity. Birth awakens not neutral destiny but enrollment in the continuing order of creation ordained by God. The genealogies become bearers of the creation theme and, by their elemental, organic nature, its fit expression.

Clines outlines “clues in the narrative … which point to the validity of a theological interpretation of the genealogies” and notes (1) that these genealogies exhibit the progress of the divine blessing “be fruitful and multiply,” (2) that their logically superfluous refrain “and he died” as the final comment on each life in Gen 5 and their diminishing life-spans exhibit a

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8 The noun ⼳ (“son”) occurs a dramatic 10x in Gen 22:1–18, and the substantive adjective ⼣ (“only son”) 3x. This latter term occurs only 12x in the OT, mainly in contexts of great pathos (e.g., Judg 11:34; Ps 35:17; Zech 12:10).

9 This dramatic portrayal of Jacob’s concern for his children in Gen 33 follows his prayer in Gen 32, invoking Yahweh as “God of my father, Abraham, and God of my father, Isaac,” and praying: “Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, lest he should come and strike me—both mothers and children—for you yourself said, ‘I will surely do good to you, and I will make your offspring like the sand of the sea’” (Gen 32:10, 12–13 [Eng 32:9, 11–12]). Two chapters before this, Jacob begs leave of his father-in-law, to whom he has been bound in service, highlighting “wives and children” as the chief goal and reward of these years of labor: “As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, ‘Let me go, so that I may go to my own place and land. Give me my wives and my children, as the price for which I have served you’” (Gen 30:25–26; on the translation of ⽐ here as a ⽐ of price, cf. Gen 29:18).

10 Robert B. Robinson, “Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis,” CBQ 48 (1986): 601. Jeffrey A. Gibbs, Matthew 1:1–11:1, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2006), 82–83, notes similar functions of the Abraham-to-Jesus genealogy in Matt 1: “Matthew here proclaims Jesus in terms that are both corporate and creational. It matters to Matthew that Jesus is the goal of the history of a people. Although God deals with humans as individuals, human beings also belong to a larger community; we are individuals, but we are not isolated individuals…. Moreover, Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus assumes that God’s interaction with humans takes place in the created world, in history” (author’s emphasis).
“progression toward death” under divine judgment; and (3) that they mark the emergence of faithful and sinful “lines” within humankind. On this final point, Clines writes:

By affixing the beginning of a Sethite genealogy (4:25f.) to the Cainite list, the author of Genesis 4 has affirmed that the world of men is not totally given over to the Cainite life-style. Even while the race of Cain is increasing in congenital violence, he means to say, elsewhere there is a line of men who have begun to ‘call on the name of Yahweh’ (4:26).

Statements attributing the conception or birth of children to God’s direct involvement further establish the theological dimension of human generations in Genesis. Cain is presented as the first human birth, of which Eve declares, “I have created a man with Yahweh” (אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲנִי אֲn, Gen 4:1). Within the family histories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, this theme is ubiquitous. Ten chapters unfold the birth of a son to Abraham through aged, barren Sarah as a gracious and miraculous divine work (Gen 12–21) until, at last, “Yahweh visited Sarah, just as he had said, and Yahweh did for Sarah just as he had promised. So Sarah conceived and bore for Abraham a son” (Gen 21:1–2). In like manner, “Isaac prayed to Yahweh on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. Yahweh was moved by his prayer, and so Rebekah, his wife, conceived” (Gen 25:21). The account of the birth of Jacobs’s first eleven sons in Gen 29:31–30:24 is packed with divine verbs: Yahweh “saw” affliction (29:31, 32), “opened” wombs (29:31; 30:22), “heard” pleas (29:33; 30:6, 17, 22), “gave” sons (29:33; 30:6, 18), “withheld” the fruit of the

11 David J. A. Clines, “Theme in Genesis 1–11,” in I Studied Inscriptions from before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura, SBTS 4 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 293–96. Philip E. Satterthwaite, “Genealogy in the Old Testament,” NIDOTTE 4:660–61, identifies basically the same three theological themes in the genealogies of Genesis: (1) the divine perspective that “generation irresistibly follows generation (has he not promised and it will be so?)” and the clear implication that succeeding generations continue to bear the image of God; (2) “the effect of stressing that, with the exception of Enoch (5:24), none of Adam’s line escaped death”; and (3) the contrast between the line of Cain to Lamech, cultured yet lethal, and the believing line of Adam (through Seth) to Noah, containing “names that suggest the thoughts of substitution (Seth; cf. 4:25), the renewal and reestablishment of humankind (Enosh, Kenan), praise (Mahalalel), prayer for God to come down and aid (Jared), and rest from labor (Noah).” See also Richard S. Hess, Studies in the Personal Names of Genesis 1–11, AOAT 234 (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1993), 111–62.

12 Clines, “Theme in Genesis 1–11,” 295.

13 Most English versions translate this as “with the help of the LORD” (ESV, NASB, NIV, NLT) or “from the LORD” (KJV, NKJV). The LXX reads διὰ τοῦ θεοῦ (“through God”).

Trans-generational, multi-generational life before the Creator and under his blessing is God’s intention from the beginning and throughout the book. Brueggemann observes, “There is in Genesis no one-generational faith.” At creation God commands the man and woman to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). The subsequent descriptions of dominion over the other creatures and the provision of green plants for food have significance not only for the first man and woman as individuals but also for their multiplied descendants envisioned here. After the Flood, God’s blessing to Noah and his family begins and ends, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 9:1, 7), followed by covenant promises which will extend through the generations, “Behold, I establish my covenant with you (plural) and with your offspring after you.” (Gen 9:8, 9).

God promises Abram to “multiply him exceedingly” and to “make him exceedingly fruitful” (Gen 17:2, 6). It is not merely nor even predominantly to Abram but especially to Abram’s offspring, his seed (זרע), that Yahweh promises to give these vast numbers, as well as

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14 Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, IBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 226, 228. On the struggle between Jacob and Esau to obtain their father’s blessing, Brueggemann expands on this theme: “The pursuit of blessing characterizes existence as intergenerational. Parents and children have a deep stake in each other’s destinies. The narrative refutes every notion of individualism which assumes that every individual life and, indeed, every generation is discreet and on its own. The generations are inalienably and terrifyingly bound together.”

15 *Creation in Biblical Perspective* (St. Louis: Commission of Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 1970), 2, puts it well: “God directed these first two people, as He had the other living creatures, to ‘be fruitful and multiply.’ This was his way of indicating that creation was to continue through those countless generations which God Himself had in mind for everything that he had made.”
the land, victory over enemies, and the privilege of mediating divine blessing to all the nations of the earth. Most fundamental is the bare pledge: “I will fulfill my covenant between me and you and your offspring (זרע) after you throughout their generations, as an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you” (Gen 17:7).

The repetition of the divine promises to Isaac looks both backward to father Abraham and especially forward to Isaac’s offspring:

Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring (זרע) I will give all these lands, and so I will fulfill the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will multiply your offspring like the stars of the heavens, and I will give to your offspring all these lands, and by your offspring all the nations of the earth will be blessed; because Abraham kept my requirement, my commandments, my statutes, and my instructions. (Gen 26:3–5)

Later, God appears to Jacob, saying, “Your offspring (זרע) will be like the dust of the earth…, and by you all the families of the earth will be blessed—and by your offspring” (Gen 28:14). Again to Jacob: “I am El Shaddai. Be fruitful and multiply…. To you I give the land which I gave to Abraham and to Isaac, and to your offspring (זרע) after you I will give the land” (Gen 35:12). When ch. 46 records the descent of Jacob and his household, during famine, to join Joseph in Egypt, it dwells extensively on the theme of Jacob and his offspring:

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16 To Abram’s seed, God directs the land promise in Gen 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 17:8; and 22:17a; the promise of vast numbers in 13:16; 15:5; and 22:17; the promise of victory over enemies in 22:17b; the promise of mediating divine blessing to others in 22:18.

17 Robin Routledge, “The Exodus and Biblical Theology,” in Reverberations of the Exodus in Scripture, ed. R. Michael Fox (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 190, notes the echo of this Gen 17:7 promise in Exodus in God’s announcement to Moses, “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God” (Exod 6:7).

18 This closing statement of Gen 26:5, which echoes Gen 22:16–18 in word choice, syntax, and logic, seems to ground the future blessing of the offspring of Isaac upon the obedience of their forefather Abraham, a dynamic which rabbinic theology has sometimes described as “the merit of the fathers” (zeptut avot). See Shalom Carmy, “Zekhut Avot,” ER 14:9940–42; Solomon Schechter, “The Zachuth of the Fathers: Imputed Righteousness and Imputed Sin,” in Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology (New York: Macmillan, 1909), 170–98. Articulations of this principle have varied widely in rabbinic thought, especially in terms of whether such merit is narrowly restricted to the three patriarchs or applies to forbearers more generally, and, in the former case, whether the merit of the patriarchs continues to apply to the descendants or whether, and if so when, it was depleted and terminated. Such theological questions are bracketed in the present discussion; the purpose at hand is simply to demonstrate the strong narrative theme in Genesis and Exodus regarding God’s dealings with human beings across generations with consideration for lines of descent—whether for weal or for woe and whether in response to human faith or obedience or on the basis of unilateral election and gracious promise.
And so Jacob arose from Beersheba, and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, along with their little ones and their wives, in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. They took with them all their livestock and possessions which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and they came to Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring (זרע) with him—his sons and his sons’ sons with him, his daughters and his sons’ daughters—all his offspring (זרע) he brought with him to Egypt.… All the persons belonging to Jacob who came to Egypt, those who came forth from his own loins not including the wives of Jacob’s sons, were sixty-six persons in all. And the sons of Joseph who were born to him in Egypt were two. All those belonging to the house of Jacob who went to Egypt were seventy. (Gen 46:5–7, 26–27)

Settled there in Egypt, in the land of Goshen, “Israel … gained possessions, and they19 were fruitful and multiplied greatly” (Gen 47:27).

This dominant note of God’s transgenerational blessing is accompanied in Genesis by a secondary theme of transgenerational liability. The offspring of Adam and Eve remain exiled from Eden. Their parents’ disobedience, with its ensuing divine curse, brings enduring consequences, so that Lamech (eighth from Adam) expresses longing for relief “from our work and from the painful labor of our hands because of the ground which Yahweh has cursed” (Gen 5:29). When Noah is dishonored by “Ham the father of Canaan,” he declares: “Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brothers.… Blessed be the God of Shem, and may Canaan be a servant to him. May God enlarge Japheth; may he dwell in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be a servant to him” (Gen 9:25–27).20 When Jacob connives to steal birthright and blessing from Esau, the outcome is bitter for Esau and his descendants. Isaac can only “bless” Esau, saying, “Behold, away from the fertile places of the earth your dwelling place shall

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19 The juxtaposition of the singular subject “Israel” (Jacob) with plural verbs in this passage is striking. Likely Israel is used here as synecdoche or shorthand for “the household of Israel” or “the sons of Israel.” Nevertheless, this stands as the first time in the canonical Pentateuch in which “Israel” is used in this collective sense.

20 Louis H. Feldman, ‘Remember Amalek!’ Vengeance, Zealotry, and Group Destruction in the Bible According to Philo, Pseudo-Philo, and Josephus, HUCM 31 (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2004), 110–11, notes that the rabbis were concerned with the apparent violation of the principle of individual responsibility in this narrative, and suggested various reasons why Canaan deserved to be cursed: he had drawn Ham’s attention to Noah’s drunken nakedness, or he himself had actually castrated Noah! Feldman describe how Philo, too, sought to rescue the biblical text, in one instance through allegory, in another by explaining that Ham and Canaan “practiced the same wickedness, both being mingled without distinction, as if using one body and one soul” (Quaestiones in Genesim 2.77).
be, and away from the dew of the heavens on high. You will live by your sword, and you will serve your brother. Yet when you grow restless, you will tear his yoke from off your neck” (Gen 27:39–40). It is clear from the larger narrative that the prospects of the Edomites and the Israelites, the respective descendants of Esau and Jacob, are in view here.\(^{21}\) At the end of his life, when Jacob pronounces what “the days to come” (באחרית הימים) will bring for the twelve lines of his sons, the eldest three receive censure for past misdeeds and bleak pronouncements as a result. Reuben the firstborn has forfeited preeminence for his descendants because he lay with Bilhah, his father’s concubine (Gen 49:3–4; cf. 35:22). Simeon and Levi will be divided and scattered as tribes, because their progenitors wantonly killed the men of Shechem (Gen 49:5–7; cf. Gen 34).\(^{22}\)

One the most explicit descriptions of God’s transgenerational sanction is when Yahweh reveals to Abram that his descendants will possess the land of promise only after a period of foreign servitude, specifying, “In the fourth generation they will return [to Canaan], for the iniquity of the Amorites is, as of now, not complete” (Gen 15:16). This apparently decrees a future divine judgment on the inhabitants of Canaan at a time when generations of iniquity will have cumulatively exhausted divine patience.\(^{21}\)

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\(^{21}\) Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 232; Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC 2 (Dallas: Word, 1994), 212; U. Hübner, “Esau,” *ABD* 2:574–75. This is consistent with Yahweh’s words to Rebekah in Gen 25:23: “Two nations are in your womb…. One people will grow stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”

\(^{22}\) Here, it is not God but rather a human, specifically a father, who decrees long-term negative circumstances for a line of descendants, although still within a theological framework which assumes and invokes Yahweh’s involvement. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 417, notes here “the conviction that all the various destinies of the tribes are to be understood only as the outcome of the prophetic statements of the ancestor. As later in the case of the prophets, so here Jacob created history by the authority of his creative word, either of blessing or curse.” Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 469, states simply, “The comments of the dying patriarch foreshadow the future of their respective sons and their descendants: in Jacob’s case the future of the Israelite tribes, and in Noah’s the destiny of the nations set out in Gen 10.”

\(^{23}\) Yair Zakovitch, “And You Shall Tell Your Son...”: *The Concept of Exodus in the Bible* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 36, associates this delay of four generations with Yahweh’s patience and sees in this the same dynamic of divine justice expressed in Exod 20:5; 34:7, etc. A major thesis of Zakovitch is that Israelite servitude in Egypt was a divine punishment and purgation for the iniquity of their forefathers (the patriarchs). He notes, “If the Pentateuch indeed promotes the concept that the children of Israel are punished in Egypt for the sin of their forefathers, then in their case, too, God enacts the rule of ‘visiting the guilt of the fathers’...”—but, in this case, it is the flip side of this rule: their fourth generation will return to Canaan!” Whether or not one accepts Zakovitch’s thesis that the Pentateuch subtly characterizes the 430 year servitude in Egypt as divine punishment for the sins of
The Genesis narrative closes with three scenes of fathers and sons. In Gen 48, bedridden Jacob meets with his son Joseph and grandsons Manasseh and Ephraim, blessing and adopting the grandsons as his own sons, and recounting, “El Shaddai appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and he blessed me and said to me, “Behold, I am about to make you fruitful, and I will multiply you and make you into an assembly of peoples and give this land to your offspring after you, as an everlasting possession” (48:3–4). In Gen 49, all twelve sons are gathered, and, as Sailhamer observes, “Jacob’s last words to his sons become the occasion for a final statement of the book’s major theme: God’s plan to restore the lost blessing through the offspring of Abraham.”

In Gen 50, after the death and burial of their father Jacob, Joseph climactically reconciles with his brothers and pledges to provide for them and for their dependents. The book closes on a forward-looking note, pregnant with transgenerational expectancy:

Then Joseph dwelled in Egypt, he and his father’s household, and he lived to be 110 years old. And Joseph saw the sons of Ephraim to the third generation, and the newborn sons of Makir, the son of Manasseh, were upon Joseph’s lap. And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will surely visit (פקד) you and bring you up from this land to the land he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall bring up my bones from this place.” So Joseph died, 110 years old, and they embalmed him and put him in a coffin, in Egypt. (Gen 50:22–25)

Robert Robinson, whose study of the literary functions of the genealogies in Genesis accents an inherent theological tension between the untidy, disordered narrative events and the orderly, inexorable genealogies, marks the temporary resolution of this tension at the end of Genesis:

the patriarchs, the reference to the “filling up” of Amorite iniquity prior to their expulsion (as divine judgment) “in the fourth generation” certainly invites association with Exod 20:5 and 34:7.

24 John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in ExpBC, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:275. The single-verse narrative summary of this scene comes in Gen 49:28 and uses the terminology of “blessing” (ברך/ברכה) three times. Because not every pronouncement is positive, as in the cases of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi discussed above, many commentators prefer to label the speech as “Jacob’s testament/testimony” rather than “Jacob’s blessing.” However, the force of the narrative’s own emphatic summation as “blessing” is significant and should not be set aside, since it captures the overall outlook of this scene as one of hopeful confidence in Yahweh’s promise, as Sailhamer notes.
At this moment, at the conclusion of the book, the genealogy rests under no threat. The line of promise is secured in twelve sons. The determinism of the genealogies and the contingency of the narrative conspire to reach the same point, if only for a moment…. But then the story resumes. Exodus begins with Pharaoh’s threat to kill all Hebrew males. The genealogical line, recently so apparently secure, is once more in jeopardy.  

7.1.2. Transgenerational Perspective in the Exodus Narrative

The Exodus narrative opens, “These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob—each came with his house” (1:1), a retrospective rehearsal. It closes with a forward-looking description: “For the cloud of Yahweh was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of the whole house of Israel, in all their journeys” (40:38). The twelve households of Jacob’s sons (1:1), heirs of the covenant promises and blessing of the previous patriarchs, have become the singular “house of Israel” who will be led by Yahweh to the land of promise and dwell there with Yahweh throughout their generations. The intervening Exodus narrative is heavily occupied with this transgenerational consciousness, a perspective directly related to the transgenerational power and purposes of Yahweh, the protagonist.

7.1.2.a. The Opening Chapters

The first six chapters of Exodus firmly establish this “fathers and sons” framework, explicitly connecting narrative events—and the character and intentions of Yahweh—with generations-of-old and generations-to-come. The 70 descendants of Jacob who have gone down to Egypt (Exod 1:1–5) recall the 70 descendants of Noah in Gen 10 who originate the 70 nations of humanity. Thus, “Israel is here being portrayed as the microcosm of the macrocosm—the fulfillers of the divinely ordained destiny of man laid out following the Creation and the

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26 The expression “the house of Israel” (בראשית ישׂראל) is surprisingly rare in the book of Exodus, appearing only in Exod 16:31 and 40:38 (cf. “the house of Jacob” in 19:3). It therefore strikes a notable and distinct chord when used in the closing verse. The standard appellation is “the sons of Israel” (בני ישראל).
Across ch. 1, the referent of the word *son* (בן) progresses from “the (past) *sons* of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob…, all that generation (דור)” (Exod 1:1, 6), to describing the present oppressed generation (“Behold, the *sons* of Israel are too many and too mighty for us,” Exod 1:9; cf. 1:12, 16), to describing the prospective *sons* of the next generation (“Every *son* that is born you shall cast into the Nile,” Exod 1:22). From this first chapter onward, the common designation “the *sons* of Israel” (בני ישראל)—seldom just “Israel” and never “Israelite” (יהושע)—accents their literal descent from Jacob. Propagation is the unifying theme of the first chapter, with Hebrew population explosion, reactionary persecution, mandatory infanticide, and the midwives (ותילדמ) Shiphrah and Puah, whose brave faith brings the divine reward of “houses” (בתים, 1:21) of their own.

The recurring Genesis word pair “be fruitful and multiply” (פרה and רבה) is picked up from the outset in Exod 1, an allusion to and conflation of Yahweh’s words to Adam and Eve and to Noah and his family:

Exod 1:7: But the *sons* of Israel were fruitful (פרה) and teemed (שׁרץ) and multiplied (רבה) and became exceedingly numerous, and so the land (ארץ) was filled (מלא) with them.

Gen 1:28: And God blessed them, and God said to them: Be fruitful (פרה) and multiply (רבה) and fill (מלא) the earth (ארץ).

Gen 9:1: And God blessed Noah and his *sons*, and he said to them: Be fruitful (פרה) and multiply (רבה) and fill (מלא) the earth (ארץ).

Gen 9:7: And as for you [pl.], be fruitful (פרה) and multiply (רבה), teem (שׁרץ) on the earth (ארץ) and multiply (רבה) in it.

Thus, Exodus opens with the fulfillment of this divine intention, blessing, and promise, even as it introduces Pharaoh as a new and potent threat to its fulfillment.

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Against this backdrop, a son descended from Levi is born, hidden, providentially preserved, adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter, and named Moses. Later forced to flee to Midian, Moses marries Zipporah and has sons of his own. These two main scenes of Exod 2 are both capped by the naming of an infant son and its rationale (Moses in 2:10; Gershom in 2:22).

The situation remains dire and tragic for the sons of Israel in Egypt and for exiled Moses, yet God hears their groaning and remembers his covenant with their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (2:24). God appears to Moses at Mount Horeb in the burning bush, repeatedly describing himself as “the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (3:6, 13, 15; 4:5). He has come down from heaven to fulfill the promise to these patriarchs to visit their offspring, to bring their offspring up from Egypt, and to give to their offspring the land of Canaan (Exod 3:8, 17; cf. Gen 48:21; 50:24–25). Even the plundering of Egyptian gold, silver, and clothing foretold at Horeb is given a generational cast: “You shall put it on your sons and on your daughters, and so you shall despoil the Egyptians” (Exod 3:22). This deliverance will make known the character of “Yahweh”—his “name forever” (שׁם עולם), his “memorial” (זכר), that is, the name by which he will be known and mentioned “throughout all generations” (לדר דר, Exod 3:15).

The limitations of mortal pharaohs in these opening chapters stand in striking contrast to

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28 Charles Isbell, “Exodus 1–2 in the Context of Exodus 1–14: Story Lines and Key Words,” in Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Narrative, ed. David J. A. Clines, David M. Gunn and Alan J. Hauser, JSOTSup 19 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), 43–44, notes that while Exod 2:1–10 refers to Moses as “child” (ילד) 6 times and by pronouns 14 more times, the word “son” (בן) is used only twice, in 2:2 and 2:10, forming an inclusio around this scene. Echoing the murderous decree of Pharaoh in 1:22, this use of בן “both opens and closes the paragraph on a note of despair.” To my reading, the providential circumstances which give rise not only to Moses’ preservation but also to Pharaoh’s daughter paying the Hebrew mother to nurse her own child strike a more hopeful note. While Isbell does not mention it, and the Exodus narrative makes nothing of it, it is at least curious that Moses’ name, in Egyptian, means simply “son.”

29 By the end of chapter 2, words for “son” (בן), “boy” (נער), and “daughter” (בת) have been used 34 times. On the prevalence and literary patterning of these terms, see Isbell, “Exodus 1–2,” 44.
the enduring mindfulness and power of Yahweh. As Genesis concludes, the pharaoh is grateful to Joseph and gracious toward Jacob and his family, settling them in the region of Goshen (Gen 47:6, 11), but in Exodus “a new king over Egypt arose who did not know Joseph” and who schemes to oppress the sons of Israel (Exod 1:8). When Pharaoh receives word that Moses has killed an Egyptian, he seeks to kill Moses, and Moses must flee. Yet 40 years later, Yahweh sends Moses back to Egypt, assuring him that “those seeking your life have died” (Exod 2:15; 4:19). How different is the faithfulness, the justice, and the reign of Yahweh. He remembers his promise to the fathers (2:24; cf. 32:13). He will call Egypt to account for their generations of mistreatment against Israel (3:16). The time has now come for Yahweh to demonstrate the superiority of his power and reign to that of Pharaoh (3:19; 4:21; cf. 15:18). Thus, this narrative accent on Yahweh’s transgenerational power and prerogatives is tied to the strong Exodus theme of Yahweh’s incomparability: there is no one like Yahweh in all the earth—among kings or gods—whose dominion perdures from generation to generation.

In contrast to the transgenerational themes of Exod 1–4, the narration of Exod 5 adopts a restricted vantage, holding the reader’s gaze, along with that of the Israelite slaves, on the stifling and worsening agony of the present. Even Moses has lost track of God’s promises to the fathers and the hope of generations to come: “O Lord, why have you treated this people badly? Is this

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30 For this insight, I am indebted to a comment by Georg Fischer and Dominik Markl, Das Buch Exodus, NSKAT 2 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2009), 58, regarding Yahweh’s promise-fulfilling visitation announced in Exod 3:16: “Gott bewahrt die Treue, auch zu längst Verstorbenen—im Unterschied zu Pharaoh (s.o. 1,8).”

31 See Exod 8:6 [Eng 8:10]; 9:14; and 15:11. In the Song of the Sea, the laudatory question, “Who is like you among the gods, O Yahweh?” (15:11) is ultimately justified not only by rehearsing his triumph over Egypt but also by praising his enduring kingship: “Yahweh reigns forever and ever” (15:18). Yahweh’s demonstration of his superiority over Pharaoh is closely related in Exodus to his announcement that he will “perform acts of judgment against all the gods of Egypt.” On the divine ascriptions of the Egyptian pharaohs, see Jarl E. Fossum, “Son of God,” in Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible, ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst, rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 788: the pharaoh was hailed as the “Good God,” the earthly manifestation of Horus who descended from heaven. The Exodus narrator constructs such divine pretension on the part of Pharaoh in many subtle ways (Exod 5:10 compared to 5:1; 7:17; etc; Exod 10:28 compared to 33:20; Exod 9:17 and 10:3 compared to 14:4, 17–18). In the end, then, Pharaoh is shown to be a mere mortal, whereas Yahweh is shown to be the eternal God who alone reigns forever.
why you sent me? Ever since you sent me to Pharaoh, to speak in your name, he has treated this people badly, and you have certainly not delivered your people!” (Exod 5:22–23) In reply, Yahweh reiterates his patriarchal promises (Exod 6:3–4), reaffirms that he has heard the groaning of the present-generation “sons of Israel” and that he will deliver them out of Egypt (6:5–7), and pledges a time of fulfillment in the imminent future when he will bring them into the land promised to the fathers (6:8). In this context, the fundamental covenant promise, repeated here from Genesis, suggests an enduring, hereditary relationship: “I will take you as my people, and I will be your God” (6:7; cf. Gen 17:7). The genealogy of Moses and Aaron in 6:14–25 contributes further to the generational outlook of the story.32

7.1.2.b. The Plague Narratives

The plague accounts in Exod 7–12 fix attention on present-generation redemptive acts of Yahweh, yet paradoxically this focus on the present is heightened by repeated narrative relation to past and future generations. The plagues come as punishment for multiple generations of violent Egyptian mistreatment of Israel. Yahweh describes the plagues as his “visitation” (פקד) of “what has been done to [Israel] by Egypt” (3:16). At the beginning and end of the plague narratives, Yahweh’s blows against Egypt and its gods are characterized as “acts of judgment” (שׁפטים, Exod 6:6; 7:4: 12:12).33 The heinous crimes against Israel, hitherto unredressed, will be so no longer. The first plague, the Nile River turned to blood, stands as a dramatic uncovering and indictment of Egypt’s drowning of Hebrew sons in the Nile.34 The king of Egypt and “all his

32 Terence E. Fretheim, Exodus, IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 91, emphasizes the “credentialing purpose” of the genealogy, but also notes that it “links up with 2:23 and contributes to the theme of the fullness of time.”

33 In the Genesis backstory, when Yahweh foretells to Abraham that his offspring will be slaves in a foreign land and afflicted for 400 years, he also assures him, “But the very nation which they serve I am going to judge (דין), and after this they will come out with great possessions” (Gen 15:14).

34 W. Ross Blackburn, The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus,
people” (Exod 1:22) who began the murderous treatment of Israel in Exod 1 have died and passed out of the narrative (Exod 4:19), yet the same insolence and violence have continued under a new Pharaoh and a new generation of Egyptians (Exod 5:14, 16; 7:16; 9:17, 30; cf. 18:11). During the plagues, Pharaoh himself acknowledges this: “Yahweh is righteous; I and my people are guilty” (Exod 9:27; cf. 10:16–17). Likewise the narrator: “Pharaoh sinned again…. he and his servants” (Exod 9:34). While Pharaoh’s and Egypt’s offenses have been ongoing, it is this new generation which receives blows of justice in the present.

The present calamitous phenomena unleashed by Yahweh are unequalled by anything witnessed in the past, they will not be equaled again in the future, and they are therefore to be remembered and recounted across the future generations. The hail, for example, will be “a very

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35 Michael Fishbane, “Exodus 1–4: The Prologue to the Exodus Cycle,” in Exodus, ed. Harold Bloom, MCI (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 69, “The new unit (chap. 5) thus begins with a decree imposed by the (new) Pharaoh, even as did the first (1:8–11).” David M. Gunn, “The ‘Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart’: Plot, Character and Theology in Exodus 1–14,” in Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Narrative, ed. David J. A. Clines, David M. Gunn and Alan J. Hauser, JSOTSup 19 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), 74, “Both Pharaohs—of birth and plague episodes—tend to merge somewhat as characters, perhaps the more easily since they are not given personal names. We are not surprised, therefore, to find the second Pharaoh in chapter 5 simply rejecting out of hand any thought that he should ‘let Israel go’.…. For the paradigm ‘Pharaoh’ of this phase of Israel’s history has already been established as a ruler whose methods of control are ruthless.”

36 This two-generation scheme may well be a simplified construal of the history. Based on the statements in Exod 12:40–41 that Israel dwelled in Egypt for 430 years, the number of generations of Pharaoh and oppressing Egyptians suggested by the narrative may have been even greater. It is challenging to gain a precise sense of this progression of generations, which also includes a genealogy of Moses and Aaron with only four generations from Levi to Moses, counting inclusively (Exod 6:14ff). On the relation between the 430 years of Exod 12:40 and the four generations of Exod 6, see commentaries and Jack R. Riggs, “The Length of Israel’s Sojourn in Egypt,” GTJ 12 (1971): 18–35. In the Exodus narrative, the passing of time between the beginning of the oppression in ch. 1 and the birth of Moses in ch. 2 is left undetermined, although perhaps the lack of any distinctive introduction of “Pharaoh” in ch. 2:15 (such as “a new king” in 1:8) suggests that he is the same character who was speaking at the end of ch. 1. However, the references to “Pharaoh” in chs. 3–5 also offer no distinct introduction, even though Exod 2:23 (“During those days, the king of Egypt died…”) requires that a different Pharaoh is, in fact, being referenced in chs. 3–5. In any case, there is a transgenerational dynamic at work here, and the plagues fall upon later Pharaohs and later Egyptians who share the same character and disposition toward Israel (and towards Yahweh) as previous generations.

37 Shimon Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, JSOTSup 70 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), 106–7, identifies this as the distinctive emphasis of the third triad of plagues—“the unparalleled potency of the plagues, the
heavy hail the like of which has never been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation” (9:24). The narration of the locust plague employs this theme most fully. Just prior to its announcement, Yahweh declares to Moses that he will continue to multiply his signs in Egypt’s midst “in order that you may recount in the ears of your son and your sons’ sons how I have dealt with Egypt” (10:2). This future-generation intention is mirrored a few verses later by the past-generations language of Yahweh’s warning: the locust plague will be such as “neither your fathers nor your fathers’ fathers have seen since the day they were first on the earth until this day” (10:6).

The ensuing bargaining between Pharaoh and Moses, in this context also, has transgenerational, theological significance. Moses refuses Pharaoh’s offer to let only the grown men depart to worship Yahweh: “With our young and our old we must go; with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks and with our herds we must go; for it is our feast to Yahweh” (10:9). Peli calls attention to the word order here and sees Moses underscoring the young ones: “He wants Pharaoh to hear about ‘our sons and daughters,’ the wonderful spirited youth, which rose in a miraculous way during the years of bondage.” Even in the face of Pharaoh’s oppression, Yahweh has somehow preserved the future of Israel in their sons and daughters—the sparing of infant Moses is apparently not so extraordinary. When the wonders of Yahweh are

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38 This formulation corresponds directly to the second utterance of the visiting phrase in Exod 34:7: “visiting the iniquity of fathers against sons and sons of sons.”

39 It is interesting to compare a distinct but related formulation in the exhortations of Deuteronomy. Moses warns the people against being enticed by false prophets or even close family members (brother, son, etc.) to serve “other gods which neither you nor your fathers have known” (Deut 13:7; Eng. 13:6). If the people turn away from Moses’ words, however, and go after other gods, then Yahweh will bring them to a foreign nation which “neither you nor your fathers have known” where they will “serve other gods which neither you nor your fathers have known” (Deut 28:36, 64).

40 Pinchas H. Peli, Torah Today: A Renewed Encounter with Scripture (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 64.

41 It is curious that Moses’ own name is the Egyptian word for “son.” See discussion in James K. Hoffmeier, Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996),
concluded, the sons of Israel will go forth as an enormous host, six hundred thousand men on foot along with their dependents (גנן, Exod 12:37).

7.1.2.c. The Passover Account

Yahweh’s transgenerational dealings and purposes in the plague narratives reach their climax in the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn of Egypt. The nature of the divine blow here directly redresses Egypt’s offenses against Israel recounted in chs. 1–5 and especially in ch. 1.\footnote{See Walter Brueggemann, “Exodus 11:1–10: A Night for Crying/Weeping,” in Preaching Biblical Texts, ed. Fredrick C. Holmgren and Herman E. Schaalman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 81. Brueggemann assesses the final plague as “a response in like kind.… Thus the narrator arranges this announced plague so that it correlates with the earlier abuse of Israel,” noting both the murderous decree of Pharaoh and the outcry of Hebrew slaves in Exod 1–2. Göran Larsson, Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 92, “Before God’s firstborn can leave toward freedom and a new life, other firstborn sons have to pay a high price for their own and other peoples’ evil.” See also Fretheim, Exodus, 140–41. Edward Greenstein, “The Firstborn Plague and the Reading Process,” in Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom, ed. David P. Wright, David Noel Freedman, and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake: IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 555–68, is often cited in discussions of the narrative rationale for the tenth plague. Greenstein sees three different, and to some extent conflicting, rationales in the text for the death of Egyptian firstborn: a measure-for-measure retaliation for Pharaoh’s past actions (cf. Exod 1:22; 4:22–23); a cultic act asserting Yahweh’s dominion and claim over all firstborn (cf. Exod 13:2); and an instructive account explaining the possibility of animal substitution in redeeming firstborn sons, since firstborn of man and livestock alike are struck in the plague (cf. Exod 12:29; 13:11–16). In my view, the retaliatory rationale is central. The Exodus narrative presents Yahweh’s claim on the firstborn of Egypt in connection with retaliatory divine justice (that is, as talionic justice for their murder of Hebrew sons), and presents Yahweh’s claim on the firstborn of Israel (Exod 13:2) as deriving from (rather than explaining) the events of the Passover (see Exod 13:15). Likewise, the substitutionary redemption of human firstborn with animals is presented by the narrative as a commemorative practice which recalls the Passover events, not a cultic practice preceding it.}

Since the days of their fathers, Pharaoh and the Egyptians have been seeking to kill (גנן) male Hebrew babes (Exod 1:16, 22); so now Yahweh will go forth in the land of Egypt and every firstborn Egyptian son will die (גנן, Exod 11:4–5).\footnote{Isbell, “Exodus 1–2,” 47, notes that, in Yahweh’s earliest threat of the tenth plague back in Exod 4:22–23, the expressions “Israel is my son, my firstborn” and the corresponding, “I will slay your son, your firstborn” are somewhat awkward. “Son” (בן) is superfluous in both, and “firstborn (son)” (בכר) would have sufficed. He suggests that “son” (בן) is included in order to highlight the connection between Yahweh’s threat of the death of the firstborn and Pharaoh’s edict in ch. 1: every “son” (בן) born to the Hebrews is to be thrown into the Nile” (Exod 1:22).} Since the days of their fathers, the Egyptians have ruthlessly enslaved the sons of Israel (Exod 1:11–14; 5:6–21), so that their outcry (צעקה, Exod 3:7, 9; cf. 2:23; 5:8, 15) has gone up to heaven; so now the death of Egyptian firstborn will

140–42. The Exodus narrative itself, however, makes nothing of the Egyptian meaning of Moses’ name, instead giving its Hebrew etymology as one drawn out (משׁה) of the water (Exod 2:10).
bring about a great outcry (צעקה) throughout all the land “the like of which has never been nor will ever be again” (Exod 11:6; cf. 12:30). The recurrence of the totalizing word כל (every, all) in the description of the tenth plague just as in Pharaoh’s edict in ch. 1 further ties this final Passover blow to crimes against Israel which the narrative attributes to a previous generation:

And Pharaoh commanded all (כל) his people, saying, “Every (כל) son that is born you shall cast into the Nile, but every (כל) daughter you shall allow to live. (Exod 1:22)

At midnight, Yahweh struck every (כל) firstborn in the land of Egypt … and every (כל) firstborn of livestock. And Pharaoh arose in the night—he and all (כל) his servants and all (כל) Egypt, and there was a great outcry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not someone dead. (Exod 12:29–30; cf. 11:5)

Yahweh is thus portrayed as going forth (יצא, Exod 11:4) through the midst of Egypt in punishment for the iniquities of fathers past and fathers present by the death of the firstborn son in every household. The Passover comes as the climactic blow of Yahweh’s “coming down” to “visit-in-punishment” (פקד) that which Egypt has done to Israel (3:8, 16)—for generations. The correspondence between this final plague and the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 is striking: “visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons, even against the third and fourth generations.”

These past- and present-generation dimensions of the Exod 11–13 Passover narrative, however, are overshadowed by its unmistakable future-generation orientation. The Passover is narrated as Yahweh’s decisive act of strength which wins Israel’s release and opens up Israel’s

44 In the wake of historical scholarship and source criticism, modern Exodus commentaries almost never note the connection between the death of the Egyptian firstborn and the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5, assuming that the Decalogue originated independently from the events narrated in Exodus and usually, furthermore, that the motive clauses (such as 20:5b–6) are secondary to the commandments themselves. For pre-modern commentators, however, the correspondence was apparent so that the divine blow against the sons of Egypt, like Exod 20:5, required apology. Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 56–57, explicitly denies the historicity of the firstborn plague as not in keeping with the character of divine justice articulated in Ezek 18, implicitly setting aside Exod 20:5. Feldman, 'Remember Amalek!', 129–131, notes that Philo “justifies God’s action by asserting (De Somnia 2.266) that the firstborn of Egypt were true children of their sinful parents, and that they embodied lust, pleasure, grief, fear, injustice, and folly.” Josephus, on the other hand, avoids details of the Exodus narrative which emphasize that firstborn of servants and animals were also stricken. Feldman interprets Josephus’s brevity and reticence thus: “He clearly refuses to deal with the problem of this infliction of punishment on apparently innocent people and animals.”
future (11:1; 12:42, 51; 13:15–16), even as it strikes a blow to Egypt’s hopes and prospects embodied in her firstborn sons. It is the definitive, once-for-all-generations revelation that Yahweh treats Israel distinctly, specifically, that when Yahweh passed through Egypt, striking down the firstborn of both “man and beast,” he graciously passed over and spared the firstborn sons of Israel (11:7; 12:23–27). All which later generations of Israel will have and enjoy in the land “in that day” (Exod 13:8) is the blessing and gift of this God, and a direct consequence of his striking Egypt and sparing Israel “this day” (Exod 12:14, 17, 41, 51; 13:3, 4).⁴⁵

For this reason, going forward, “this day” will perpetually function as a “memorial” (זכרון, Exod 12:14) for the sons of Israel, a day which they are to “remember” (זכר, Exod 13:3) by festival and cultic rites. Extensive instructions for future commemoration of the Passover events are interwoven throughout the present-narrative account. Larsson comments on this narrative dynamic, “In the description of what happened in Egypt before the liberation, the laws for the future celebration of Passover are constantly intertwined in such a way that it is difficult to distinguish between history and future, story and ritual.”⁴⁶ The account of Yahweh actually passing through Egypt and striking down the firstborn takes only a single verse, a mere 23 words (Exod 12:29), standing right in the middle of the entire Passover narrative in 11:1–13:16.⁴⁷ Most of what surrounds this passage involves warnings of what he is about to do and, especially, instructions for commemorating and retelling these events throughout Israel’s generations through Passover sacrifice and meal, the feast of unleavened bread, and the redemption of firstborn sons and livestock. Wells observes:

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⁴⁵ Simon De Vries, *Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow: Time and History in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 75, 161, discusses this same theological dynamic in connection with the emphatic references to “today” (היום, 14:13) and “in that day” (ביום ההוא, 14:30) in the victory at the sea episode.

⁴⁶ Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 86.

⁴⁷ Within this episode, there are 38 verses prior to Exod 12:29 and 37 verses following.
In Exodus 12, the very Israelites about to leave Egypt are also the first participants celebrating the *remembrance* of leaving Egypt by following a prescribed ritual. Thus time is collapsed in both directions in this ritual, in that those Israelites leaving Egypt act like later Jews celebrating the Passover, and later Jews celebrating the Passover act as if they are ancient Israelites leaving slavery in Egypt.\(^{48}\)

Here the *theological* dimension of the transgenerational theme is pronounced. In these chapters, Yahweh is portrayed not merely as against Egypt and for Israel, but also *for the future generations of Israel*. He acts to secure blessings in the land for far-off descendants. He desires to be remembered and known by these descendants. These descendants are mentioned repeatedly in these chapters, in explicit terms.

This day will be a memorial for you, and you shall observe it as a festival to Yahweh throughout your generations; you shall observe it as a perpetual statute. (Exod 12:14)

You shall observe this instruction as a statute for you and for your sons (בָּנֶיךָ) forever (עד־עולם). When you come into the land which Yahweh will give to you just as he promised, keep this service. And when your sons (בָּנָיכם) say, “What is this service of yours?” say, “It is the sacrifice of Yahweh’s Passover, for he passed over the houses of the sons of Israel when he struck the Egyptians but delivered our houses.” (Exod 12:24–27)

The command to tell “your son” about the Passover miracle is repeated three times in this section, in connection with the ongoing rites of Passover meal (12:24–27), unleavened bread (13:8), and redemption of firstborn (13:14).

In fact, the final statement in the tenth plague episode is the imaginative model reply of a father, in days to come, answering the query of his son, a reply which begins and ends with the words, “(For) by a strong hand Yahweh brought *us* out of Egypt” (13:14, 16). The “*us*” in this statement is enormously significant. Some verses earlier, in Exod 13:8, the envisioned future father is to reply to his son, “Because of what Yahweh did for *me* when *I* came out of Egypt.”

Patrick describes the dynamic at work in the movement from this first-person singular confession

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in Exod 13:8 to the first-person plural language of Exod 13:14 and 16:

The father “fuses” (or grafts) his identity into the textual world for the sake of the son. The son now relates to his father as a representative of the founding event of their people, and when he becomes a father he will represent it to his child. The horizons of the textual world and the people of Israel are thereby “collapsed” so that all generations can say, “Yahweh brought us out of the land of Egypt.”

Childs notes, “This response [of father to son] is not simply a report, but above all a confession to the ongoing participation of Israel in the decisive act of the redemption from Egypt.” All the cultic instructions in these chapters, then, with their enduring status, look ahead to continual remembrance and characterize the climactic events of the tenth plague as for the sons of Israel throughout their generations.

Finally, the prevalence of “houses” or “households” in the Passover narrative deserves mention. The noun בית occurs sixteen times in ch. 12 alone. The Israelites are to “take a lamb according to fathers’ households (לבית אבות), a lamb for each household” (12:3). The lamb is to be eaten inside the house and its flesh not taken outside (12:46); nor is any person to go out of the door of the house until morning (12:22b). The lamb’s blood is to be put on the doorposts and lintel of the house (12:7, 22–23). The blood will be “a sign on the houses where you are” so that the Lord will pass over (12:13) and will “not allow the destroyer to enter your houses” (12:23) to strike. In days to come, when their children inquire about the Passover observances, they will tell them, “It is the sacrifice of Yahweh’s Passover, for he passed over the houses of the sons of Israel when he struck the Egyptians but delivered our houses” (12:27). After Yahweh strikes the Egyptian firstborn at midnight, “there was not a house where there was not someone dead” (12:30). Thus, it was not individually, but by “fathers’ households” that Yahweh delivered Israel.

51 Along with the Passover meal observances, the removal of leaven for the feast of unleavened bread is also prescribed in this chapter for “houses” (12:15, 19, 20).
He did so by leveling a fatal blow against the households of Egypt, striking down the firstborn sons of every household, and thus of every father.

7.1.2.d. In the Wilderness

Outside of Egypt, the Exodus narrative continues to exhibit transgenerational concerns. The departure in ch. 13 is concretely tied to the patriarchal promises: as the sons of Israel “go up” from Egypt, Moses takes with them the bones of Joseph. Here the narrator cites Joseph’s prophetic demand from the end of Genesis: “God will surely visit you, and you must take my bones up with you from this place” (Exod 13:19; cf. Gen 50:25), which in Genesis is preceded by “I am about to die, but God will surely visit you and bring you up from this land to the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” (Gen 50:24). So it was that Joseph not only lived out his 110 years in Egypt, enjoying his grandchildren and great-grandchildren upon his knees (Gen 50:22–23), but he now participates (as a mummy) along with these greatly multiplied later generations in the fulfillment of Yahweh’s promised visitation and deliverance and in the return to the land of promise.

Soon after departing, the people of Israel are trapped by the Egyptian army at the sea; they cry out, lamenting the lost opportunity to continue in slavery and fall into Egyptian graves (Exod 14:11—and this just after Joseph has come forth from his). In reply, Moses declares that Yahweh will save them, and that the Egyptians they see today, they will never see again forever (14:13,

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52 Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3:5n3, relates a rabbinic tradition which creatively captures the connection between past promise (and generations) and present fulfillment: “Moses’ mother led [Moses] to the very spot where Joseph’s bones lay…. Joseph’s coffin had been sunk far into the ground, and he knew not how to raise it from the depths. Standing at the edge of the grave, he spoke these words, ‘Joseph, the time hath come whereof thou didst say, ‘God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.’ No sooner had this reminder dropped from his lips than the coffin stirred and rose to the surface.”

53 See §4.2.8 above regarding the counting of generations in this passage and the translation of 50:23b.

54 Josh 24:32 states that the bones of Joseph were ultimately buried at Shechem, on a piece of land which Jacob purchased from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem (cf. Gen 34).
On the far side of the sea, Moses and the people praise Yahweh as “my God” in poetic parallelism with “the God of my father” (15:2). They look forward in confidence to the time when Yahweh will bring his people to their destination and “plant them on the mountain of your inheritance, the place which you have made for your dwelling, the holy place, O Lord, which your hands have prepared” (15:17). The long-term, multi-generation future of Israel stands dramatically open before them, for “Yahweh reigns forever and ever” (Exod 15:18).

When Yahweh provides the people with manna, he commands, “An omer’s measure of it shall be kept for your generations, in order that they may see the bread with which I fed you, when I brought you out from the land of Egypt” (16:32). The narrator lingers on this point, repeating the idea as Moses’ instruction to Aaron in the next verse, “Take a single jar, and put an omer’s measure of manna in it, and set it before Yahweh to be kept for your generations” (16:33). This heightens the irony (or, perhaps, the tragedy) of the people’s grumbling just a few verses later when there is no water: “Why now have you brought us up from Egypt to kill me and my sons and my livestock with thirst” (17:3).

When Amalek comes and attacks them, the victory which Yahweh provides takes on transgenerational dimensions. Yahweh commands Moses to write “as a memorial” on a

55 Such confidence ties directly to the patriarchal promises which Yahweh has announced he is now fulfilling (e.g., Exod 3:8; 6:8; 32:13; etc.). Even Jethro gives voice to this future hope when he meets with Moses in the wilderness: “If you do this thing, God will direct you, and you will be able to endure; and all these people as well will come to their place in peace” (Exod 18:23). James W. Watts, *Psalm and Story*, JSOTSup 139 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 51, reads this section of the song as an intentional shift in temporal perspective, adopting the perspective of later generations which experience the land settlement as accomplished event, and thus, rhetorically, allowing these readers “to join in the celebration at the sea from their own temporal perspective.”

56 The vocabulary of Exod 16:33 (for a preservation; Hiphil of נוח, to place or set) echoes Exod 16:23, which speaks of setting aside and keeping the sixth-day manna for the Sabbath. By the same power with which Yahweh preserved the highly perishable manna for an extra day on the Sabbath, he will preserve this omer of testimonial manna for generations to come.

57 This is now the third mention in Exodus of something functioning as a “memorial,” to instruct and remind Israel throughout their generations. The previous “memorials” were Yahweh’s name (Exod 3:15) and the calendar date of the Passover (Exod 12:14). The preserved jar of manna (Exod 16:32–33) and the stone tablets of testimony
scroll” and to “put it in the ears of Joshua” that “I will thoroughly wipe out the memory (זכור) of Amalek from under heaven” (17:14). The reader learns not only from later OT narratives but from the very next verse that this divine resolve will play out over many generations: “Yahweh will have war against Amalek from generation to generation (17:15).

7.1.2.e. Enduring Covenant, Commands, and Priestly Status

Once the people arrive at Sinai in Exod 19, much of the remainder of the narrative consists of Yahweh giving commands, ordinances, and statutes to be observed by the sons of Israel throughout their generations. The multigenerational scope of these laws resumes the long-view perspective of the Passover, unleavened bread, and redemption of firstborn instructions from chs. 12–13. The first command of the Decalogue bears a motive clause threatening divine visitation of fathers’ iniquity “against sons, even against the third and the fourth generation” (Exod 20:5). The requirement that the people bring a continual supply of pure, pressed olive oil for the sanctuary lamp is a “perpetual statute, throughout their generations, for the sons of Israel” (חקת עולם לשניהם מאת בני ישראל, Exod 27:20–21). The Sabbath is “sign between me and you throughout your generations (לדרתם) so that you may know that I am Yahweh, who sanctifies you” (Exod 31:13). It is a “perpetual covenant” (ברית עולם, Exod 31:16). Even the command regarding oil for anointing the priests is given “to the sons of Israel … throughout your generations” (Exod 30:31). The aim of the commands at Sinai is, as Buber observes, “not the single person, but the people of YHVH…. The [divine king] does not want to rule a crowd but a community.” These

(Exod 31:18; 32:15; 34:29) serve a similar purpose, although the narrative does not call them “memorials.”

58 See Feldman, “Remember Amalek!” 84–146, for discussion of ancient Jewish efforts to explain this divine decree of destruction for descendants of a group, because of past offenses. Feldman examines four similar OT episodes: the destruction of life in the Great Flood, the utter destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the plague of the first-born Egyptians, and the command to annihilate the seven nations of Canaan.

59 For later episodes related to the extermination of the Amalekites, see 1 Sam 15; 1 Sam 30; and 1 Chr 4:43.

60 Martin Buber, “Holy Event (Exodus 19–27),” in Exodus, ed. Harold Bloom, MCI (New York: Chelsea
commands, along with their promises and warnings, are “directed to the entire nation as a single entity in time throughout its generations.”

This transgenerational language is most common in the instructions for priests, and particularly in the enduring consecration of Aaron and his descendants as Israel’s priests. This father-to-sons hereditary privilege is described most pointedly in the anointing scene in ch. 40:

Then bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, and wash them with water. And dress Aaron in the holy garments and anoint him and consecrate him, so that he may serve me as a priest. And as for his sons, bring them near and dress them in tunics and anoint them, just as you anointed their father, so that they may serve me as priests. And their anointing will place them into a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations. (40:12–15)

Like their priestly standing, the prescribed rituals and service of the priests are described in enduring, transgenerational terms. The prescribed priestly clothing, for example, is a “perpetual statute for Aaron and for his offspring” (28:43). Washing hands and feet with water before approaching the altar is described as “a perpetual statute for Aaron and for his offspring throughout their generations” (30:21).

This priestly vocation of the sons of Aaron within Israel is mirrored by the priestly vocation of the sons of Israel as a holy nation among all the nations of the earth (Exod 19:5–6). It is not merely the thousands of individuals, but it is Israel as a distinct and enduring people whom Yahweh has “brought to myself” (Exod 19:4). He is fulfilling his purpose that they be his people, and he their God (Exod 6:7). The story does not end with escape from Egypt because Yahweh’s rescue of Israel is not merely from bondage; it is “deliverance into a community.”

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61 Cassuto, Commentary on Exodus, 243. Note also the admonition of Moses in Deut 29: “The hidden things belong to Yahweh our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our sons forever, so that we may do all the words of this Torah” (Deut 29:28; Eng. 29:29).

62 This holy, priestly status recalls Yahweh’s Genesis promise to the patriarchs, “In your offspring, all the nations of the earth will be blessed” (Gen 22:18; 26:4).

They are the enduring property of Yahweh, whom he will “take as his hereditary possession” (Exod 34:9; cf. Deut 4:20; 32:9). Not as individuals, but as a transgenerational family, they are Yahweh’s “firstborn son” (Exod 4:22). Mann sees this theme driven home by the totalizing language of the covenant scene in Exod 24:

The terms of the covenant call for absolute obedience as a people, and the consequences of irresponsibility are equally comprehensive. The totality of the covenant polity was emphasized in the description of the ratification ceremony: “Moses came and told the people all the words of Yahweh and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, ‘All that Yahweh has spoken we will do’” (24:3).64

Specifically, Yahweh intends Israel to be, throughout its generations, the people in whose midst he will dwell. The tabernacle structure and services will both manifest and enable the dwelling of this holy God in the midst of this people. God has delivered the people from their generations of “hard servitude” (עבדה קשׁה, Exod 1:14; 6:6, 9) and has given them a blessed, perpetual “service” (עבֹדה) before Him in constructing and maintaining the tabernacle.65 Yahweh explains this as the purpose of the exodus: “I will dwell in the midst of the sons of Israel, and I will be their God, and they will know that I am Yahweh their God who brought them out from the land of Egypt in order that I may dwell in their midst” (Exod 29:45–46). In this sense, the camp of Israel, Sinai, the tabernacle, and ultimately the land which Yahweh is giving to them as an inheritance all share in this single purpose: “In every place where I will cause my name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you” (Exod 20:24)—a statement recalling the giving

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65 The people’s “service” (рабיה) in the initial construction of the tabernacle can be described in the narrative as completed: “And so all the service of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was completed, and the sons of Israel did according to everything which Yahweh had commanded Moses, thus they did” (Exod 39:32; cf. 39:42). However, the language of “service” (рабיה) is also used throughout the tabernacle chapters to describe the permanent, ongoing work of the cult, on the part of the people, the Levites, and the priests (e.g., Exod 27:19; 30:16; 35:21; 38:21; 39:40). In addition to the tabernacle cult, the Passover rites and the feast of unleavened bread in Israelite homes are also instituted as the people’s “service” (рабיה) to be fulfilled “when you come to the land which Yahweh will give” (Exod 12:25–26; 13:5).
of Yahweh’s name “to the sons of Israel … [as] my memorial throughout all generations” (Exod 3:15).66

7.1.2.f. Fathers and Sons in the Decalogue

The command “Honor your father and your mother,” as situated in the Decalogue, establishes the importance of the child-parent relationship for the continuing blessedness of Yahweh’s people throughout their generations. The ramifications of this commandment go beyond teaching young children to be obedient. Miller observes:

The command is addressed to persons of any age whose parents are living. It was not primarily directed to children, to tell them how to treat their parents, but to adults; this means that this commandment has in mind especially how mature adults are to treat their older or elderly parents. Of course, that does not mean the commandment is inapplicable to younger children; it applies there too.”67

Trimm argues extensively that this commandment applies especially to adult children with aging parents, demanding that they not scorn or neglect their parents in their declining years.68

Yet beyond purely filial, familial concerns, the pivotal placement of this command in the flow of the Decalogue heightens its theological and covenantal dimensions as well. The parent command stands at the transition from Yahweh-related commands to neighbor-related commands. Like all the Yahweh-commandments which precede it (and unlike all of the neighbor-commands which follow it), the parent commandment is given a motive clause: “so that your days may be long in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you” (Exod 20:12).

The expression “Yahweh your God” here appears in each of the preceding motive clauses (Exod

66 Trygve N. D. Mettinger, In Search of God: The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 9, reads the Hiphil of זכר in Exod 20:24 in the active sense of “proclaim,” but still links this with the sanctuary dwelling in Israel’s midst: “‘In every place where I proclaim my name I shall come to you and bless you’…. In other words, God proclaims his name in the sanctuary and thus manifests his presence.”

67 Patrick D. Miller, Deuteronomy, IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 84.

20:2, 5, 7, 10) and binds the commandments in Exod 20:2–12 together as a group, often named the “first table” of the law.

Honoring of parents and the worship of Yahweh are thus closely related, as the narrative emphasis on fathers recounting the saving Passover deeds of Yahweh to sons (Exod 12–13) has already made clear. Johnstone explains that the father “is responsible for maintaining the exclusive worship of YHWH within his household, for honoring YHWH in all activities, and thus for ensuring for generations to come the welfare of the community.”

Even Trimm, who emphasizes the commandment’s call to care for aging parents, acknowledges that a general obedience to parents with respect to “following God” is also in view. Sailhamer pushes this observation further: “You are to treat your parents with respect not only as long as they live, but also as long as you live in the land the Lord your God is giving you. Long after parents have departed, they are still to be treated with respect by honoring and obeying their instruction. This is the basis of God’s showing love to the thousands of generations of those ‘who love me and keep my commandments’ (20:6).”

Blidstein cites Rabbi Levi ben Gershom (fourteenth century): “This [respect for parents] will ensure that succeeding generations will accept the teachings of their elders, generation after generation, and they will all, therefore, be strong in

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69 William Johnstone, *Exodus*, 2 vols., SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2014), 2:26. John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 285, observes, “In the OT historical books we can see this pattern play itself out. In Judges 2:10, for example, we are told that a whole generation was lost because of the spiritual neglect of their parents: ‘another generation grew up, who knew neither the LORD nor what he had done for Israel… They forsook the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshipped other gods.’ For this act of neglect and rebellion the children were punished (Judg 2:12–15)” (author’s emphasis).

70 Trimm, “Honor Your Parents,” 255–56. In support of this observation he notes that Biblical passages releasing children from honoring or obeying parents do so for the sake of avoiding idolatry or other gross disobedience to God (Deut 33:9; 1 Kgs 15:13; Ezek 20:18). For a similar perspective, see Raymond Brown, *The Message of Deuteronomy*, TBST (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1993), 87–88: “There is little doubt that this commandment also addressed a spiritual priority as well as a social provision. Honouring one’s parents meant following their faith.”

71 Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 286.
their observance of the Torah of the Lord.”

The promise of length of days in the land “needs to be seen in terms of the covenant—Israel’s security in the promised land.” In this sense, the motive clause for the parent commandment is closely tied to the motive clause for the idolatry commandment:

[Have no other gods and avoid idolatry] … for I am Yahweh your God, a jealous God, who, with respect to those who hate me, visits-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons, even against the third and fourth generations, but who, with respect to those who love me and keep my commandments, acts in lovingkindness to thousands (of descendants). (Exod 20:5–6)

[Honor your father and your mother] … so that your days may be long (ךְאר) in the land which Yahweh your God is giving you. (Exod 20:12)

Thus the “first table” of the Decalogue opens by forbidding idolatry on the part of fathers, lest their sons be led astray by their bad example, and it closes by demanding filial honor on the part of sons, lest they cast aside their parents’ model devotion and religious instruction. With both commandments, Yahweh is seeking to safeguard his intention for Israel’s generations—length of days in the land of promise, enjoying his lovingkindness and his blessings. Because of this vital

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72 Gerald Blidstein, Honor Thy Father and Thy Mother (New York: Ktav, 1975), 21. Blidstein catalogs numerous rabbinic elaborations on this theme, but sees this “purposive orientation toward filial piety” as a “distinctly medieval phenomenon.” The shift from honoring parents to honoring their values as well, Blidstein writes, “noble as this may sound, is actually a sign of weakness and insecurity. It is unnecessary in an age of classic faith, and insufficient when that faith declines” (p. 24). It seems to me that this evaluation springs more from the soil of the 1970s than from the book of Exodus.


75 Transgenerational aspects are present in the two intervening commands as well. Exodus 20:7 warns that “Yahweh will not leave unpunished (נקה) the one who takes up his name in vain.” In the climactic divine self-description in Exod 34:7, Yahweh’s insistence that he “will by no means leave [iniquity] unpunished” (ונקה ל juxtaposed) is further specified by “visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons and sons of sons, even against the third and fourth generations.” A clearer generational emphasis is present in the Sabbath command, where the entire household, including “your son and your daughter,” are to be included in Yahweh’s Sabbath (20:10)—an institution which Yahweh later describes as “a sign between me and you throughout your generations” (31:13).

76 This mutual interpretation of Exod 20:5–6 and Exod 20:12 aligns with the paraphrase of the Exod 20:12 promise in Deut 4:40: “And so you shall keep his statutes and his commandments which I am commanding you
connection, the Exodus laws prescribe capital punishment for the breach of honor toward parents—for striking or cursing them (Exod 21:15, 17).

7.1.2.g. Twelve Tribes

The narrative construction of the sons of Israel as a transgenerational community before Yahweh is further reflected in the repeated representation of the people by “twelves,” reflecting their twelve ancestral tribes. Yahweh establishes his blood covenant at Sinai not merely with the singular people Israel, nor merely with the thousands of assembled individuals, but with twelve tribes, the twelve family lines descended from Jacob’s twelve sons, represented by the twelve standing stones (מצבה) erected by Moses alongside the altar at the foot of the mountain (Exod 24:4). In the tabernacle instructions, as the high priest draws near to Yahweh, representing the people, he is to do so wearing a breastpiece set with twelves precious stones, engraved with the names of the twelve tribes (Exod 28:21). Thus, the high priest will bear these twelve names before Yahweh, “for the purpose of remembrance (זכרון) before Yahweh continually” (Exod 29:30). On the shoulders of his ephod are two more stones, each engraved with six tribal names (Exod 28:9–12). Few individual Israelites are named in the Exodus narrative, but for those who are, their characterization often includes their tribal lineage. Moses’ parents are introduced with no other name or description: “A man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi” (2:1). Aaron is first mentioned as “Aaron, your brother, the Levite” (4:14). Tribal identity is repeatedly emphasized with the two named tabernacle craftsmen: “Bezalel son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah” (Exod 31:2; 35:30; 38:22) and “Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the
tribe of Dan” (Exod 31:6; 35:34; 38:23). The twelvefold tribal identity of Israel before Yahweh recalls the past divine promise given to the patriarchs concerning their offspring, it is embodied in the present narrative in the blood covenant rite, and it looks forward to their future encampment by tribes around the tabernacle (Num 2) and ultimately their hereditary allotments in the promised land (Josh 13–19).

7.1.2.h. Writing as Reminder and Testimony

The engraving of the ephod and breastpiece stones with the tribal names “for remembrance” is one instance among others of the permanence of writing, for enduring instruction and remembrance throughout generations. Just as Yahweh commanded Moses to record his threat against Amalek “as a memorial on a scroll,” Moses also writes down all of the words of Yahweh spoken at Sinai. In ch. 24, Moses reads aloud from this “scroll of the covenant” and, having cast blood upon altar and people, declares that God has made his covenant with the people “in accordance with all these words” (Exod 24:7–8). The two tablets of stone—received, broken, and received again—contain the Ten Words which God had spoken in the hearing of the people at the mountain and which he has also “written for their instruction” (Exod 24:12). The tablets, like the covenant scroll, bear the “words of the covenant” (34:28), and thus the two tablets fulfill the same purpose as the written scroll, to preserve the covenant words of Yahweh for transgenerational instruction in Israel. They are “the two tablets of testimony” (Exod 31:18; 32:15)—and often simply “the testimony” (Exod 25:16, 21; 40:20)—which are permanently deposited in the ark, giving it the name “the ark of the testimony” (Exod 25:22; 40:21; etc.). Aaron places the jar of manna alongside this “testimony” (Exod 16:33–34) because

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77 After describing the place of three tribes each to the east, south, west, and north of the tabernacle, the text summarizes: “Thus the sons of Israel did according to all that Yahweh commanded, thus they camped according to their tribal divisions, and thus they traveled, each according to his clan, according to his father’s household” (Num 2:34).
manna and tablets play a similar role: “to be preserved throughout your generations” so that future generations may “see” (Exod 16:32).

7.1.2.i. The Golden Calf Episode

The apostasy of the people with the golden calf is presented as the tragic reversal of Yahweh’s enduring, transgenerational purpose for the sons of Israel—its mirror image. Yahweh’s dramatic acts of deliverance and theophany should have gained the people’s enduring faith in Moses (לעם, Exod 19:9; 14:31) and their enduring acknowledgement of Yahweh’s enduring reign as their sole God and King (לעם, 15:18; 20:2–3). Now, however, the people turn away from both of these “quickly” (מכה, 32:8), forsaking confidence in Moses and demanding the construction of new “gods” (32:1). The transgenerational blessings symbolized by the Egyptian plunder placed “upon your sons and upon your daughters” (3:22) are now dramatically forfeited, as the gold is stripped from their ears and fashioned into a golden calf (32:2–4). While Yahweh is instructing Moses on the mountain to take up an offering of gold and silver and to establish for the sons of Israel an enduring tabernacle structure and service, the sons of Israel parody this with their own offering, construction, and service which have no enduring future. The calf is soon burned and pulverized and the people forced to drink it (32:20), and the people are commanded to strip off from themselves all remaining ornaments of gold and silver (33:4–6) while Yahweh sorts out what to do with them.

The golden calf episode thus represents the climax of narrative tension within Exodus, the greatest peril for the transgenerational goals of Yahweh with Israel. Yahweh’s initial response to this rebellion is to disown and consume “this people” and to begin anew by making Moses into a “great nation” (Exod 32:9–10). Moses intercedes, pleading for Yahweh’s merciful continuance of His long-range intentions for this people—for “your people, whom you brought out of Egypt,” Moses reminds him (32:11). Moses protests that Yahweh has bound his name and reputation to
this people, by publicly claiming them and delivering them out of Egypt (32:11–12) and, long before that, by making promises to their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (32:13). For “Yahweh’s character is now inextricably intertwined with Israel’s destiny,” a destiny which includes not only inheriting the land but also their vocation as the distinct, holy people among whom Yahweh dwells throughout their generations (33:1–3, 15–16). As Kaufmann puts it, “Israel’s fate and the fate of YHWH’s name in the world are inseparable.” Thus, Yahweh listens to Moses’ intercession and changes his mind concerning the disaster which he had threatened (32:14). Nevertheless, this people’s rebellion is met with the slaughter of 3000 by the sword of the Levites (32:28) and a plague sent by Yahweh (32:35). In response to the Levites’ zeal, even “at the cost of his son and his brother,” they and future generations of Levites receive blessing and distinct consecration to Yahweh’s service (32:29; cf. Deut 33:8–10).

The theophany and self-proclamation of Yahweh to Moses in Exod 34:5–9 brings this climactic episode to its climatic resolution. Here, the profuse emphasis on divine forgiveness surpasses all preceding characterizations of Yahweh in Exodus. The declaration of lovingkindness and forgiveness to “thousands,” alongside the sober reminder of the possibility of divine visitation of iniquity “against sons and against sons of sons, even against the third and fourth generations” ties this fullest divine characterization directly to the perduring ways and intentions of Yahweh throughout the narrative. His enormous mercy, as well as unfailing justice, will be worked out across generations.

In response to Yahweh’s self-description Moses prays, “If I have found favor in your eyes,

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80 The dynamics involved with these punishments are discussed below under two other narrative themes: §7.5. Corporate Characterization, Action, and Guilt; and §7.7. The Hiddenness and Freedom of Yahweh.
O Lord, may the Lord go in our midst, for this is a stiff-necked people, and forgive our iniquity and our sin, and take us as your inheritance” (Exod 34:9). The final clause here is the single word וָנָכַלְנוּ, the Qal verb נָכַל with a first plural object suffix, woodenly: “and inherit us.”81 The object of inheritance (נֵחָלָה) in Exodus is most commonly the land. At the sea, the sons of Israel rejoiced in their future prospects with Yahweh: “You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance” (15:17). “Little by little,” the people are to “become fruitful and inherit the [whole] land” (23:30). But here in 34:9, Moses speaks of Yahweh “inheriting” the people, the sons of Israel. Lipiński lists more than two dozen OT passages which describe the people as Yahweh’s “inheritance” (נחלה) and explains:

The use of this figurative expression does not emphasize the transfer or inheritance of property, but rather the constant, enduring nature of its possession. The notion of permanent possession is in fact intimately associated with the concept ofnahalâ, which constitutes a family’s ancient property, an indisputable possession that could not be transferred from one clan to another.82

Moses thus asks more than that Yahweh would consent to accompany Israel in its departure from Sinai, but also that, in his abundant mercy, he will restore Israel’s enduring vocation before Yahweh—that Israel would remain Yahweh’s treasured possession (ッグל, 19:5) throughout its generations.83 This long-term recommitment to his people stands as “the positive content of divine forgiveness” revealed in Yahweh’s foregoing speech.84

7.1.2.j. Driving Out the Canaanites

After Yahweh resolves to maintain his distinct covenant purposes for Israel (Exod 34:10),

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81 The LXX rendering of this clause—καὶ ἐσόμεθα σοί, “and we shall be yours”—is beautiful in its simplicity and force, although it does leave unexpressed the verbal root’s nuance of enduring, familial possession.

82 É. Lipiński, “נחל נָהֲל; נָכַלְנוּ נָהֲלָה;” TDOT 9:331. Passages designating Israel as Yahweh’s inheritance include Deut 4:20; 9:26, 29; 1 Sam 10:1; 2 Sam 20:19; 21:3; 1 Kgs 8:51, 53; 2 Kgs 21:14; Isa 19:25; 47:6; 63:17; Jer 10:16; 12:8–9; 51:19; Joel 2:17; 4:2; Mic 7:14, 18; Pss 28:9; 33:12; 74:2; 78:62, 71; 94:5, 14; 106:5, 40.

83 Propp, Exodus 19–40, 612.

84 Thomas B. Dozeman, Exodus, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 733.
he repeats to Moses a summary of directives from Exod 12–13 and Exod 20 and 23, focused (after the golden calf incident) upon proper worship and the avoidance of idolatry (34:11–26). Several institutions previously associated with father-son religious instruction are reprised: feast of unleavened bread (34:18), redemption of firstborn (34:19–20), Sabbath (34:21), the requirement that all adult males (הוזר) appear before Yahweh three times per year (34:22–24), and Passover (34:25). Of particular interest in tracing the narrative theme of fathers, sons, and generations is the exhortation in 34:11–16 to completely drive out peoples inhabiting Canaan and its preceding parallel in 23:23–33. The concern is for the long-term faithfulness and blessedness of God’s people in the land promised to the patriarchs throughout their generations.

In Exod 23, Yahweh addresses the religious danger of entering the land of the Amorites, Hittites, et al. Israel must not “bow down to their gods, or be enticed to serve (Hophal of עבודה) them [that is, to worship them, to join in their rituals], or practice according to their practices” (23:24). Rather, the sons of Israel shall serve Yahweh their God and experience his blessings: “There will not be a woman who miscarries or is barren in your land; I will fill up the number of your days” (23:26). The hope of progeny is explicit in the first clause, but is implied in the second clause as well. Just as the motive clause attached to the parent commandment suggests both individual long life and also national, transgenerational “length of days” in the land (20:12), so here “this promise may be read on two levels. On the individual level, the biblical ideal is to die at an old age surrounded by numerous descendants…. On the national level, the ideal is eternal residence in the land.”

85 Dozeman, Exodus, 745, provides a helpful chart summarizing the association of Exod 34:11–26 with preceding Exodus passages.

86 Propp, Exodus 19–40, 289. Both individual and national interpretations of “fullness of days” in Exod 23:26b can be derived from the immediate context. Fischer and Markl, Das Buch Exodus, 266, accent the blessing of plentiful food and good health in Exod 23:25, “sodass langes Leben möglich ist.” The promise of freedom from miscarriage and barrenness in 23:26a contributes to the assurance of an abundant progeny and national continuance in the land. It may also, however, contribute to an individual ideal of attaining old age surrounded by grandchildren
After this, Yahweh declares that he will not drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites “in one year” (בשׁנה אחת, 23:29) but rather “little by little (מעטמעט) until you have been fruitful and you can inherit the land” (23:30). This passage does not specify how much longer than “one year” this gradual possession of the land will take, but the coordination of this possession with Israel being “fruitful” implies that it may take some generations. The language here in Exod 23:29–30 subtly evokes the transgenerational refrain of Genesis—“be fruitful (פרה) and multiply (רבה) and fill the earth (מלא את־הארץ).”

I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land (ארץ) should become desolate and the beasts of the field should multiply (רבה) against you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you become fruitful (פרה) and inherit the land (נחל את־הארץ).

This closing section of the Book of the Covenant concludes with a warning against making a covenant with the inhabitants or their gods, lest, remaining in the land, these peoples cause Israel to sin and ensnare them in false worship (23:32–33).

In Exod 34:11–16, Yahweh again expresses his concern to preserve exclusive devotion among the generations of Israel. He repeats his pledge to drive out the Amorites, the Canaanites, et al., and instructs Israel not to make any covenant with them, allowing them to remain in the land, lest they become a snare. The final three verses then present an imaginative future sequence which unpacks what is meant by a “snare”:

You shall not bow down to (לא תשׁתחו ל) another god (אל אחר), for Yahweh, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God (אל קנא) lest you should make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land (אראים), and they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invite you, and you should eat of his sacrifice, and take from his daughters for your sons (בניך), and his daughters whore after their gods and cause your sons (בנו) to whore after their gods. (Exod 34:14–16)

and great-grandchildren (e.g., Job 42:16–17).

The following verse, Exod 23:31, establishes the boundaries of the land to be inherited, and draws a map which is never realized as Israelite territory until the time of David and Solomon, thus indicating that the “little by little” description here indicates, or at least allows for, a very long view. See Peter Enns, Exodus, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 479–80.
The verbal and thematic parallels with the first commandment are significant:

You shall have no other gods (אלהים אחרים) in my presence. You shall not make for yourself an idol or a likeness of anything in the heavens above or on the earth (ארץ) beneath or in the waters under the earth (ארץ). You shall not bow down to (לא תשתהו) them or be enticed to serve them, for I am Yahweh, a jealous God (אל קנא), visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons (בנים), even against the third and fourth generations, with respect to those who hate me. (Exod 20:3–5)

In particular, the language in 20:5 of being “enticed to serve” (Hophal of עבד) other gods finds specific illustration in the dynamics of Exod 34:15–16, a picture of gradual ensnarement: first truce, then neighborly religious compromise, then intermarriage, and finally shared idolatry. This is a transgenerational process which begins with the fathers and culminates in the sons.

7.1.3. Implications of the Generations Theme for Understanding the Visiting Phrase

While it is true that punishment of fathers’ iniquity against sons and descendants is jarring to modern sensibilities of individualized justice, the Exodus narrative is saturated with the transgenerational purposes, powers, and performances of Yahweh, and the identity and standing of human beings before Yahweh frequently takes into account their hereditary position as “sons” or “offspring” of certain “fathers” through a line of “generations.” This dynamic emerges not merely from an arcane or ancient psyche nor from an arbitrary decree, but rather from the biological, organic nature of created humanity; from the express divine purposes of blessing, holiness, dominion, and community; and from the unique role of Israel as a transgenerational people belonging to Yahweh.

This exploration of fathers, sons, and generations in Exodus and its backstory, Genesis, has

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88 The Hophal of תפס here in Exod 20:5, for whatever reason, is rendered as if it were a Qal, with a simple, active meaning (“serve them” or “worship them”) in every major ET, and the LXX renders it similarly with λατρεύω. John I. Durham, Exodus, WBC 3 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 276–77, is one of the few commentators to note and explain this as a Hophal form, rendering it “or be enticed to serve them.” The same is true in Exod 23:24, except that even Durham ignores the Hophal form of תפס there. Benno Jacob, The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus, trans. Walter Jacob (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1992), 552, also notes the Hophal form of תפס in Exod 20:5: “you shall not permit yourself to be brought into their service.” Jacob suggests two possible sources of enticement: “for reasons of friendship or evil impulse.”
been pursued at some length in an effort to transcend two tendencies in the scholarly discussion of Exod 20:5 and 34:7. First, the formula containing the visiting phrase has often been treated as a late insertion into its Exodus contexts, and thus interpreted in light of various suggested extratextual provenances. As an alternative, I propose that the extensive development of the generations theme across Genesis and Exodus provides a richer, more definite, and more naturally primary context in which to comprehend the meaning and function of the visiting phrase. It is simply astonishing that this contextual theme has been so broadly ignored in the secondary literature.  

Second, the transgenerational punishment described by the visiting phrase has commonly been explained through reference to a “primitive” or ancient Near Eastern sense of corporate identity or corporate personality. The popular description of Walton and Matthews is illustrative:

[Exodus] 20:6. Corporate solidarity. In the ancient Near East a person found his or her identity within a group such as the clan or family. Integration and interdependence were important values, and the group was bound together as a unit. As a result, individual behavior would not be viewed in isolation from the group. When there was sin in a family, all members shared the responsibility. This concept is known as corporate identity.

This explanation, as far as it goes, is not objectionable. However, the corporate, familial identity in the Genesis and Exodus narratives is not presented merely as a culturally experienced, culturally constructed mindset, but most significantly as an ontological and theological reality,

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89 For a recent, rare, and welcome exception, see Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., “Rizpah’s Torment: When God Punishes the Children for the Sin of the Father,” BSac 175 (2018): 50–66.


91 I certainly do not intend here to discount the contribution of comparative studies of ANE cultures to the task of biblical interpretation. See, for example, John H. Walton, “Interpreting the Bible as an Ancient Near Eastern Document,” in Israel: Ancient Kingdom or Late Invention? ed. Daniel I. Block (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2008), 298–327, for a demonstration of the value of ANE background in illuminating dimensions of a specific text, Exod 20:3–11.
the fruitful multiplication of human families under Yahweh’s blessing—or sometimes sanction—and within his historical purposes.\footnote{Andrew Perriman, “The Corporate Christ: Re-assessing the Jewish Background,” \textit{TynBul} 50 (1999): 251, 253, also accounts for the visiting phrase of Exod 20:5 under the biological/genealogical unity of the sons of Israel and their theocentric unity within God’s covenant purposes. In criticizing the hazy application of H. Wheeler Robinson’s theory of “corporate personality” to Paul’s “in Christ” rhetoric in the NT, Perriman stresses genealogical descent and theocentric considerations as superior explanations for Exod 20:5. “Is not this sense of unity adequately explained by reference to such more tangible factors as common biological descent, blood-ties, shared historical and redemptive experience, and the natural socio-political cohesion of nomadic or semi-nomadic culture?... On what basis would we want to attribute this to the idea of corporate personality rather than to a sense of national identity reinforced by descent and covenant?... The expression about ‘visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children...’, often cited as evidence for corporate personality, derives its significance specifically from its usage in the decalogue and occurs only in contexts in which the people, either through idolatry or disobedience, break faith with the God of the covenant. The reason is quite explicitly located in the character of God (‘I the Lord your God am a jealous God’) rather than in the nature of the Israelite family.”}

That Yahweh deals with persons and groups in view of their line of ancestry is a notion at the heart of every major dimension of the Exodus story. With astonishing, unstoppable fruitfulness and multiplication, the sons of Israel grow from a household to a great people, in line with Yahweh’s intention from the beginning of creation. It is because the people are the sons of Israel that Yahweh claims them as his firstborn son, and he acts to fulfill the promises made to their fathers when he visits them and redeems them. The making known of Yahweh’s name in Exodus bonds his reputation as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to his present demonstrations of faithfulness and power, with the express purpose that his mighty acts be recounted to future sons of Israel and that he be known throughout their generations. Social and cultic laws are promulgated by Yahweh as perpetual statues for all of Israel’s generations. At the end of the book, he comes to dwell in their midst “in all their journeys”—and through all their generations. Thus, the Exodus story stands at the crux of the fathers-to-sons history of Yahweh and his Israel.

Yahweh’s declaration to the people that he is “a jealous God, visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons, even against the third and fourth generation” should therefore be understood against this broader fathers-sons theme as it is developed across the Exodus narrative.
What are some implications of this contextual consideration?

First, the transgenerational visiting phrase sounds forth Yahweh’s enduring potency as the king who reigns throughout history—his vigilance and zeal, and his authority and capacity to judge, continues from generation to generation, forever and ever (cf. Exod 15:18).

Second, the visiting phrase evokes Yahweh’s role as the Creator, who created, blessed, commanded, and continually enables human fruitfulness and multiplication, who brings each generation of “sons” forth through “fathers.”

Third, the visiting phrase cautions that divine justice and divine dealings with humanity should not be contemplated simply in static, dogmatic, or abstract terms, but as concrete decrees and dispositions which unfold within and across the history of Israel and the nations.

Fourth, the visiting phrase suggests that God may visit-in-punishment against subsequent generations after a time of patient delay—a reading strengthened by the phrase “slow to anger” in 34:6. Yahweh’s enduring, long-view prerogatives allow him to be patient in bringing about his purposes in history—sometimes allowing a time of groaning before delivering or a time of accumulating iniquity before punishing, even across generations, as the Exodus story displays.

Fifth, the visiting phrase echoes the dynamics of Yahweh’s transgenerationally delayed judgment against Egypt, against the Amalekites, and even against inhabitants of Canaan (as predicted in Gen 15:16).

Sixth, the visiting phrase, by warning Israel of transgenerational sanctions, invokes Yahweh’s purposes of generations-long blessing and vocation for Israel which would be squandered if fathers and sons are enticed down the path of idolatry. Here, the close relationship of Exod 20:5–6 and 20:12b (as well as Exod 34:14–16) is significant.

Seventh, the visiting phrase assumes and reinforces the charge to fathers to pass on the knowledge and exclusive worship of Yahweh to sons, an emphasis of the surrounding narrative.
7.2. Divine Absence/Presence, Divine Agency, and Divine Visitation

The Exodus story depicts God’s agency and presence in the world as undergoing a marked transition—from relative inaction and absence (or distance) in the opening chapters to a decisive initiation of divine arrival and powerful activity in chs. 3 and following. That is to say, Yahweh’s agency and presence in the book of Exodus are not uniform and unchanging. This has direct implications for understanding his “visiting-in-punishment against” (פקד על) in Exod 20:5 and 34:7.

7.2.1. Establishing the Theme

As Israel falls under brutal oppression, yet continues to be fruitful and multiply—as infant Moses’ life is preserved, yet grown Moses is forced to flee and live in exile—God is not inactive or absent.93 At the same time, Exodus portrays such a dramatic shift in the mode of divine action, such a clear initiation of a season of divine action, commencing with the burning bush theophany in Exod 3, that the less-obtrusive, behind-the-scenes, providential mode of Yahweh’s activity in chs. 1–2 can be fairly described as relatively inactive.94 Similarly, Exodus portrays such a dramatic “coming” of Yahweh in self-revelation (Exod 3), judgment against Egypt (Exod 7–12, and esp. 11:4), victory over Egypt at the sea (Exod 14:24–25),95 expelling the inhabitants from...
the land of Canaan (Exod 23:20–33), and dwelling in the midst of his people Israel (Exod 19–40, and esp. 40:34–38), that Yahweh can be fairly described as relatively absent (or relatively distant) in chs. 1–2.96

An opposite reading is proposed by Terence Fretheim in his essay “Issues of Agency in Exodus.” Fretheim suggests that Exod 1–2 does not stand in counterpoint to the mode of divine action in the remainder of the book, but rather supplies the hermeneutical lens through which to rightly understand the nature of divine action throughout the narrative:

I would claim that this opening of Exodus sets this divine way of working in place for the balance of the book. That is, these chapters constitute a theological grid through which the God of the balance of the book is to be read, even when the activity of God seems to dominate the narrative.97

Fretheim maintains that Yahweh works in history and in creation “always through means/agents, ranging from human words and deeds (both within and without Israel) to nonhuman activities...
such as natural events)." With this assumption in place, Fretheim accent the equivalencies between God’s mediated work in Exod 1–2 (through the agency of natural conception and childbirth, the midwives, Pharaoh’s daughter, etc.) and his work in the remainder of the narrative (through Moses, Pharaoh, nature and diseases, and even the natural properties of manna and the naturally occurring water among rocks, etc.).

Such a reading must ignore or downplay many narrative cues, however, which cast Yahweh’s actions beginning in Exod 3 as a distinct, not typical, period of divine agency. The pregnant ending of ch. 2, where the reader is informed that God is hearing, seeing, and knowing the plight of Israel, provokes in the reader a sense of expectancy—not a calm assurance that God will continue to operate as he has in chs. 1–2, but an expectancy that, remembering his promises to the fathers, he is about to do something. “The four solemn clauses with which the passage ends toll the god tidings: the time of God’s action has at last arrived.” Yahweh himself confirms this in ch. 3 by appearing to Moses and speaking to him regarding his plan to deliver Israel: “I have surely seen the affliction of my people…. and I have come down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptians.” In chs. 1–2, the Egyptians exclaim neither “this is the finger

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98 Fretheim, “Issues of Agency,” 591. There is no need to argue against this particular point for the purposes of this study, but while Fretheim is helpful here in avoiding an artificial disjunction between “God’s acts” and the acts of created agents, there are a number of Exodus scenes in which God does act directly, with no apparent “natural” agent: the encounter with Moses in the night in Exod 4:24–26; the speaking of the Decalogue to the assembled people in Exod 20:1–17; the passing by and proclaiming of the divine name in Exod 34:5–7; and, in spite of the case Fretheim makes to the contrary, the striking down of the firstborn of Egypt, especially in light of Exod 11:1, 4–6. Also, against Fretheim’s claim that the manna is “as natural as the quail” and that the narrative indicates “no sign of amazement on the part of the people” regarding its two-day Sabbath preservation (p. 604), it seems to me that this special preservation (along with other elements in the narrative) indicates the direct, “unnatural” or “supernatural” agency of Yahweh. In fact, the people do show surprise when the manna first appears (Exod 16:15). Their question “What is it?” accounts for the very name manna and evinces surprise. Moses replies simply, “It is the bread which Yahweh has given you to eat.” Its “unnaturalness” is indicated outside of Exodus as well: “And he humbled you and caused you to hunger and fed you with manna, which you had not known and which your fathers had not known” (Deut 8:3). It was “the bread of angels” (Ps 78:25). It is hard to read either the daily appearance or the Sabbath two-day preservation from spoiling simply under Fretheim’s rubric of “nature’s God-given potentialities” (p. 604).


100 Ackerman, “Literary Context,” 114–15: “The key word in this series is yarad ‘come down,’ which, as in
of God” (Exod 8:15 [Eng 8:19]) nor “Yahweh is fighting for them against Egypt” (Exod 14:25). Thus, the “behind-the-scenes” activity of God in Exod 1–2 “contrasts sharply with the description of divine intervention beginning in Exod 3.” After ch. 3, Yahweh’s words and actions are defining self-revelations and demonstrations. His actions and his presence are visible (Exod 4:30; 7:20; 9:8; 16:10; 17:6; 19:4, 11; 24:10, 17; 33:10; 40:35–38). The people are to “see” and thus “know” and “tell” to coming generations.

The great events of the Exodus narrative, then, are not portrayed as typical outworkings of historical processes or of a divinely created or divinely superintended moral order. Rather, God’s judgments in Exodus come as divine interventions into history and into the nexus of the moral order—exceptional, revelatory, defining acts which upend the status quo, defy “natural” historical causation, and uphold justice in situations in which the self-working moral order of the universe has theretofore failed to do so. In the opening chapters, the “crisis develops without overt [divine] intervention,” and what will soon take place by the hand of Yahweh is in no sense inchoate in, or inevitable from, or somehow already set in motion by the offending actions of Pharaoh. Something is deeply awry in the moral order. But, as Brueggemann observes, “Drastic revision does indeed take place in power relations where no revision seemed possible.


102 This is asserted not only against Fretheim, but also against other standard articulations of the same “synthetic” viewpoint. See Klaus Koch, “Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?” ZTK 52 (1955): 1–42; repr. as “Is there a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?” in Thedicy in the Old Testament, ed. James L. Crenshaw (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 57–87; Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, trans. David M. G. Stalker, 2 vols. (New York: Harper, 1962–1965), 1:263–68; Jože Krašovec, Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness: The Thinking and Beliefs of Ancient Israel in the Light of Greek and Modern Views, VTSup 78 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 81. In the Exodus narrative, the blows suffered by Egypt are not merely the outgrowth of the offender’s deed (Fretheim) or “the last ripple of the act itself which attaches to its agent almost as something material” (von Rad). God’s role is not merely that of a mid-wife who “brings to its full unfolding what has been set in motion by human beings” (Koch), nor are the plagues “the destruction [the Egyptians] themselves have devised and set in motion” (Krašovec).

103 Patrick, Rendering of God, 83. Of the remainder of the book of Exodus, Patrick judges, “Few scriptural narratives are so dominated and structured by divine intervention.”
They change because in the end, the God of the Hebrews will not stay unengaged where the Hebrews are oppressed."  

In this period of pronounced divine presence and action, Fretheim’s distinction between mediated or unmediated divine acts (and his claim that all divine acts utilize means) is somewhat irrelevant. For example, whether Yahweh strikes down the firstborn sons of Egypt through naked immediate divine agency or whether he employs a virulent pathogen, noxious chemical, or angelic hand, one thing is clear: a unique moment of divine presence and judgment now irrupts within history, within the land, and upends everything. The Exodus text stresses that this is the act of Yahweh himself as he goes forth through the land of Egypt at midnight (11:4–5).

David Seely has traced the extensive use of the “hand of God” image in Exodus (27x) beginning in ch. 3 using the various terms hand (יד), right hand (ימין), arm (זרוע), finger (אצבע), palm (כף), and he understands this as depicting a uniquely direct mode of divine agency. Seely observes that references to the hand of God “do not play any significant role in the narratives either before or after the books of Exodus through Deuteronomy.” The function of this image in Exodus, however, is central, consistent, and significant:

All of the instances of the intervention of the hand of God in the Exodus narratives are direct manifestations of divine power and are in no way connected with the efforts of mortals. In this sense they stand apart from many other examples of divine intervention in the Bible in which God strengthens or aids an individual or a people in their efforts. Thus the image of the hand of God represents a distinctive theology of

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105 Feldman, ‘Remember Amalek!’”, 129n197, discussing Yahweh’s role in the death of the firstborn, references rabbinic tradition: “The rabbis (Mekilta de-Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai 52) present a scenario in which ninety million angels, some of hail and some of flames, appear ready to carry out the annihilation, but God restrains them, since He insists on carrying out this decree Himself.”


God’s power to intervene miraculously in the affairs of humans apart from earthly powers.\(^{108}\)

In the Exodus narrative, this direct *activity* of Yahweh is closely tied to his *presence*, for the nearness of Yahweh brings decisive acts of destruction or decisive acts of rescue, and thus decisive revelation of his ways. Yahweh’s presence—His coming down (יָרָד, 3:8; 19:11, 18, 20; 34:5), going forth (יאָה, 11:4), going with (רָאָה, 13:21; 14:19; 23:23; 33:14–16; 34:9), and being with (יָהֹד, 3:12; 4:12)—results in destruction and death for the Egyptians and other enemies, but deliverance for and dwelling with the Israelites.

For a human being to come too near to Yahweh, or for Yahweh to go forth among them, is a dreadful and sometimes deadly encounter.\(^{109}\) Examples of this include Moses at the bush (Exod 3:5–6); Yahweh’s encounter with Moses in the night (4:24–26);\(^{110}\) Yahweh’s being “in the midst of the land” during the plagues (8:18 [Eng 8:22]) and especially his “going out in the midst of Egypt” in the tenth plague (11:4–6); the mandated barricades around Sinai when Israel arrives (19:12, 21–22); Yahweh’s “terror-arousing presence” which will drive out the Canaanites (23:27–30);\(^{111}\) the prescribed consecration, clothing, and manner for the priests to draw near before Yahweh, lest they die! (28:42–43; 30:20–21; etc.); and Yahweh’s threat following the golden calf that if he were to go about in the midst of that stiff-necked people for a moment, he would surely destroy them (33:3, 5).


\(^{109}\) On this theme, see Christoph Dohmen, *Exodus 19–40*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 329–33, who discusses the “Unmöglichkeit der Gottesnähe” in Exod 33:2–3 and devotes an excursus to “Gefährliche Nähe Gottes” which begins with the story of Nadab and Abihu in Lev 10:1–3.

\(^{110}\) Robert P. Carroll, “Strange Fire: Abstract of Presence Absent in the Text: Meditations on Exodus 3,” *JSOT* 61 (1994): 49, speaks of the “sinister presence” of Yahweh: “In 4.24–26 YHWH will meet with Moses in order to seek his death. The presence can be a death-dealing one (the story does, after all, form part of the prologue to the story of the slaughter of the Egyptians).”

\(^{111}\) Kürle, *Appeal of Exodus*, 97, notes the emphasis in Exod 23:20–33 both on Yahweh’s dreadful presence which drives out the Canaanite inhabitants of the land and on Yahweh’s blessing which bestows the land upon the sons of Israel. “Given these two aspects, the reader is led to evaluate the divine presence as both a threat and a blessing: a threat to ignite his own loyalty to Yhwh and a blessing (the land without the likely snare of the Canaanite religion) to provide a situation conducive for this desired loyalty.”
Yet divine absence is by no means therefore preferred. In the time of “relative absence” at
the beginning of the book, the people of Israel experience oppression, bitterness, and groaning.
Yahweh’s “coming down” brings deliverance. More than that, restored proximity between God
and man—by setting apart Israel from other nations and dwelling in their midst—is the stated
goal of Yahweh’s mighty acts in Exodus (19:5–6; 29:45–46). The narrative depictions of divine
nearness in Exod 24:9–11 and 40:34–38 are both awesome and sublime. The divine intimacy
with Moses (“face to face, as a man speaks to his friend,” Exod 33:11) is characterized as unique
but also as a longed-for ideal. Chastened Israel weeps at the news that Yahweh will not go up
with them in their midst (33:4), and Moses protests, “How, then, will it be known that I have
found favor in your sight—I and your people? Is it not by your going with us, so that we are
distinguished—I and your people—from all of the people on the face of the earth?” (33:16)

To have Yahweh as their God means nothing less than to be with Yahweh,112 and the
fundamental covenant promise “I will be your God” (6:7) is ultimately unrealized without
Yahweh’s presence (29:45–46). The covenant ordinances given in Exod 21:1–23:19 are
bookended by the theme of Yahweh’s presence: the altar instructions in 20:24–26 and the
“reflection on the consequences of his guiding presence” in 23:20–33.113 Thus the consummation
of the entire narrative comes with the descent of Yahweh’s glory-presence upon the tabernacle in
40:34–38. As Leder observes,

112 The divine name itself likely carries strong nuances of “presence” in Exodus. Cornelis den Hertog, “The
the verb יְהִי underlying the divine name expresses presence and not bare existence and suggests translating Exod
3:14 as “‘I am there as I am there,’ or, more markedly, ‘I am present as I am present.’” Raymond Abba, “The Divine
Name Yahweh,” JBL 80 (1961): 325, “It is this assurance of the presence of the Savior God with his covenant
people which is embodied in the name Yahweh.” Walther Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, trans. J. A.
Yahweh!’ which may be uttered as a threat as well as in consolation, in either case is a constant reminder of the real
presence of God, whether this be to afflict or bless.”

113 Kürle, Appeal of Exodus, 92.
Exodus 40 ... brings us back to the deficit with which the biblical narrative begins in Genesis: Adam and Eve expelled from God’s presence in the Garden of Eden for refusal of divine instruction. In Exodus, when the glory cloud fills the newly constructed tabernacle, God dwells in the midst of the descendants of Adam and Eve through Abraham and Sarah. Adam’s descendants are in God’s presence not because they found their way back but because God has brought them to himself (Ex. 19:4).114

In the Exodus narrative, Yahweh’s coming and acting unfold within time. At first, there is a time of foreign sojourn and servitude; a time of ignorance; a time of unopposed, unredressed sin; a time of suffering; a time of prayer and waiting. In Exodus, all this persists for many years. But ultimately, Yahweh does indeed visit his people. Then comes the time of nearness to God; the time of revelation and knowledge; the time of punishment and the end of oppression; the time of rescue; the time of fulfillment and singing. In Exodus, while Yahweh designs to take up his dwelling with Israel throughout their generations, there is also a clear sense that “this day” is a unique and decisive day of divine presence and action which Israel is to remember, proclaim, and look back to throughout their generations.

This description of divine action in the Exodus narrative bears a strong resemblance to the meaning of the Hebrew idiom פקד על, discussed extensively above in Chapter 5. There, I concluded, on the basis of lexical-semantic analysis, that the expression פקד על is not a cipher for the natural or self-emerging consequences of sinful acts playing out against the sinner or his descendants, nor is it a reference to Yahweh’s providential, hidden management of such an ongoing moral order. Rather, Yahweh’s act of פקד על refers to his divine, decisive bringing of devastation or death against someone, in punitive repayment of iniquity. This punishment usually overturns a situation of impunity following a period of apparent divine inaction, inattention, or absence. In light of this, I suggested the English translation of פקד על as “visit-in-punishment.”115

It is not surprising, then, in view of its narrative accent on a decisive season of divine

115 See §5.2.6 above.
presence and action, that the Exodus narrative gives prominence to the verb פקד (“to visit”),
invoking a distinctive formula established by Joseph’s dying words in the closing verses of
Genesis. In Gen 50, Joseph repeats a promise first given by Yahweh to Abraham and
subsequently passed on to Joseph himself by Jacob:

And (Yahweh) said to Abraham, “Surely know that your offspring will be sojourners
in land that is not their own. They will serve them and be oppressed for four hundred
years, but I will judge (דין) the very nation whom they serve, and afterward they will
come forth with great possessions. (Gen 15:13–14)

Jacob said to Joseph, “I am about to die, but God will be with (יְנָהַם עֲכֶם) you and will
bring you back to the land of your fathers.” (Gen 48:21)

As dying Joseph, in turn, conveys to his family this *divine promise of Yahweh’s decisive judging-
and-rescuing presence*, he twice uses the infinitive absolute plus imperfect of פקד (‘surely
visit’):

Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will surely visit (פָּקֹד פָּקַד) you
and bring you up from this land to the land he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to
Jacob.” And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely visit (פָּקֹד
יִפְקֹד) you, and you shall bring up my bones from this place.” (Gen 50:24–25)

When the long-promised moment comes, God instructs Moses to declare to the Israelite elders:

Yahweh, the God of your fathers, appeared to me—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and
Jacob—saying, “I now surely visit (פָּקַד פָּקַד) you and what has been done to you by
Egypt. And I promise: I will bring you up from the affliction of Egypt to the land of
the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the
Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey. (Exod 3:16–17)

Moses and Aaron assemble the elders of the people and convey Yahweh’s words, and the people
believe, bow down, and worship “when they hear that Yahweh has visited (.once) his people”

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116 I take פָּקַד פָּקַד in Exod 3:16 as a performative perfect (see Joüon §112): “I now surely visit” or “I hereby
surely visit.” Evidence for a performative reading of this perfect use of פקד is offered by the parallel syntax in 1 Sam
15:2: פֹאָדֶה אֲשֶׁר יִשָּׂאֹב לְאֶלֶּל. Here, Yahweh is not merely reporting that, long ago, he “noticed” what
Amalek did to Israel, but rather is announcing that his promise to wipe out the memory of Amalek from under
heaven (Exod 17:14) is now being enacted—Yahweh is now “visiting-in-punishment that which Amalek did to
Israel.” This is how the LXX renders 1 Sam 15:2, by supplying the adverb νῦν: νῦν ἐκδικήσω, “now I will punish.”
Most English versions here miss the intentional allusion in Exod 3:16 to Joseph’s promise in Gen 50:24–25 (a
promise repeated in Exod 13:19), translating the כָּרֵד בַּאֲדָם in 3:16 with: “I have observed (ESV) / am indeed concerned
about (NASB) / have given heed to (NRSV) you and what has been done to you in Egypt.”
(Exod 4:31). When Israel departs Egypt, Moses takes along the bones of Joseph, for, as the narrator reminds the reader, “Joseph had surely abjured the sons of Israel, saying, God will surely visit (פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד) you, and you shall bring up my bones with you from this place” (Exod 13:19). Thus, this great episode of Yahweh’s intervening judgment against Egypt and intervening rescue of his people is summarized in the narrative as Yahweh’s “visitation” (תַּפּוֹד). 117

Other than Exod 20:5 and 34:7, the other use of תפּוֹד (“to visit”) in Exodus comes after the golden calf apostasy in ch. 32. Having accepted Moses’ intercession, Yahweh consents to send the people on to the land of promise. Yet he pairs this consent with a warning: “But in the day of my visiting (פָּקֹד), I will visit-in-punishment against (יִשְׂרָאֵל) them their sin” (32:34). 118 Moberly observes:

The point is reinforced by a play on the meaning of pqd, first in a neutral, then in a hostile sense…. It gains effect from earlier uses of pqd in Exodus … where it is uniformly used of God visiting Israel in a favourable sense. Because of Israel’s sin, God’s action with Israel is changed from blessing to curse. The idea of Yahweh ‘visiting’ Israel introduces the theme of the divine presence which is central to ch. 33. The tacit assumption is that Israel’s sin has caused the withdrawal of the divine presence. But as God begins to draw close to Israel again, in response to Moses’ intercession, his presence, even if only partial, cannot but have serious consequences for sinful Israel. 119

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117 Ackerman, “Literary Context,” 81–82, details a very similar dynamic at work with the theme of Yahweh’s “descent” (ירד), which he also roots in the Genesis backstory and promissory expectation: “The climax of the Babel story was in God’s descending (yarad) in power to overthrow the tower and scatter its people. When will he descend in Egypt?—to destroy Pharaoh or help Moses and Israel? Although we soon discover that Pharaoh’s activity turns counterproductive, no mention is made of God’s descent or active intervention. This is all the more striking in the light of God’s promise to Jacob that he would descend (yarad) with him into Egypt (Gen. 46:4). God remains behind the scenes throughout these early Exodus episodes. But we, the readers, perceive his unseen activity in the frustration of all of Pharaoh’s plans. We are led to expect a more powerful descent, as in Babel, but it has not yet occurred…. We can patiently relish the buildup in the assurance that more is yet to follow. And we are not disappointed: at the burning bush YHWH announces that he has ‘descended’ and will use his power to set his people free (Exod. 3:8); again at Sinai YHWH descends in power to give his people the way by which they are to maintain their freedom (see Exod. 19:18–24).”

118 The Exodus narrative is vague regarding the actual “day” of punishment which is threatened here, perhaps intentionally vague, as I discuss below (see §7.7.1).

7.2.2. Implications of the Divine Agency/Presence Theme for the Visiting Phrase

This Exodus theme of Yahweh’s distinct presence and agency provides essential context for interpreting the visiting phrase in 20:5 and 34:7. First, it presses against the prevailing view that “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” refers to the natural passing of traits, behaviors, circumstances, and consequences from one generation to the next. Cole’s explanation of the phrase in Exod 20:5 is illustrative:

Since this is God’s world, and since we are all involved with one another, breaches of God’s law by one generation do indeed affect those of future generations to come. Slavery, exploitation, imperialism, pollution, immorality are all examples of this principle. What we call ‘natural results’ are just an expression of God’s law in operation, punishing breaches of His will.\(^\text{120}\)

However, Yahweh’s mighty acts of “visitation” in Exodus can hardly be classified as natural results. Instead, the narrative context suggests that the visiting phrase in 20:5 warns of a day of Yahweh’s decisive “coming” and “punishing,” a day of pronounced divine presence and agency, a day which will bring a time of impunity to its end.

Second, read alongside this narrative theme, the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 (and to a lesser extent in 34:7) functions as a cautionary allusion to the divine blows leveled against Egypt in the preceding chapters. The people have witnessed what Yahweh’s visitation can bring, when he “visits … that which has been done to you by Egypt” (Exod 3:16). They have “seen what I did to the Egyptians” (Exod 19:4). Now they should be careful to obey his voice and keep his commandments, lest such visiting-in-punishment should befall them—or their sons.

7.3. Punishment as Lex Talionis

A third theme with implications for understanding the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 is the portrayal of Yahweh’s acts of judgment, throughout the narrative, as precisely

appropriate to the human offense being punished. This theme can be summarized under the heading *lex talionis*, a principle classically expressed in Yahweh’s command: “But if there is injury, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand,” etc. (Exod 21:23–24).121 While there is longstanding debate regarding the practical implementation of this formula by ancient Israel,122 this language, at a minimum, stands as “a general statement of legal policy that formulates the abstract principle of equivalence and restitution in concrete terms.”123 This dynamic spans the OT, and can be described as “proportionate compensation,”124 “equivalent retribution,”125 “legal symmetry,”126 “measure for measure,”127 “tit for tat,”128 or “poetic justice.”129 In the Exodus narrative, Yahweh often appears as a God who himself acts in such ways toward humans, that is, in accord with this general sense of *lex talionis*.

121 Variations on this formula are also expressed in Lev 24:19–21 and Deut 19:18–21.


123 Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 126. Davis, *Lex Talionis*, 54, concludes, “In Exodus 22 and Deuteronomy 19 the primary focus of these passages is the first element of the formula ‘life for life’ to be applied literally, with the trailing formulas put in place as a principle of proportional justice.”

124 Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 146. Miller argues against the common view that *lex talionis* is “the essence of Old Testament law,” based on the limited texts in which it is explicitly expressed (Exod 21:23–25; Lev 24:19–20; and Deut 19:21) and the OT’s limitation of its literal application to cases of murder. In his discussion, however, he accepts that the “eye for an eye” formula, while appearing only sporadically in the Pentateuch, does suggest “a concern for proportionate compensation—that the punishment be appropriate to the crime—as a principle underlying the law of Israel.” For an extensive treatment of the close correspondence between sin and punishment in the Prophets, see Patrick D. Miller, *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets: A Stylistic and Theological Analysis*, SBLDS 27 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982).


127 For example, m. Sotah 1:7: “By the measure which a man measures out, it will be measured out to him.” See also Jesus’ words in Matt 7:2; Mark 4:24; Luke 6:38.


7.3.1. Establishing the Theme

Yahweh characterizes his dealings with Pharaoh in these terms already at the burning bush:

“And you shall say to Pharaoh, thus says Yahweh, “Israel is my son, my firstborn, and so I say to you, let my son go so that he may serve me. Yet you refuse to let him go: behold, I am going to kill your son, your firstborn” (4:22–23). The first plague, the Nile turned to blood, is commonly understood as a direct response to or indictment of Egypt’s drowning of male Hebrew babies in the Nile. The setting in which Moses announces this first plague is significant, and is chosen by Yahweh: “Stand on the bank of the Nile” to confront Pharaoh “as he comes out to the water” (7:15). The scene suggests a morbid association by which Pharaoh stands accused: he “bathes in the very water in which the boys were drowned (1:22).” In the narration of this first plague, Fretheim sees the repeated phrase “there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt” (Exod 7:19, 21) as portending both the death of the firstborn sons of Egypt as well as the drowning of the Egyptian host in the Sea of Reeds. In this way, Nile blood, firstborn dead, and drowned army stand as just, proportionate responses to the drowning of the Hebrew children by Pharaoh and “all his people” in Exod 1:22.

In his great acts of judgment against Pharaoh and Egypt, Yahweh is portrayed as “striking the striking one” through frequent use of the verb נכה (“strike, kill”). This theme is artfully introduced in the initial scene with Moses, now grown, whose actions foreshadow the actions of Yahweh:

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131 Fretheim, Exodus, 115–16. Enns, Exodus, 200, also speaks of the bloody Nile as “both a swift retribution for the previous attempt to kill the Israelite male children and a jarring preview of Egypt’s ultimate fate.”

132 The narrative emphasis on the death of the firstborn in Egypt as an equivalent retribution corresponding to the murder of Hebrew sons and the mournful “cries” of Israel in Exod 1–2 is discussed above under §7.1.2.a. Sailhamer, Pentateuch as Narrative, 263–64, observes: “A certain symmetry exists between Egypt’s treatment of Israel in the early chapters of Exodus and God’s treatment of Egypt in the present text [Exod 12:29ff]. As Egypt had killed all of the Israelite sons (Ex 1:22) and had oppressed God’s firstborn, Israel (4:22–23), so now the Egyptian firstborn were taken and they were repaid for the wrong they had done.”
And it happened in those days that Moses went out to his people and saw their burdens. He saw an Egyptian man striking (נכה) a Hebrew man, one of his brothers. And he turned this way and that, and he saw that there was no one. Then he struck (נכה) the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. (Exod 2:11–12)

At the burning bush, Yahweh announces that he, too, has “indeed seen the affliction of my people” (3:7). Through Moses, he declares to the people of Israel: “I now surely visit (פקד) you and what has been done to you by Egypt…. So I will stretch out my hand, and I will strike (נכה) Egypt with all my wonders” (3:16, 20). In unreasonable ruthlessness, the Egyptians strike (נכה) their Hebrew slaves (5:14, 16; cf. 1:11, 13–14). And so Moses, on Yahweh’s behalf, at Yahweh’s command, and with “the staff of God” in his hand, strikes (נכה) the Nile, turning it to blood (7:17, 20). The narrator concludes the scene of the first plague by making clear that this was “Yahweh’s striking (נכה) of the Nile” (7:25). The plague narrative continues to employ (נכה) (“strike”) in the plagues of gnats (8:12–13) and hail (9:25, 31–32), climaxing in Yahweh’s declaration:

And I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike (נכה) all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, of both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will perform acts of judgment. I am Yahweh! And the blood will be a sign for you upon the houses where you are, so that I will see the blood and pass over you so that a blow will not come against you and destroy you when I strike (נכה) the land of Egypt. (12:12–13)

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133 Yahweh’s visiting-in-punishment (ȍ יָדָּ) often manifests as “equivalent retribution” (lex talionis) in the OT. As examples, see Jer 11:19–23; 23:2–4; 51:47–49; Isa 26:21–27:1; and Job 31:1–14.

134 In the intervening verses, Exod 3:9–10, Yahweh expresses his response to Egyptian oppression in such a way that the phonetic value of the response corresponds to the phonetic value of the oppression. That is to say, lex talionis operates here on the level of rhetoric or diction rather than the level of action. “And now, behold, the cry of the sons of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression (לֹהָ צִים) with which the Egyptians are oppressing (שָׁעַר) them. And now, go that I may send you (ךָּלְכֵהְוֶּ אֶשְׁלָחֲ) to Pharaoh, and bring out (וְהוֹצֵא) my people.”

135 Dennis J. McCarthy, “Plagues and Sea of Reeds: Exodus 5–14,” JBL 85 (1966): 137n1, notes that the term “stroke” is “more accurate than the customary ‘Plague.’” The Hebrew roots נֵכָּ and עַנָּ are used in Exodus along with נֵכָּ to indicate the plagues or Yahweh’s action of bringing plagues against Egypt. In such contexts, all three phonetically similar roots convey a similar sense of “hit, strike a blow.”
The actual narration of the tenth plague begins, “At midnight, Yahweh struck (נכה) all the firstborn in the land of Egypt” (12:29). In this way, Yahweh rescues the enslaved and stricken by striking the enslavers.\(^{136}\)

William Ford offers further examples of this *lex talionis* dynamic characterizing Yahweh’s actions in Exodus around the three verbs בוש (to harden), חבים (to make heavy or unresponsive), and חזק (to strengthen)—the three verbs used for Yahweh’s “hardening” of Pharaoh’s heart.

These three words are used primarily for Pharaoh’s actions regarding Israel (grasping [ комфорт, 9:2], increasing work [ poids, 1:14; 6:9; בוש, 5:9], hardset against ‘sending’ [ בוש, 13:14]; and for Yahweh’s actions in relation to Pharaoh and Egypt (mighty hand [ את], heavy plagues [ בוש], hardening Pharaoh [ בוש, חבים, חזק], glory over Egypt [ בוש]).\(^{137}\)

While more subtle than the talionic nature of Yahweh’s “striking” (נכה), the word play involved here further casts Yahweh’s judgments against Pharaoh and Egypt as appropriate punishment in accordance with *lex talionis*.

The Exodus narrative also presents Yahweh’s “throwing” and “waging war” as talionic acts, especially in the scene at the sea. Pharaoh’s demand that his people “throw” (שלח, 1:22) the male babes into the Nile is matched by Yahweh’s act of “throwing” the Egyptian hosts, chariots, horses and riders into the sea, described using three synonym “throwing” verbs ( נשע, 14:27; רמה, 15:1, 21; ירה, 15:4). When Egypt comes as a military host to make war against Israel, Yahweh “fights” (לחם, 14:14, 25) for Israel against Egypt; he is a “man of war” (איש מלחמה, 15:3). While

\(^{136}\) It is intriguing, and likely also relevant, that the first chapter of Yahweh’s just ordinances in the Book of the Covenant is largely occupied with safeguarding the rights of slaves (Exod 21:2–11) and the rights of those who suffer various types of striking (21:12–36; נכה in vv. 12, 15, 18, 19, 20, 26). This is consistent and fitting, for Yahweh has shown concern for “struck slaves” by “striking the enslavers” in the preceding narrative.

\(^{137}\) William A. Ford, *God, Pharaoh and Moses: Explaining the Lord’s Actions in the Exodus Plague Narrative*, PBM (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 11–13. McCarthy, “Plagues and Sea of Reeds,” 141, identifies some of the same narrative connections with the three “hardening” verbs. Similarly, Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 68n4: “Exod 1:1–15:21 displays a basic thematic unity. The first chapter reports how Pharaoh oppressed the Hebrew population by imposing hard labour on them and by ordering the massacre of their male children. A divine riposte was therefore necessary. Pharaoh’s decision to massacre the Hebrew new-born is evidently the explanatory background to the slaying of the Egyptian firstborn (chap. 13). Pharaoh’s challenge also explains why the same root qšš is used for designating the ‘hard service’ (‘abodah qasah) imposed on the Hebrews by Pharaoh and the hardening of his heart (7:3; 13:15).”
the foe boasted that he would overtake Yahweh’s people and that “my hand shall destroy them” (15:9), quite the opposite happened: the people of Israel saw “the great hand of Yahweh” that day (14:31) and sang: “Your right hand, O Yahweh, shatters the enemy” (15:6).

The verb לָבָם (“fight, wage war”) expresses Yahweh’s equivalent retribution also in the case of the Amalekites in Exod 17. When Israel was exhausted by travel and thirst and concerned for their survival and that of their younger generation (17:3; cf. Deut 25:17–18), Amalek appears out of nowhere in the narrative and “wages war” (לחם, 17:8) against Israel. Yahweh enables Joshua and the people to prevail, but the scene closes with the declaration, “Yahweh will have war (מלחמה) against Amalek from generation to generation” (17:16).

In laws given at Sinai, Yahweh describes his practice of lex talionis as both warning and reassurance to the sons of Israel. In safeguarding the welfare of the vulnerable, he warns:

You (pl.) shall not oppress a widow or a fatherless child. If you do oppress one, in any way—indeed if he should cry out to me at all—I will surely hear his cry, my anger will burn, and I will slay you with the sword. Thus your wives will become widows and your sons will become fatherless. (Exod 22:21–23 [Eng 22:22–24])

When exhorting Israel not to imitate the worship and the ways of the inhabitants of Canaan, he assures them: “I will be an enemy (איב) to your enemies (איבי) and I will oppose (צר) those who oppose you (צרו).” (Exod 23:22).138

Finally, the golden calf apostasy reveals the heart of Israel’s character: they are “stiff-necked” (32:9; 33:3, 5; 34:9) and “in the grip of evil” (ברע, 32:22).139 In light of this latter valuation, it is appropriate that Yahweh would bring “harm, evil, disaster” (רעה) against them such as the destruction proclaimed in 32:10. Yet it is here in the Exodus narrative where

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138 Here Yahweh reformulates his promise to Abraham in Gen 12:3: “I will bless those who bless you, and the one who dishonors you I will curse.”

139 Houtman, Exodus, 3:609, 661, renders Aaron’s description of the people in 32:22 in this way, also noting that it may be a wordplay on רע (רעה) (“their shouting” [in idolatrous revelry]) in 32:17. The precise rendering of ברע (preposition ב plus רע (“evil”)) in 32:22 is challenging, even though the general sense seems clear. Woodenly, Aaron states, “You yourself know this people, that it is ‘in evil.’” Most modern translations read “set on evil” or “prone to evil.” The LXX has σὺ γὰρ οἶδας τὸ ὀρμήμα τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου, “You know the impetuosity of this people.”
Yahweh’s pattern of *lex talionis* breaks down. Moses intercedes with Yahweh, pleading that he would relent from the threatened “harm, evil, disaster” (רעה) toward his people (32:12). Yahweh does not respond verbally, but the narrator informs the reader: “So Yahweh relented from the ‘harm, evil, disaster’ (רעה) which he had threatened to do to his people” (32:14).  

7.3.2. Implications of the *Lex Talionis* Theme for Understanding the Visiting Phrase

This broad *lex talionis* construal of Yahweh’s justice stands as an additional contextual consideration in interpreting the Exodus phrase “visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons, even against members of the third and fourth generations.” Miller suggests that, in the OT as well as the ANE more generally, the *lex talionis* formula functioned as a way of limiting the extent of injury that takes place as a form of judicial punishment. It served thus to ensure that justice was done and not vengeance or a punishment greater than the crime itself. *Proportionality is required but also controlled* from being excessive and humiliating.

Yahweh exercises and endorses “a measure of restraint in retribution, ‘so the vengeance should not exceed the injury.’” In a context in which Yahweh’s punishments are thus portrayed—as consistently consistent with the crime—his self-description as “visiting … against sons” should not be interpreted as a sanction which is *disproportionate* to the sin. This weighs against

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141 Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 147 (italics mine).

142 David L. Jeffrey, “Lex talionis,” in *Stories from the Old Testament, Vol. 1*, ed. Lawrence Boadt, CBS (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1999), 42–43: “The intention of this law, as St. Augustine among many others has observed, is actually to signify a measure of restraint in retribution, ‘so the vengeance should not exceed the injury’ (De sermone Domini in Monte, 1.19.56).… He goes on to observe that the person ‘who pays back just as much as he has received already forgives something: for the party who injures does not deserve merely just so much punishment as the one who was injured by him has innocently suffered’ (1.19.57).”

143 The broad *lex talionis* portrayal of Yahweh’s proportionate, measured punishing should shape the reader’s interpretation of his other actions and descriptions in the narrative as well. This would exclude, for example, the position of Gunn, “Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart,” 89, who argues that the narrator portrays the plagues against Egypt as partially “undeserved” and “an excess of havoc” (my emphasis). But even Gunn acknowledges that Yahweh’s self-glorification in his treatment of Pharaoh has a certain symmetry: “The king is thereby reminded of his proper place in the scheme of things: as he has exalted himself over Israel, so Yahweh has exalted himself over
interpreting the visiting phrase as cruel, unjust, or excessive, as if Yahweh’s wrath is so great that calamity upon one or two generations cannot satisfy it or as if Yahweh’s wrath propels him to wild and indiscriminate act of harm.\textsuperscript{144} While the language of transgenerational “visiting against” stands as a warning regarding the long purview of Yahweh in his judging acts, the surrounding narrative theme of \textit{lex talionis} suggests that such transgenerational punishment will nevertheless be justly restrained and measured—“the third or fourth generations” in contrast to the “thousands” receiving his lovingkindness.

At the same time, this \textit{lex talionis} theme also implies that appropriate punishment for offense is required and warranted, confirming the assertion—linked with both occurrences of the visiting phrase in Exodus—that Yahweh “does not leave iniquity unpunished” (נשקת א, 20:7; 34:7). “Mere escape from Pharaoh will not suffice; he must be judged.”\textsuperscript{145} The operation of \textit{lex talionis} in the first part of the narrative is clear: with respect to those who hate him, Yahweh visits in punishment, perhaps transgenerationally, always appropriately. In the second part of the narrative, a tension or paradox is introduced on this point. For Yahweh accedes to Moses’ intercession after the golden calf, mercifully forgiving Israel \textit{rather than} bringing ישים upon those who are ישים according to \textit{lex talionis}. As Yahweh proclaims his ultimate character in 34:6–7, he significantly reverses the order of the previous parallel expressions from 20:5–6, now declaring his lovingkindness first, and with heaped-up elaboration. Yet even here he remains the God who...
punishes iniquity, even transgenerationally. However, in view of the enormous priority of his mercy and his narrative act of deciding not to bring calamity against his stiff-necked people, the interpretation of the visiting phrase in Exod 34:7 should take into account that Yahweh does not mechanically or in every discrete instance repay evil for evil, eye for eye, and so forth. He also has the prerogative to forgive.

7.4. Punishment as Withdrawal or Reversal of a Divine Gift

A fourth narrative theme with implications for the contextual interpretation of the visiting phrase in Exodus can be outlined very briefly: Yahweh’s punishment for disobedience is cast in terms of the withdrawal of divine gifts or privileges previously bestowed.146

7.4.1. Establishing the Theme

This dynamic is unmistakable in the opening chapters of Genesis, the backstory for the Exodus narrative. When Yahweh summons man, woman, and serpent for judgment in Gen 3, his pronouncements relate directly to the gifts and blessings given in Gen 1 and 2. Enmity between human and animal offspring diminishes human lordship and harmony. Strife between man and woman diminishes companionship. Pain in childbearing afflicts the blessed call to fruitfulness and multiplication. Thorns and thistles interfere with enjoying every green thing for food. And Yahweh, who had formed the man as a living being from the dust of the earth, now sentences him to die and return to dust.

Under the pattern of creation—uncreation—re-creation, Clines traces this dynamic through Gen 1–11. The flood, for example, relegates the world to its “formless and empty” state and

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146 This is a broad OT theme, not limited to Exodus. For example, Krašovec, Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness, 280, discussing the divine punishment decreed to David through Nathan in 2 Sam 12:11–12, observes, “The essence of God’s punishment lies in taking what he graciously gave as a gift, and herein lies the ground for his retributive punishment.”
drowns every living thing with the breath of life in its nostrils. Throughout these chapters, there is an increasing dissolution of the God-given bonds within the created order: “between man and soil, man and the animals, man and woman, man and God.” Divine judgment plays out in these chapters as “the story of the undoing of creation.”

In a similar vein, Creach characterizes the plagues against Egypt as “the reversal of creation.” At creation, God’s רווח (“Spirit, wind”) is blowing over the waters, and soon God begins to act in forming and vegetating the earth. But in the plagues, God’s רווח (“Spirit, wind”) blows locusts into Egypt which devour all vegetation. The plague of darkness “signifies return to chaos prior to God calling forth light in Genesis 1:2.” The death of the firstborn sons of Egypt is “the final result of creation reversing course” as God’s world of life is confronted by “an invasion of the abode of the dead.”

This theme of God’s judgment as the reversal or undoing of his blessings also plays out on the level of his election of and covenant with Abraham and his descendants. After the arch-rebellion of the sons of Israel in the golden calf incident, God initially decrees the reversal of gifts and privileges granted to Israel—“Yahweh threatens to return the world to its pre-Abrahamic state of disorder.” In place of their unique identity as “my [Yahweh’s] people” (Exod 3:7, 10; etc.), Yahweh not-so-subtly disowns them as “your [Moses’] people” and “this people” (32:7, 9). Instead of a distinct standing among the nations (19:5–6; 33:16), Yahweh will

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148 Clines, “Theme in Genesis 1–11,” 303.
149 Jerome Creach, *Violence in Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 82–86, develops this thesis in a section subtitled, “The Plagues as Reversal of Creation.” In this, he leans heavily on Terence Fretheim, “The Plagues as Ecological Signs of Historical Disaster,” *JBL* 110 (1991): 385–96. Creach’s presentation also acccents the theme of Yahweh’s just acts of lex talionis. Creach portrays Pharaoh as the “Anticreator,” who decrees death for sons born to the Hebrews, thus opposing Yahweh’s plan to restore blessing to the creation through the seed of Abraham. Thus, Yahweh judges the Anticreator by afflicting his land with the “undoing of creation”—that is, according to lex talionis.

150 Creach, *Violence in Scripture*, 84.
make them an object of reproach (32:12). Instead of giving them long life in the land (6:8; 20:12) and planting them on his own mountain (15:17), Yahweh will “slay them in the mountains and exterminate them from the face of the earth” (32:12). Instead of an enduring covenant between Yahweh and Israel, the tablets of the testimony are shattered at the foot of the mountain (32:19). Instead of a people miraculously sustained with water from the rock (17:6), the people are forced to drink the charred and pulverized golden calf mixed with water (32:20). Instead of Yahweh multiplying them like stars (32:13) and sparing them from diseases (15:26), three thousand are struck down by the sword, and Yahweh afflicts the people with a plague (32:35). Instead of the promise that Yahweh will dwell with Israel (3:12; 29:45–46), Yahweh declares that he will not and cannot go in their midst (33:3–5).

One artful expression of this reversal of divine privilege comes with the people, at Yahweh’s command, “stripping themselves” (נפל Hithpael, 33:6) of their “ornaments” (עמי, 33:4–6). The same verb stem occurred previously in the narrative in reference to Israel plundering or despoiling the Egyptians (נפל Piel, 3:22; 12:36). This invites the conclusion that “these adornments consisted, at least in part, of the jewelry of silver and gold that the Israelites received from the Egyptians.” As they stripped the Egyptians, so they now must strip themselves. Fretheim speaks of these ornaments as “signs of their redeemed status” which must now be set aside. The Exodus despoiling has been undone.

A similar wordplay may be at work in the double use of the root פراع in Exod 32:25, indicating the people’s return to “pharaonic” subjugation by their idolatry: “Then Moses saw the

152 The conclusion that the narrator is intentionally playing on the verb נצל (Piel and Hithpael) between Exod 3:22; 12:36; and 33:6 is strengthened by the prominence of נצל (Hiphil) in Exodus, indicating “deliverance.” Both in Exod 3:22 and 12:36, the “plundering” (נפל) of the Egyptians is preceded by a reference to Yahweh’s “deliverance” (נצל, 3:8; 12:27).

153 Cassuto, Commentary on Exodus, 428.

154 Propp, Exodus 19–40, 598.

155 Fretheim, Exodus, 294.
people—that they were unconstrained (נכתב), for Aaron had turned them loose (נכתב), to the ridicule of their enemies.” It is difficult to miss the resemblance of the unique form נכת (with archaic 3ms object suffix156) to the word “Pharaoh” (נכתב)—which has occurred over 100 times in the preceding narrative. While Propp dismisses the similarity as incidental,157 others see an intentional association. Geller writes, “Their chaotic looseness represents, in midrashic word play, a kind of spiritual resubjugation to par‘oh, Pharaoh.”158 Friedman, too, reads this as a pun: “Aaron has ‘Pharaohed’ the people; he has done something to them that Pharaohs had done: made them ignoble in the eyes of those who oppose them…. *[H]e has brought them back to the condition in which they were before the Sinai revelation: in disarray, without the law.”159 This wordplay, then, contributes to the larger theme of the reversal of a previous blessing or privilege.

7.4.2. Implications of the Reversal of Divine Gift Theme for the Visiting Phrase

The implication of this theme for understanding the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 is simple but significant. The transgenerational language of divine visitation of iniquity represents the reversal or “undoing” of Yahweh’s Abrahamic and Sinaitic promises to Israel. Instead of multiplying their offspring as heirs of divine blessing, coming generations will be met with the divine visitation of iniquity. If the “fathers” of Israel worship other gods, Yahweh may visit a coming generation with woe instead of weal. God’s long-term covenant blessings will be squandered. At the outset of this chapter, the narrative theme of “Fathers, Sons, and Generations” gave rise to the conclusion: “The visiting phrase, by warning Israel of transgenerational sanctions, invokes Yahweh’s purposes of generations-long blessing and

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156 On the archaic 3ms object suffix נכת, see GKC §58g; Joüon §61i.
vocation for Israel which would be squandered if fathers and sons are enticed down the path of idolatry.” The present theme of divine judgment as the withdrawal of Yahweh’s previous gifts or privileges strengthens this observation.

Chisholm places this dynamic—the withdrawal of a previous divine gift—at the center of his explanation of divine transgenerational punishment in the OT: “God is not bound to some supposed universal principle that limits punishment strictly to the individual sinner. On the contrary, since children are a blessing that the Lord bestows, he sometimes chooses to withdraw this blessing as he exacts retribution upon those who have forfeited divine favor.” Here, Chisholm focuses on Yahweh as the Creator who bestows the blessing of life across generations. The Exodus narrative, while also highlighting this role of Yahweh as Creator, places particular emphasis on his redeeming work and covenant promises for Israel’s generations in the land—and the danger of reversing and forfeiting these.

7.5. Corporate Characterization, Action, and Guilt

Another relevant feature of the Exodus narrative is the corporate nature of much of the characterization, action, and responsibility. The sons of Israel are predominantly characterized as a single corporate entity. This is largely true of other nations as well.

7.5.1. Establishing the Theme

Besides the central figure of Moses, along with Joshua, Hur, Miriam, and Aaron and his sons, individual figures from among “the people” are rarely named or given independent speech

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160 Chisholm, “Rizpah’s Torment,” 51.

161 Exodus accents Yahweh’s identity as the Creator God in various ways: the fruitful multiplication of the sons of Israel in ch. 1; his “making” (אִשָּׁה) households for Puah and Shiphrah (1:21); his claim to be “he who establishes the mouth for a man” (along with the other senses and presumably the whole person, 4:11); his mastery over nature during the plagues; the Israelites walking on “dry ground” (יָד, 14:29; cf. 14:21) in the midst of the sea; authority over diseases and healing (15:26); the provision of manna and water in the wilderness; etc. For a more general discussion of the theology of creation in Exodus, see Fretheim, Exodus, 12–14.
or action. The midwives Puah and Shiphrah in ch. 1 and the skilled craftsmen Bezalel and Oholiab in the tabernacle chapters have limited development and are exceptions which prove the rule. With remarkable consistency, the subject or object of actions—or the speaker or addressee in the dialogue—is presented corporately as “the sons of Israel” or “the people” or “all the people” or “the whole congregation of the sons of Israel.”

When the two struggling Hebrews (Exod 2) and elsewhere the elders of Israel (Exod 4, 12, 17, 19, 24) interact with Moses, they function not merely as individuals but also as representatives of the people as a whole. The struggling man’s retort to Moses (“Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you planning to slay me…?” Exod 2:14) foreshadows the repeated accusations of all Israel against Moses. In scenes with the elders “on stage,” the narration often subtly shifts to “the people” as the subject of action or speech (Exod 4:29–31; 19:7–8a).

More regularly, however, the people are simply portrayed as a single, monolithic character. “The sons of Israel” groan and cry out because of their servitude (2:23). God sees “the sons of Israel” (2:25). As a group, he names them “my people” (3:7), “my son, my firstborn” (4:22), and “my hosts” (7:4). During the plagues, they are treated distinctly as a group and spared the force of the disasters (8:19 [Eng 8:23]; cf. 9:6, 26; 10:22–23; 11:7). Moses is to “tell the whole congregation of Israel” about the Passover instructions (12:2), that “the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel” is to kill the lamb at twilight (12:6). “The people” receive these instructions by bowing down and worshipping (12:27; cf. 4:31). “All the sons of Israel” did just as Yahweh commanded (12:50; cf. 12:28).

162 The Israelite “foremen” (שׁטרים) in Exod 5 are also representative of, rather than distinct within or distinct from, the people as a whole. Note their similar challenge to Moses (and Aaron): “May Yahweh look upon you and judge you, for you have made us an odious stench to Pharaoh and his servants, so that you have put a sword in their hand to kill us” (Exod 5:21).
Always as a single actor, “the whole congregation of the sons of Israel” grumbles in the wilderness and accuses Moses of leading them to certain death (14:11–12; 16:2–3; 17:2–3; cf. 15:24). Moses fears that “this people … will stone me” (17:4). “The sons of Israel” quarrel (ריב) and test (נסה) Yahweh (17:5). Only in the manna episode is there differentiation: “some” (安置, 16:20) leave part of the manna overnight and “some of the people” (מן-העם, 16:27) go out to gather on the Sabbath. Yet even here, in both instances the disobedience is strongly presented as a characterization and culpability of the whole people (16:19–20, 27–30).

At Mount Sinai, the presentation of Israel is emphatically corporate. All the people see and hear Yahweh’s theophanic descent and speaking from the mountain (19:9, 11). All the people trembled and feared (19:16; 20:18). Before the covenant is made in blood, “Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of Yahweh and all the ordinances, and all the people answered with one voice (קול אחד) and said, ‘Everything Yahweh has spoken we will do’” (24:3; cf. 19:8; 24:7).

In particular, the blessings which Yahweh pronounces for his obedient people are strongly corporate. Most famously in Exod 19:5–6, but in two closely parallel passages as well, Yahweh pronounces weal upon obedient Israel, in each case as a single, corporate people:

If you (sg.) will diligently listen to the voice of Yahweh your (sg.) God, and do what is upright in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, then all the diseases which I put on the Egyptians—I will not put them on you (sg.), for I am Yahweh, your (sg.) healer. (Exod 15:26)

And now, if you (pl.) will diligently obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you (pl.) will be my treasured possession among [or, more than] all peoples, for the whole earth is mine. And you (pl.) will be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you shall speak to the sons of Israel. (Exod 19:5–6)

But if you (sg.) diligently obey [my angel’s] voice and you (sg.) do everything I say, then I will be an enemy to your (sg.) enemies, and I will oppose those who oppose you (sg.)…. None will miscarry or be barren in your (sg.) land, and I will make the number of your (sg.) days full…. And I will fix your (sg.) territory163 from the Red

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163 A similar statement is made in Exod 34:23–24: “Three times a year, all your males shall appear before the
Sea as far as the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness as far as the Euphrates River, for I will give the inhabitants of the land into your (pl.) hand, and you (sg.) shall drive them out from before you (sg.). (Exod 23:22, 26, 31)

The most significant episode of Israel’s group action, characterization, and responsibility, however, comes with the golden calf apostasy and its aftermath in Exod 32–34. There is no indication that this rebellion is initiated by one key individual, the elders, some, or even most of the people. Rather, the text emphasizes the unified actions of the people in the apostasy (32:1, 3–4, 6–8, 35). Thus provoked, Yahweh reaches a verdict regarding their corporate character and declares to Moses their corporate fate:

Your people (ךָעמ) whom you brought up from the land of Egypt have made a ruin of things.… I have seen this people and, behold, it (הוא) is a stiff-necked people. And now, leave me alone so that my anger my burn against them and so I may consume them, and I will make you into a great nation. (vv. 7, 9–10)

Moses intercedes, and Yahweh relents “from the harm (רעה) which he had declared he would do to his people” (v. 14). While Yahweh relents from destroying the people, sanctions nevertheless follow for the people as a whole. Moses burns and pulverizes the calf idol, mixes it with water, and forces the sons of Israel to drink it (32:19–20). Moses summons and, at Yahweh’s command, unleashes armed Levites, who make their way throughout the camp, striking down 3000 fellow Israelites—a costly blow to the whole people (32:27–29). Yahweh sends a plague upon the

Lord, Yahweh, the God of Israel. For I will drive out nations from before you and enlarge your territory; no one will covet your land when you go up to appear before Yahweh.” The reference to “all your males,” and especially the references to “your territory,” strongly indicate that the addressee is corporate Israel.

The Levites are commanded to kill “each one his brother, his friend, his neighbor” (Exod 32:27), and they are subsequently ordained for service to Yahweh and blessed “each at the price of his son and his brother” (בבון ובאחיו, 32:29). Here I read כ as beth pretii (GKC §119p), along with the ESV. The narrative suggests a dual purpose for the slaughter by the Levites: to rein in the rampant disorder (“the people had become unrestrained,” 32:25) and to punish the “great sin” of the entire people (32:21, 30). The two are not mutually exclusive. That the slaughter included the second dimension—punishment for Israel’s idolatry—is indicated not only by the bracketing of the Levite slaughter (vv. 25–29) with language regarding the “great sin” (vv. 21, 30), but also by the unlikelihood that God would ordain the slaughter of 3000 Israelites simply to counter unruliness. To some extent, the two purposes converge under the realization that the people’s unrestraint/unruliness here is of a particular bent: idolatrous rebellion against Moses and Yahweh. Therefore, I concur with the reading of Gregory of Nyssa, The Life of Moses, 95–96, who observes: “Because the Israelites in a body agreed to the evil and because the whole camp to a man participated in it, they were all without distinction scourged.… The scourging inflicted on the part chastens the whole;” and also with Moberly, Mountain of God, 55, who helpfully stresses: “The key to understanding this
people (עם) because of the calf which they made, which Aaron made” (32:35). As the narrative progresses, the abiding corporate character continues to be highlighted: they are a people “stiff of neck” (33:3, 5; 34:9) and “in the grip of evil” (ברע, 32:22).165

This great crisis climaxes in Yahweh’s theophanic proclamation of his name to Moses and in Moses’ strongly corporate plea: “Please, Lord, if I have found favor in your eyes, then, I pray, may the Lord go in our midst, for it is a stiff-necked people, so that you may forgive our iniquity and our sin and take us as your inheritance” (34:9). Yahweh replies affirmatively, with a promise which focuses on corporate Israel: “Behold, I am making a covenant; before all your people (sg.) I will perform wonders such as have not been created in all the earth or among any episode is to appreciate that its central concern is a life-or-death faithfulness to Yahweh … to show that death is the penalty for unfaithfulness to Yahweh and the covenant.” Some commentators speculate that the three thousand slain are ringleaders of the rebellion, “somehow more culpably involved in the idolatry” and most “directly responsible for Israel’s sin.” Scott J. Hafemann, Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3, WUNT 81 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 204–5, “In spite of the seeming general declaration of guilt in 32:7f., 11, 14, 21, verses 26–29 make clear that not all of the people were in fact guilty of this idolatry… The reference to the number slain in 32:28, the role of the Levites in selecting those to be killed, and the principle of divine judgment in 32:33 all support the supposition that the judgment already meted out has been against those who were somehow more culpably involved in the idolatry. Those directly responsible for Israel’s sin have been representatively judged. Though not without guilt, and certainly still ‘stiff necked’ (32:9) and ‘evil’ (32:22), the people now remaining can be considered under the umbrella of those who, like Moses, remained faithful.” Douglas K. Stuart, Exodus, NAC 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 681, speculates that Moses’ command to go back and forth through the camp means “carefully and systematically approaching everyone and finding out whether or not they intend to return to Yahweh, abandoning their idolatry. Those found to be committed to idolatry must be killed. Those sorry for being caught up in it but now actively repenting must be spared.” Such assessments read the interpreters’ theological assumptions into the text, ignore the overarching corporate portrayal of Israel throughout the book of Exodus, and diminish the overwhelming portrayal of divine mercy in Exod 34:5–9.

Yahweh’s reply to Moses in 32:33 that “whoever has sinned against me I will blot out from my book” is immediately preceded not by the Levite slaughter of 3000 (and the sparing of the others), but rather by Moses’ offer of himself to atone for the sin of the whole people: “Oh! This people has sinned a great sin! They have made for themselves gods of gold! But now, if you will forgive their sin—but i not, blot me out from the book which you have written” (32:31–32). It is then followed by Yahweh plauging “the people because they made the calf which Aaron made” (32:35). I therefore concur with Houtman, Exodus, 3:673–74: “It is assumed that Israel as a collective falls under that rule [‘whoever has sinned … I will blot out’]. The thought that Yhwh will test every single Israelite about their part in the idolatry and punish them accordingly does not appear to be present…. Therefore the conclusion can only be: Israel has forfeited her life.” See also Fischer and Markl, Das Buch Exodus, 341. Dozeman, Exodus, 708, following this same reading, can thus conclude from Exod 33:19 and 34:6–7: “The revelation of divine grace in the name Yahweh is a reversal from the divine promise of punishment to Moses’ initial intercession for the people after the sin of the golden calf: ‘Whoever sinned against me I will blot out from my book’ (32:33).” Philip J. Hyatt, Exodus, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 302, reads the depiction of the Levites here as indicating that they had not been involved in the worship of the calf. This too seems to me to go against the grain of the text, with its totalizing of the people’s involvement in the calf rebellion. Certainly Aaron the Levi was involved!

165 This is the translation of Houtman, Exodus, 3:609, 661. For further discussion, see note above under §7.3.2.
of the [other] nations. And all of the people in whose midst you (sg.) are will see the work of Yahweh, for what I am about to do with you (sg.) will be awesome” (34:10). While Yahweh is speaking to Moses, the verses which follow (esp. 34:11–12, 27) indicate that the ultimate addressee here, while grammatically singular, is the people as a whole.166

The narrative concludes with corporate Israel’s generosity and obedience in building the tabernacle, and with them beholding the divine glory dwelling in their midst. Moses assembles the whole congregation of the sons of Israel (35:1, 4) and conveys Yahweh’s commands regarding the Sabbath and the offering for the tabernacle. The offering is given freely by those so moved, yet the narrator makes this willing generosity characteristic of the people as a whole: “Every man and woman whose heart moved them to bring [something] for all the work which Yahweh had commanded through Moses to be done—the sons of Israel brought [it] willingly to Yahweh” (35:29).167 Eventually, the craftsmen report to Moses that the people are bringing more than enough, Moses gives command, and the people are restrained from bringing more (36:5–6). When all the work of construction has been completed, headed by “all the craftsmen” (35:10; 36:4, 8), the narrator summarizes: “According to all which Yahweh had commanded Moses, thus the sons of Israel had done all the service. And Moses saw all the work, and behold, they had done it. Just as Yahweh had commanded, they had done it, and so Yahweh blessed them” (39:42–43). The book closes with the sons of Israel obediently remaining in place or departing in sync with the glory cloud of Yahweh, and with Yahweh dwelling in the tabernacle in cloud and fire “in the sight of the whole house of Israel throughout their journeys” (40:36–38).

166 There is strong ambiguity regarding the “you” addressed in 34:10: is it Moses himself or corporate Israel who will be the locus of Yahweh’s unique wonders? Both readings are defensible within the context, and both yield rich theological insight. On Israel as the addressee, see Durham, Exodus, 460. On Moses as the addressee, see Houtman, Exodus, 3:718–20; and Jacob, Exodus, 988–89. Read in either way, Israel itself is being characterized in this passage as a single, corporate entity.

167 To capture the logic and presentation of the Hebrew narration, the rendering of 35:29 above follows the Hebrew word order precisely, albeit in awkward English.
Such corporate characterization, address, agency, and responsibility is consistent with the
covenantal identity of the sons of Israel before Yahweh. As the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and
Jacob, as those redeemed out of Egypt, and as those marked with the blood of the covenant, they
are uniquely his people.

At the same time, Exodus characterizes other groups and nations in a similarly corporate
perspective, in terms of their actions and Yahweh’s dealings with them. The narrative accents the
involvement of “all [Egyptian] people” (Exod 1:22) in the oppression and genocide of the
Israelites, and Pharaoh himself testifies that “I and my people are guilty” (Exod 9:27). Thus the
scope of Yahweh’s punitive plagues extends “throughout all the land of Egypt” (Exod 7:21) and to all of the houses of the Egyptians (7:28 [Eng 8:3]; 12:30). While Pharaoh is
repeatedly approached and addressed, the narrative leaves him curiously unnamed, and the
identity of multiple Pharaohs merge into a single portrayal. None of the divine “blows” target
Pharaoh individually. Rather, as Yahweh foretold in the Genesis backstory, he judges the nation
which has enslaved his people (Gen 15:14).

In his battle with Egypt at the sea, Yahweh hardened not only the heart of Pharaoh to
pursue Israel in order to gain glory over him (Exod 14:4) but hardens also the hearts of the whole
Egyptian host to follow Israel into the sea in order to gain glory over all Pharaoh’s army, his
chariots, and his horsemen (14:17). When Yahweh looks down on the Egyptians from the pillar
of cloud, throwing them into a panic, the narrator expresses their cry of dismay in collective
language, using the first person singular: “And Egypt said [3ms], ‘Let me flee from before Israel,
for Yahweh is fighting for them against Egypt’” (14:25). And the devastation of the Egyptian
host is emphatically total: “With respect to all Pharaoh’s army which had gone after them into
the sea, not even one of them was spared” (14:28b).

Other peoples likewise function in the narrative in a unified manner. When the Amalekites
attack the sons of Israel in Exod 17, they are described exclusively with the collective eponym Amalek (עמלק, 7x in 17:8–16). Their actions are entirely corporate: “Amalek” came and fought (v. 8) and intermittently prevailed (v. 11). Both Joshua (as military commander) and Yahweh interact with them corporately. Joshua fights against (vv. 9, 10) and ultimately overcomes “Amalek” (v. 13). In response to their unprovoked attack upon Israel, Yahweh announces that he “will utterly blot out the name of Amalek from under heaven” (v. 15) and “will have war against Amalek from generation to generation” (v. 16).

The peoples of Canaan—“the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites” (Exod 3:8)—do not appear directly on stage in the Exodus narrative. Nor do their neighbors, “the inhabitants of Philistia,” “the chiefs of Edom,” or “the leaders of Moab” (Exod 15:14–15). However, Yahweh warns of the potential that these could become a “snare” to the sons of Israel (23:33; 34:12), affirms that he is bringing Israel up to dispossess them (3:8, 17; 13:5, 11); and pledges that he will drive them out (23:28–31; 34:11) and annihilate them (23:23). Presumably “the iniquity of the Amorites” (עון האמרי) has now reached its full measure. Israel rejoices that these foreign peoples have heard of Yahweh’s mighty deeds and are melting away in terror (15:14–16).

7.5.2. Implications of Corporate Characterization for Understanding the Visiting Phrase

To what extent should this corporate presentation of Israel’s character shape the hearing of the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 and 34:7? Throughout the narrative, Yahweh’s address to Israel has been largely corporate, whether using the second person singular (the whole as one unit) or second person plural (many individuals belonging together)—directing, instructing, reassuring, threatening, etc., the people as a people. Disobedience has been corporate, as has its

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168 This bare eponymous description עמלק, used 7x in Exod 17:8–16, stands in subtle contrast to עמלקי (with gentilic yod), which might have been employed here (cf. Gen 14:7; Num 14:25).
punishments. In the rhetorical analysis of the Exod 20 and 34 texts in the following chapters, I will argue, contextually, that the visiting phrase does not function on an exclusively national or corporate level. That is to say, it does not merely warn of Yahweh’s visitation of iniquity on an entire generation of the Israelites (sons) following one or more iniquitous generations (fathers). However, this broad Exodus theme of Israel’s corporate standing before Yahweh does support such a national, corporate, “whole-generation” reading as an appropriate application of Yahweh’s warning.

7.6. Concern for Individual Justice

7.6.1. Introductory Comments

In the Genesis backstory, Abraham presses Yahweh’s sense of justice: “Far be it from you to do this thing, to kill the righteous along with the wicked so that the righteous and the wicked are alike! Far be it from you! Shall not the judge of all the earth do justice?” (Gen 18:25) The ensuing conversation with Abraham and the events with Lot and his family demonstrate that Yahweh will uphold the distinction between the righteous and the wicked. In the final book of the Prophets, the question of Yahweh’s commitment to justice continues to find expression: in the day of his judgment which is coming, Yahweh “will spare (חָמַל) [those who fear him] just as a man spares his son who serves him, and you will once again see [the distinction] between a righteous person and a wicked person, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him” (Mal 3:17b–18).

Yahweh’s language of transgenerational punishment in Exod 20:5 and 34:7, however, has

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169 The standard lexicons define חָמַל as “spare” (BDB, DCH) or “have compassion” (HALOT). While the verb can bear the latter sense, it is used predominantly in situations in which the object is facing death or great calamity, and the subject compassionately spares or exempts them from this death or calamity. As examples, Pharaoh’s daughter “spares” (חָמַל) the infant Moses (Exod 2:6) from the decree of genocide, Saul and the people “spare” (חָמַל) the Amalekite king and the best of the livestock and goods from devotion to destruction (1 Sam 15:9), and Yahweh commands Israel “not to spare” (חָמַל) but to kill one from among their own who worships other gods (Deut 13:6–10).
raised objections on precisely this point. If the iniquity of fathers is visited in punishment against sons, does this not blur the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, is it not a sweeping away of the innocent with the guilty? Rather than interrogating the transgenerational statements of Exod 20:5 and 34:7 in the abstract or in isolation, the present study has suggested consideration of the broader narrative context.

The primary focus in the book of Exodus is not God’s dealings with human beings as individuals but rather the establishment of the sons of Jacob as distinct from every other people on the face of the earth (Exod 19:5; 33:16). It is also true, as elaborated above (§7.1) that Genesis and Exodus strongly present Yahweh relating to human beings through family lines, so that there is a sense in which sons stand in relation to Yahweh through and with their fathers. At the same time, the Exodus narrative does not portray Yahweh as a God who is exclusively concerned with such national or familial distinctions. Divine justice does not operate only on a corporate level, nor is Yahweh concerned only with national or familial innocence or guilt.

There has been a tendency among some scholars to contrast Exod 20:5 and 34:7, on the one hand, and Ezek 18, on the other, in the starkest possible terms. Such a characterization of each allows a clear-cut progression in Israel’s religious thought from a thoroughgoing corporate basis (Exod 34:7) to a thoroughgoing individual basis (Ezek 18) for divine justice. More nuanced readings, however, have traced corporate and individual dynamics operating side by side—in tension but not in mutual contradiction—throughout the book of Ezekiel, suggesting a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of the individualist outlook of Ezek 18. Can a similar case be made for the Exodus narrative? This question has received less attention. In the

170 As one example, see Bernard M. Levinson, Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 49–71.

171 See an overview of the scholarship and its application to these questions in Joel S. Kaminsky, Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 119, 153, 178.
following, I will briefly argue that even as the characterization, agency, and responsibility of Israel (and other peoples) is overwhelmingly corporate in the Exodus narrative, Yahweh is at the same time portrayed as a great God and king who is also concerned with justice on an individual level.

7.6.2. Establishing the Theme

Yahweh’s concern for justice within Exodus contributes to his characterization as the great and rightful king. It was a commonplace across ANE cultures that “the application of justice was the highest trust given by the gods to a legitimate king.”172 In the Exodus narrative, Yahweh comes down from heaven to establish and to exhibit his kingly authority, in all places (Exod 9:14) and through all time (Exod 15:18). Pharaoh had perverted rightful kingship, repeatedly seeking to kill (ירד) the innocent (Exod 2:15; 5:21; cf. 1:16, 22; 4:19; 15:9). Yahweh treats only the guilty this way (14:30; 15:11–12; 32:27–28), and emphatically demands the preservation of justice among his people. Thus, as the great king, Yahweh is righteous (צדק, Exod 9:27) and the defender of the cause of righteous ones (צדקים, Exod 23:8).

In the Exodus narrative, Yahweh’s commitment to individual justice becomes apparent in a number of ways. He notes and responds to individuals’ disobedience or faithfulness. He makes distinctions between the innocent and the guilty in the effects of his great acts of judgment. He emphatically forbids the miscarriage of individual justice in Israel’s human jurisprudence. In these ways, Yahweh demonstrates that he is capable of and interested in distinguishing between righteous and guilty individuals. While corporate dynamics predominate, the Exodus narrative, and the God and the people presented in the narrative, have a clear consciousness of individual sin and individual moral responsibility.

A vivid instance of Yahweh dealing with people as individuals comes in the opening chapter of Exodus. In the midst of a great conflict between peoples—the Egyptians’ brutal enslavement of the sons of Israel and the initiation of genocide—the attention of the narrator, the reader, the Pharaoh, and God himself narrows upon two individuals: the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah. At great personal risk and with sly wit, they defy the Pharaoh’s murderous command. Twice their moral courage is explained; they feared God” (Exod 1:17, 21), and because of this, God shows providential favor to each of the women, giving them children of their own (1:21).

Yahweh’s concern with individual justice is apparent in episodes with Moses, as well. At the burning bush, his patience tried by Moses’ (individual) refusal to trust, Yahweh burns with anger against Moses (4:14). Later, in the wake of the golden calf apostasy, Moses petitions divine forgiveness for the people with the suggestion that otherwise he be erased from God’s book. There Yahweh replies, with concern for the individual appropriateness of justice, “He who has sinned against me—him I will blot out of my book” (32:33).

In Yahweh’s stern dealings with Pharaoh, the narrator presents Yahweh as emphatically just. Again and again, the guilt of Pharaoh is noted. Pharaoh “refuses” Yahweh’s demands (4:23; 7:14; etc.) and will not listen/obey (וְיָשָׁמֵשׁ, 7:13, 16). He does not take Yahweh’s signs to heart (7:23). He exalts himself against God’s people (9:17). When he acknowledges his guilt and pleads to Moses, Yahweh relents and is willing to send relief (9:27–29; 10:16–19). But Pharaoh only “sins again and hardens his heart” (9:34), refusing to be humble before Yahweh (10:3). Moses accuses Pharaoh of mocking or trifling with Yahweh (8:25 [Eng 8:29]). Pharaoh himself

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173 While applied to the people as a whole in this episode—because all the people were involved in the great sin of the calf—the principle articulated here is one of individual justice. See Houtman, Exodus, 3:673: “YHWH acts strictly justly, in accordance with the adage ‘the person who sins shall die’ (Ezek 18:4, 20 and see Deut. 7:10; 24:16; 2 Kgs 14:6; Jer 31:29f.; Ezek 14:12ff.). It is assumed that Israel as a collective falls under that rule.”
acknowledges: “I have sinned. Yahweh is righteous; I and my people are guilty” (9:27). And, “I have sinned against Yahweh your God and against you [Moses]” (10:16). Even the lyrical boast in the Song of the Sea serves to highlight Pharaoh’s hubris and guilt: “The enemy said, ‘I will pursue. I will overtake. I will divide the spoil. My soul will have its fill of them. I will draw my sword. My hand will possess them’” (15:9). It is for the purpose of freeing his people that Yahweh deals severely with Pharaoh, but it is also true that these harsh blows accord with justice, individually considered.

During the large-scale plagues, impacting thousands, Yahweh reveals himself as capable of distinguishing between Israel and Egypt, so that the innocent are not swept away with those who are being justly punished. Beginning with the fourth plague and climaxing in the death of the firstborn on the night of the Passover, Yahweh routinely sets apart and spares the Israelite region, people, livestock, and houses (8:22–23; 9:4, 6–7; 11:4–7; 12:13, 23) to demonstrate that he “is making a distinction” (-navigation) between Egypt and Israel. With the plague of hail, a further distinction is introduced. Here, Yahweh designs the blow and gives warning in such a way that the plague spares even the Egyptian officials who “feared the word of Yahweh” (9:20) in this matter, but it strikes those Egyptians who “did not take the word of Yahweh to heart” (9:21), mortally pelting their servants and livestock.

At this point an objection might be raised. Do not the strongly corporate and national dimensions of Yahweh’s dealings in the Exodus narrative invite the reader to assume at least

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174 In the first half of the Exodus narrative, it is certainly more clear-cut to refer to the Egyptians as guilty than it is to refer to the sons of Israel as innocent. While Yahweh’s acts against Egypt are acts of justice and judgment, his gracious rescue and care for Israel is not portrayed as somehow merited. As with the Egyptian striking the Hebrew man in Exod 2:11, the Egyptian is clearly “in the wrong” (as is the Hebrew aggressor the next day), but that does not suggest that the oppressed/struck man somehow deserves care, deliverance, favor, or mercy. This asymmetry is brought out nicely in Pharaoh’s confession of sin in Exod 9:27: “I have sinned. Yahweh is righteous; I and my people are guilty” (9:27). In the context, Pharaoh has been sinning against Yahweh’s people (9:17), and Yahweh has brought the plague of hail against Egypt but not against Goshen where the sons of Israel were (9:26). Yet, significantly, Pharaoh does not say, “Yahweh and his people are righteous, and I and my people are guilty,” but only that Yahweh is in the right in his judgment.
some degree of miscarriage of justice on an individual level? Is it plausible that every single Egyptian was complicit in the death of Hebrew babies? Did every single Israelite really depart from the way Yahweh commanded in the golden calf incident? While the reader’s own experience and sense of realism may spark such questions, the Exodus narrative does not suggest them; in fact, the narrative takes pains to direct the reader away from such questions. In particular, the divine judgments upon entire peoples are accompanied, in the Exodus narrative, by a consistent emphasis on the comprehensive guilt of the people—an emphasis which in fact affirms the propriety and necessity of individual justice, and springs from that very principle. The whole people is punished because each of them is guilty.175

Perhaps the clearest expression of divine concern with individual justice in Exodus comes in Yahweh’s legal instructions.176 Nowhere in these legal sections does Yahweh direct human authorities to punish children or an entire household for someone’s offense.177 Wright discusses the “individual thrust” of the Ten Commandments, noting that also “the ‘Book of the Covenant’ (Exod. 21–23) operates legislatively on the unmistakable ground of individual responsibility and liability before the law.”178 Yahweh’s statutes frequently employ the second person singular,

175 See Exod 1:22; 9:27; 32:1–3, 30; and the discussion above under §7.5.1. Of course, Pharaoh is portrayed as uniquely guilty and responsible, as the king mandating the oppression and infanticide, and most directly refusing to acknowledge Yahweh.

176 Horace D. Hummel, Ezekiel 1–20, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 533, discussing Ezek 18, stresses this individual consciousness in the Pentateuch as well: “It really is quite easy to demonstrate an individual accent in the Bible from the very outset: the individual creations of both Adam and Eve, and their individual punishments; the salvation of Noah and his family when the rest of humanity perished in the flood; the promises to individual patriarchs; the formulation of the Ten Commandments, in which ‘you’ is singular in Hebrew; the frequent legal constructions with יְשׁנָה אֵישׁ (‘each person,’ e.g. Lev 15:2; 17:3; 20:2); and so on.”

177 Transgenerational punishment in human jurisprudence is explicitly forbidden in Deut 24:16. The contrast on this point is often noted between OT and ANE law. Krašovec, Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness, 143–44, cites as examples the Code of Hammurabi §116, §§209–10, and especially §§229–30, which demand the life of a son of the guilty person. For example, when a house collapses, killing a child, the life of the builder’s son would be forfeit. In contrast, in Exod 21:31, if an ox gores a man’s son or daughter, the ox owner (and not the ox owner’s son or daughter) may be killed. See also Moshe Greenberg, “Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law,” in Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume, ed. Menahem Haran (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1960), 5–28.

178 Christopher J. H. Wright, Old Testament Ethics for the People of God (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 366. Wright prefaces this comment with the observation: “The essence of the covenant relationship is
particularly in the apodictic commands of the Decalogue in Exod 20 and the ordinances of Exod 22:20–23:3 and 23:6–19. In Exod 21:2–22:16, the casuistic formula beginning with כי almost always involves a singular verb and subject, especially when expressing the consequence or sanction.

If (כי) men quarrel, and one strikes his neighbor with a stone or with a fist, and he does not die but becomes bedridden, if he gets up and walks about outside, (even) upon his staff, then the one who struck him shall be free from punishment; only he shall pay for his time in bed, and he shall certainly care for him during his healing. (21:18–19)

If (כי) there is harm, then you (ms) shall pay life for life. (21:23)

Other legal instructions in Exodus also express individual sanctions against singular perpetrators:

For if anyone eats something leavened, from the first to the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. (12:15b)

Every person who touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. (19:12)

You (ms) shall not take up the name of Yahweh your God in vain, for Yahweh will not leave unpunished the one who takes up his name in vain. (20:7)

In the case of those who would mistreat sojourners, orphans, widows, or the poor, Yahweh warns that he himself will hear the cries of the oppressed, become involved, and punish the offender (Exod 22:20–26 [Eng 22:21–27]). If any person breaks the Sabbath, or mixes holy incense for personal use, or if any priest draws near to Yahweh without washing or without proper

corporate: ‘I will be your God; you will be my people.’ Here ‘you’ and ‘your’ are plural. But the primary demand of the covenant is addressed to the individual, with a singular ‘you’: ‘You shall have no other gods before me.’” Gerhard von Rad, Deuteronomy: A Commentary, trans. Dorothea Barton, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 152, commenting on Deut 24:16, observes, “The conception of a general development from collective to individual liability is incorrect. The principle of personal responsibility was by no means unknown in earlier times. The whole Book of the Covenant knows nothing of … corporate liability within the family.”

While this passage combines second person singular with second person plural address, Exod 22:22 [Eng 22:23] stands as a key verse, rhetorically emphatic with its triple use of the infinitive absolute to strengthen verbs plus כי employed in an asseverative sense (“indeed”), addressed with a hypothetical individual situation in view: “If you (ms) do indeed afflict him, and, indeed (כיה), if he should indeed cry out to me, I will indeed hear his cry.” Likewise, 22:25–26 [Eng 22:26–27] gives a similar warning, also in individual, singular terms: “If you should indeed take your neighbor’s cloak in pledge, return it to him by sunset, for it is his only covering, it is his cloak for his bare skin? In what else can he sleep? If he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am gracious (חנון).” This final remark connects Yahweh’s concern for individual justice with his innermost character, using the same language which Yahweh will uses in Exod 34:6, “a compassionate and gracious God” (אל רחום וחנון).
vestments, individual death may be the penalty. A half shekel of silver for the tabernacle is levied not upon tribes or clans, but upon every individual male over twenty years of age (Exod 38:25–26). Thus, Yahweh’s laws are often addressed to individuals, envision individual circumstances, speak of individual obligations, and have in view individual sanctions.

The Exodus narrative depicts human jurisprudence in action only rarely, but two such episodes display a concern for individual justice. In Exod 2, Moses twice intervenes in human conflicts—one day striking down the Egyptian who was striking a Hebrew (individual lex talionis), the next day confronting “the guilty one” (רשׁע) of a pair of fighting Hebrews (Exod 2:11–13). Later, in a scene with remarkable parallels to ch. 2, Moses’ father-in-law sees him sitting from morning to evening, judging “between each man and his neighbor” (בין אישׁ ובין רעהו, Exod 18:16). Moses follows Jethro’s advice, deputizing a hierarchy of judges to decide “every small matter,” while retaining authority to decide “every big matter” (18:22, 26). While not overshadowing the corporate-national and familial dynamics in Exodus, these episodes testify to the legal standing of individual Israelites as individuals, and to a concomitant narrative concern for individual justice.

One passage bears particular weight in reflecting on Yahweh’s concern for individual justice. In Exod 23:1–8, Yahweh gives a series of instructions which share a single aim: to prevent the miscarriage of justice in Israel’s jurisprudence. They are not to bear false witness or join in a group effort to bring a false charge, depriving someone of justice (vv. 1–2). They are not to show judicial favoritism to the poor qua poor (v. 3), but neither are they to pervert the

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181 Larsson, Bound for Freedom, 24, noting the similarity in language between Exod 2:12 and Isa 59:15–16, characterizes Moses as acting in justice: “Moses was not indifferent; he intervened when he saw that no one cared for justice.” Larsson sees the same concern driving Moses later in the chapter in the scene with Jethro’s daughters being driven from a well by local shepherds: “He stood up for the weak, and he saw to it that justice was done.” Ackerman, “Literary Context,” 111, posits a similar motive with Moses’ intervention with the two fighting Hebrews in Exod 2:13, an “intervention to establish justice in the matter,” which Ackerman suggests “foreshadows the laws of Sinai given with the same intent.”
justice due the poor (v. 6). They are to keep far from false charges (v. 7) and from bribes, which
blind those receiving them and subvert the claims of those who are in the right (v. 8).182

Accompanying these warnings and exhortations stands this fundamental:

An innocent person (נקי) or a righteous person (צדיק) do not kill,
for I will not acquit (Hiphil of צדק) a guilty person (רשע). (Exod 23:7b)

This splendid chiasm, first of all, roots Israel’s human justice in Yahweh’s divine justice. The
extensive concerns for case-by-case individual justice throughout the Decalogue and the Book of
the Covenant have already implicitly established Yahweh’s own commitments in this regard.183
Sarna offers an additional connection between the person of Yahweh and the concern for
individual justice embodied in the laws. He speaks of the “ethicizing of history,” noting that
God’s actions in the preceding narrative “demand a corresponding imitative human response.”184
As Yahweh has acted to establish justice in the preceding events, acting with appropriate
punishment against the guilty, Israel is now called to treat the innocent as innocent and the guilty
as guilty.

Second, v. 7 demands just human practice under threat of the כי-clause which follows: for
Yahweh will punish the one who wickedly perverts justice (and who thus becomes guilty
himself).185 The innocent must not be treated as if guilty, for Yahweh will not treat the guilty as if
innocent! By forbidding judicial death for the innocent in the first line, the parallelism here
implies that death may well be the appropriate sanction for the guilty—and furthermore that
Yahweh himself may bring such a severe blow against the guilty who pervert justice. For
Yahweh will see justice upheld, and this means that the guilty person must be treated as guilty,

182 This warning against bribes, while using different vocabulary, echoes the counsel of Jethro in Exod 18:21.
183 Kürle, Appeal of Exodus, 27, “The legal collections … reveal deep insights into the law-giver’s nature and
his concerns.”
185 Cassuto, Exodus, 299.
not as innocent. And the righteous person must be treated as righteous, and not as wicked.\footnote{Proverbs 17:15 uses the same vocabulary as Exod 23:7: “The one who acquits a guilty person and the one who condemns a righteous person, they are both alike an abomination to Yahweh.”} Thus, Yahweh is not a God who will sweep away the righteous with the wicked—or who will stand idly by when others do.

7.6.3. Mercy for an Enemy: A Complement to Yahweh’s Justice

Curiously, sandwiched in the middle of these directives for maintaining justice in Israel’s legal disputes (Exod 23:1–3, 6–8) stand two verses which exhort the people not to turn their backs on an enemy in need.\footnote{Propp, Exodus 19–40, 275: “As is often noted, the contents of vv 4–5 do not jibe with their overall context, which concerns the administration of justice.” Jacob, Exodus, 712, commenting on Exod 23:4: “The presentation of this and the following verse here has remained puzzling.”}

If you meet the ox of your enemy (כָּאֶב) or his donkey going astray, you shall indeed bring it back to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you (כָּשֶׂנֶה) fallen down under its load, you shall resist leaving it to him; you shall indeed rescue along with him. (23:4–5)

Here, Yahweh commands human compassion for “your enemy” and for “one who hates you,” the two terms being used as parallel synonyms. The latter term—כָּשֶׂנֶה—precisely echoes Exodus 20:5, where Yahweh had warned that he “visits-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons … with respect to those who hate me (כִּשְׁנִי).”\footnote{The morphology is nearly identical: Qal participle with pronominal suffix.}

How significant is it that Yahweh says he himself will do one thing with regard to enemies (visit them in punishment), while he commands the sons of Israel to do something quite different with their enemies (do not abandon them in need, but rather help them)? This is a notable disjunction. Laws exhibit the character and concerns of the lawgiver. “Pentateuchal law not only characterizes its speakers in order to validate the law, but [also] … promulgates law in order to
characterize its speakers.” Laws commanding compassion and honest dealing with widows, orphans, and the poor, for example, reflect Yahweh’s own compassion and protectiveness of the weak. Commands not to revile God, to redeem all firstborn males, to hold regular festivals of worship—these reflect Yahweh’s zeal for his name. These kind of reflections are common in the commentaries. Exodus 23:4–5, however, is seldom drawn into reflection on divine character. Sarna, for example, notes that this text “forbids indifference to the plight of one’s enemy,” but does not connect this to God’s own ways. Sprinkle, on the other hand, treats this text explicitly from the standpoint of its reflection of the divine character but focuses on God’s compassion for the animals mentioned; he does not discuss God’s compassion for enemies.

Most commentators emphasize that the picture here is one of setting aside enmity in the face of need, doing good to one’s neighbor even if he be an opponent. It is an exhortation to display mercy. Rabbi Sacks comments, “A decent society will be one in which enemies do not allow their rancour or animosity to prevent them from coming to one another’s assistance when they need help.” This theme stands in tension with the careful justice safeguarded by the immediate context and with Yahweh’s actions toward his enemies thus far in the narrative.

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193 Cole, *Exodus*, 185, on this command to help one’s enemy with his donkey, suggests: “Justice demands that we treat him like any other neighbour” (my emphasis). Cole’s comment here is colored by the surrounding judicial context of 23:1–3 and 6–8. However, justice hardly seems to demand selfless care for one who hates us or who has threatened or wronged us. John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 3:57, offers a more sensible evaluation of Exod 23:4–5: God’s intention is “that believers should testify their forgiveness of their enemies, by being merciful to their animals.... The desire of vengeance ... is here restrained.” Here the demand of justice is tempered by mercy, even a self-involving mercy. Dozeman, *Exodus*, 548: “There is a progression in the two laws. The second goes beyond the simple return of an animal to an enemy to require more personal assistance.” Fischer and Markl, *Das Buch Exodus*, 262, also describe this progression, the second command costing a man the
Yahweh has opposed his enemies—fighting (14:14, 25; 15:3; 17:16), drowning (14:27; 15:1, 4), shattering (15:6, 9), overthrowing (15:7), and threatening punishment across generations (20:5).

God’s commands in Exodus 23:4–5, then, create a rhetorical and ethical disjunction in the narrative, over against God’s previous actions and over against his self-description in 20:5. There is a tension here, a tension which has been present and growing in the narrative since the Israelites began grumbling at the Red Sea. Yahweh, the man of war who shatters his enemies, is also revealed as a God who helps even those who resist and hate Him, when they are faced with great need. For a grumbling people, Yahweh has granted deliverance from strong foes (Egypt, then Amalek), from hunger, and from thirst. This characterization of Yahweh foreshadows the full revelation of His mercy following the golden calf in Exodus 32–34. The commands to help one’s neighbor in Exodus 23:4–5, then, along with these broader narrative threads of Yahweh helping a “hostile” Israel in time of need, serve to qualify the divine threat in Exodus 20:5 against “those who hate me.” Transgenerational visitation of iniquity should not be read as an automatic or absolute principle of divine justice. God is free to punish, and he warns that he does punish. But he may also meet his enemies in compassion. The exhortations in 23:1–8, then, characterize a lawgiver who values both justice and selfless mercy.

exertion of greater willpower. They write: “Dieser Sieg gegen eine Widerstände der erste Schritt zur Versöhnung und der geheime Kraft, die Rechtsstreitigkeiten mit ihren grausamen Dynamiken bis zum Tod (V.7) im Keim verhindern kann” (author’s emphasis). [“This victory over one’s own resistance is the first step toward reconciliation and the secret power that can nip in the bud the legal prosecution with its harsh processes leading to death (23:7).”]

194 Regarding the Massah and Meribah narrative in Exod 17 as a portrayal of Yahweh’s character which resonates with Exod 23:4–5 (helping an enemy in need with his animal), it is interesting that Yahweh here provides drink for the Israelites, their sons, and their livestock. Furthermore, the people in Exod 17 are described as those who “contend” with Moses and Yahweh, a verb with legal overtones. Some commentators note the way in which Exodus 23:4–5, bracketed by laws pertaining to legal disputes, may portray the enemy as a legal opponent.

195 Larsson, Bound for Freedom, 109, notes that the rabbis wrestled with Yahweh’s twofold approach to enemies in the OT. Yahweh’s decimation of the Egyptian host at the sea is celebrated with joyous song in the narrative. Yet Prov 24:17 counsels, “When your enemy falls, do not rejoice; and when he stumbles, let not your heart rejoice.” Larsson writes, “Aware of this dilemma, one rabbinic commentary describes a scene in front of the heavenly throne. The angels wish to sing a song of praise when they witness what happens to the Egyptians. Before they even start, however, they are reproached and fully silenced by God himself with the words, ‘The work of my hands are drowned in the sea, and you want to sing songs?’” [b. Megilla 10b; b. Sanhedrin 39b]
7.6.4. The Theme of Individual Justice and the Visiting Phrase

The Exodus theme of individual justice traced above excludes extreme applications of the concept of corporate personality, corporate identity, or corporate responsibility to the visiting phrase, which would assert that the phrase betrays an ancient social and psychic structure in which there was simply no consciousness of individual identity or responsibility. Just as the book of Ezekiel does not exhibit a thoroughgoing and exclusive individualism, the Exodus narrative does not exhibit a thoroughgoing and exclusive collectivism.

Furthermore, the Exodus theme of individual justice excludes interpretations of the visiting phrase as claiming that divine punishment of the innocent is normative or characteristic of Yahweh. This supports reading the qualification “with respect to those who hate me” (לָשָׁנִי) in Exod 20:5 as referring to the punished sons along with their fathers, and thereby interpreting the formula to suggest divine punishment of wicked sons in a line of longstanding family sin.

Such a reading is adopted by the amplifications of the targumim. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan expands the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 as follows: “recording the guilt of wicked fathers upon rebellious children unto the third and unto the fourth generation of them who hate Me.” Targum Onkelos is even more direct on this point: “visiting the sins of the fathers upon the rebellious children, unto the third generation and to the fourth generation of those who hate Me; while the children continue (or complete) to sin after their fathers.”

This interpretation of Exod 20:5 has been criticized as harmonizing and theodicizing—a post-canonical instance of rabbinic eisegesis aimed at reconciling the visiting phrase with Jer 31 and Ezek 18 and at shielding God from charges of injustice. However, the targumim seem to reckon here with the concern for individual justice displayed in the broader Exodus context, and

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197 See Levinson, Legal Revision, 53–56, 84–88, as well as my summary and critique of Levinson’s approach to Exod 20:5 above, §3.2.3.
with the Exodus portrayal of Yahweh as a righteous king and judge. It is more fair and accurate to say that the paraphrases of Exod 20:5 in the targumim are literally sensitive to the thematic and theological accents of the surrounding narrative.

I have argued in this section that the Exodus narrative displays an interest in individual justice and portrays Yahweh as commanding and committed to treating the guilty as guilty and the righteous as righteous. I have suggested that this theme legitimately shapes a contextual understanding of the visiting phrase Exod 20:5: the sons being visited in payment for their fathers’ iniquities are themselves iniquitous.

That being said, one final challenge to such a reading deserves mention. Levinson adds this critique of the targumic expansions:

If God punishes only those who commit wrongdoing in each generation, then the doctrine of the transgenerational consequences of sin has been entirely vitiated. Although the [targumim’s] corrected version saves God from committing iniquity, it also makes the original text redundant. What is the logic for even mentioning the generations if it is only individual retribution that operates, no longer transgenerational punishment?\(^{198}\)

The challenge here is significant. If Yahweh is committed to individual justice, why speak in corporate and transgenerational terms here and throughout the narrative? What is the logic for mentioning the generations? Is there a sense in which Exod 20:5 may depend upon both the individual and corporate aspects of Yahweh’s justice, holding them in tension without one rendering the other redundant or meaningless? This question will be addressed in the rhetorical analysis of the passage in the following chapter.

7.7. The Hiddenness and Freedom of Yahweh

A final theme with key relevance to the visiting phrase is Yahweh’s freedom and the ultimate inscrutability his ways. This is not to say that Yahweh and his ways are wholly

\(^{198}\) Levinson, *Legal Revision*, 87.
unknowable, but rather that, even as he reveals himself, and even at the pinnacle of his self-revelation, Yahweh is not wholly known—even Moses and the Israelites don’t know Yahweh exhaustively. Peter Boyd has observed:

The ancients used to think that once the name of a supernatural being was discovered, it lost its power…. Yahweh, indeed, has revealed His name to Moses (Exod 3:14), Yahweh has disclosed the future (אֲחֹרָּי) for the new Israel, which revelation discloses the very heart of God, yet this by no means implies that Moses has pierced the veil of Yahweh’s mysterious Being. Moses cannot see His “face”; he cannot know Yahweh’s origin; he cannot comprehend Him who is from all eternity to all eternity.\(^{199}\)

With clarity, the Exodus narrative reveals Yahweh as powerful to save and to judge. Similarly, his abundant mercy and forgiveness is vividly made known. Even so, questions and tensions remain, and Yahweh remains in some respects hidden—not only in terms of his transcendent Being but also in terms of his ways in the world. Two aspects of Yahweh’s actions, in particular, remain emphatically hidden and free: (1) the timing of his rescue and judgment and (2) the terms and extent of his divine mercy. He is free in his ways, so that humans cannot presume, demand, or manipulate his actions.

Buber writes, “Our path in the history of faith is not a path from one kind of deity to another, but in fact a path from ‘the God who hides Himself’ (Isa. 45:15) to the One that reveals Himself.”\(^{200}\) This is certainly the case in the book of Exodus, yet it is also true that, throughout the story and even at its resolution, Yahweh never fully sheds his cloak of cloud and mystery. While OT narration is often “laconic and mysterious,” establishing “ambiguity by leaving significant gaps in the story,”\(^{201}\) such mystery rises to the level of a narrative theme and

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\(^{200}\) Buber, “Holy Event (Exodus 19–27),” 46.

theological claim in the book of Exodus.\textsuperscript{202}

Across the Exodus narrative, Yahweh reveals himself—coming to be present, making himself seen, heard, and known. Yet, even as the narrative reaches its climax and conclusion, perhaps especially at the narrative’s climax and conclusion, Yahweh remains, in some important senses, mysterious, hidden, and unapproachable. In the discussion below, I will trace three elements which establish this theme. First, Yahweh acts in ways which the reader cannot thoroughly explain, reconcile, or account for. Second, he cloaks himself with fire, cloud, and veil. Third, in key utterances, he expressly reminds Israel of his divine freedom and prerogatives.

\textbf{7.7.1. Establishing the Theme}

\textbf{7.7.1.a. Actions Which Cannot Be Fully Explained or Accounted For}

While Yahweh displays himself clearly as compassionate deliverer from slavery, sender of Moses, provider of food and water in the wilderness, and merciful forgiver of Israel’s iniquity, each of these episodes raises questions for the reader, answers for which the narrative does not ultimately provide. Exodus begins with Egypt’s violent subjugation of Jacob’s descendants. The precise duration of this bitter servitude, along with the infanticide decreed by Pharaoh, is vague.\textsuperscript{203} But it is not brief, taking place during “those many days” (בימים רבים, Exod 2:23). Even after Moses’ initial approach to Pharaoh, the people’s burden remains—in fact, it is increased (Exod 5:6–9; 6:9). The narrative leaves no question that Yahweh is superintending all events (Gen 50:20; Exod 9:14–16), that this bondage is part of his overarching plan (Gen 15:13–16; Exod 6:2–8), and that he is keenly aware of their misery (Exod 2:23–25; 3:7). Yet he allows

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{202} Ackerman, “Literary Context,” 96–97, discusses “the hiddenness and mystery of God” as “a theme which will move throughout the epic.”
\item \textsuperscript{203} This is the case not only within the Exodus narrative but even in light of the chronological details presented by the rest of the OT canon—and even the NT. See Riggs, “Length of Israel’s Sojourn,” 18–35, and the discussion in footnote 36 above.
\end{itemize}
this oppression, suffering, groaning, and dying to continue. Why? And after this permissiveness and inactivity, what finally stimulates him to act when he does, and no sooner or later? The narrative itself gives no clear answers to these questions.

Perhaps no Exodus scene is so veiled in mystery and puzzlement as Yahweh’s night-time encounter with Moses, Zipporah, and their child (Exod 4:24–26). Yahweh has insisted, over Moses’ objections, that Moses return to Egypt to bring out the sons of Israel. He has scarcely finished uttering stern words of warning which Moses is to convey to Pharaoh (4:21–23), when the narrator reports: “On the way, at a place of lodging, Yahweh met him and sought to kill him” (4:24). Is Yahweh coming after Moses or his son—and why, especially just after conveying such enormous plans and promises? After Zipporah circumcises her son and touches the bloody foreskin to Moses’ (or the boy’s?) feet, Yahweh leaves them alone. As elsewhere in Exodus, Yahweh spares one marked with blood, yet the rationale for this is left unexplained, again leaving commentators to speculate. Like Moses, the reader of Exod 4:24–26 is disturbed from

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204 W. Gunther Plaut, “The Israelites in Pharaoh’s Egypt—A Historical Reconstruction,” *Judaism* 27 (1978): 45–46, poses the question from this angle: “Why did God suddenly decide that the time had come for Israel’s liberation? Was it just divine caprice or had certain conditions developed which made liberation an urgent item on God’s agenda? The Bible itself is silent.” Plaut goes on to report a midrashic explanation that the people were growing so accustomed to servitude that they could no longer imagine anything different. That is when the time came for God to act, urgently.

205 The reticence of the narrative on this point has not stopped commentators from speculating in efforts to defend or indict Yahweh. Zakovitch, “And You Shall Tell Your Son…,” 36, for example, explains the Egyptian bondage as necessary divine punishment and purgation of Israel for the sins committed by their forefathers. In contrast, Lyle Eslinger, “Freedom or Knowledge? Perspective and Purpose in the Exodus Narrative (Exodus 1–15),” *JSOT* 52 (1991): 43–60; repr. in *The Pentateuch: A Sheffield Reader*, ed. John W. Rogerson (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), argues that Exod 1–2 subtly casts the Exod 1–15 narrative as anti-triumphalistic and even critical of Yahweh—it is God’s multiplication of the Israelites that incites the Egyptian mistreatment; he is slow to begin the alleviation of their suffering and then prolongs it further in performing multiple wonders; and so Yahweh seems to have “small concern” for Israel compared to the greatness of their suffering.

206 For an extensive review of ancient and modern interpretations of this passage, along with the text critical issues involved, see John T. Willis, *Yahweh and Moses in Conflict: The Role of Exodus 4:24–26 in the Book of Exodus*, BH 8 (Bern: Lang, 2010). Focusing on the MT, Willis catalogs six key “problems” for interpreters of this passage: “(1) Whom did Yahweh meet and seek to kill? (2) Why did Yahweh … wish to kill him? (3) How did Zipporah know what to do to keep Yahweh from killing? (4) Whose ‘feet’ (legs, genitals) did Zipporah touch with the bloody foreskin … and what was the significance of this act? (5) What does Zipporah’s statement at end of vv. 25 and 26 mean … and how is this statement connected to her acts?... (6) How is the … reader to understand … Exod 4:24–26 in the flow of the narrative in the book of Exodus (in the Pentateuch)?”

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repose and confronted with Yahweh’s hiddenness and freedom.

Later, like Moses, the sons of Israel are met “on the way” through the wilderness with life-threatening hardship and testing by the inscrutable Yahweh (Exod 18:8; 13:17–21; 16:1–4; 17:1–3; cf. 4:24). Commenting on the difficult path God chooses for his people to walk, first through the wilderness (Exod 13:7) and even upon arrival in Canaan (Exod 23:20–33), Larsson writes:

From the very first verse [13:17] a basic theme of Israel’s exodus is highlighted: the way God has determined for them is not a convenient shortcut. It is a long, winding, dangerous road. The ancient coastal road along the Mediterranean through the land of the Philistines could have been managed in two weeks! As different as heaven is from earth (Isa 55:8–9), however, so do God’s ways differ from those of human beings…. The question why God chooses such a narrow, dark, and painful path is one of the deep mysteries.208

After the golden calf apostasy, the particular measures of punishment taken against the people defy confident explanation. What is clear is that the people as a whole stand guilty before Yahweh of violating the first and most fundamental covenant demand—to have no other gods (32:1, 8).209 Because the people have “broken loose”210 (Exod 32:25, for which Aaron also bears direct responsibility), the Levites are dispatched throughout the camp and strike down “about 3000 men from among the people” (בַּֽעֲשֹׁהוּ...כִּלְשׁתָּתֵי אֵלֵי, Exod 32:28).211 Why this many?

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207 The testing and grumbling episodes in Exod 15–17 are further bound together with the encounter in the night scene in Exod 4:24–26 by homophonous use of the verbal root לון (לון). Yahweh encounters Moses at his “night-lodging place” (מלך, Exod 4:24, from BDB I לון, “lodge, stay the night”). Israel exhibits dismay at their perceived endangerment by Yahweh with “grumbling” (15:24; 16:2; 17:3; from BDB II לון, “murmur”). These are the only occurrences of words from these roots in Exodus, except for two (nearly identical) ritual instructions in 23:18 and 34:25.

208 Larsson, Bound for Freedom, 96–97, 183.

209 See discussion of the total, corporate culpability of the people in the calf episode under §7.5.1 above.

210 The two uses of the verb פָּרַע in Exod 32:25 (the people had been “let loose”/“were running wild”) should be read in direct connection to the covenant-violating golden calf idolatry (note the parallel structure between Exod 32:25 and 32:35); not merely as a description of community disorganization and lawlessness in a general sense as the situation obtaining after the idolatry or independent of the idolatry. The sword of the Levites may well have functioned in this scene to “restore order,” but this severe stroke was unleashed not merely to restore order, but also to punish the people for their apostasy and to establish that it was indeed a “great sin.”

211 While the command to the Levites is given by Moses, his decree is properly read as expressive of Yahweh’s own character and will in this instance, on the basis of the close narrative alignment between the characters of Yahweh and Moses and on the basis of the words of Moses’ summons: “Whoever is for Yahweh, [come] to me!” and “Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel: Each one, put your sword on your side and pass
And why these 3000 and not others? Exodus 32 closes with the terse report that “because of the calf which [the people] made, which Aaron made,” Yahweh plagued them (32:35). Yet the context makes this seemingly straightforward statement difficult to visualize. In the preceding verse Yahweh has declared, “But in the day of my visiting, I will visit-in-punishment against them their sin” (32:34). The plague reported in v. 35 is likely the actualization of this threat, but even so, does it occur chronologically at this point in the narrative, or is it a later punishment reported here proleptically? Is the plague an illness which does not bring death, since no death figures are reported? Or should the reader assume deaths, perhaps in numbers similar to the 3000 killed by the Levites or to the many thousands killed by divine plagues in the book of Numbers (14,700 in Num 17:14 [Eng 16:49] and 24,000 in Num 25:9)? In these ways, the golden calf episode depicts Yahweh not only as just and merciful, but also as inscrutable and free.

7.7.1.b. Cloaked by Fire, Cloud, and Veil

The ongoing portrayal of Yahweh as literally hidden, veiled, and inaccessible also strongly contributes to the theme of Yahweh’s hiddenness. Such emphases occur at the most important

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212 It is frequently asserted, in an attempt to answer these questions, that the Levites are dispatched to strike down the ringleaders or those chiefly responsible for the calf apostasy. For example, Gerald J. Janzen, *Exodus*, WestBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 239, subtitles his comments on Exod 32:25–29, “Judgment on the Ringleaders.” The narrative, however, stresses the culpability of “all the people” (32:3). If anything, the scene of judgment by the swords of the Levites reveals further, stubborn apostasy on the part of all but the Levites. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 288–89, notes: “Moses invites the entire community to make a public stand: do they belong to Yahweh or not?… The great majority of people, however, remain unmoved; their silent indifference to the call is deafening. In other words, this is an intensification of the apostasy evident in the golden calf episode; it is revealing of deep depths of disloyalty.”

213 Moberly, *Mountain of God*, 59, for example, understands the plague in v. 35 to demonstrate that v. 34b is “no idle warning,” but this is widely debated in the commentaries.

214 Currid, *Study Commentary on Exodus*, 2:293, notes, “The nature of the judgment is not stated, nor is the timing of it. Thus we are at a loss to know precisely to what event it refers.” Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:674–75, mostly raises questions and multiplies options in interpreting 32:34–35, although he seems to lead toward connecting v. 34 with a later punishment: prevention from entering the promised land in Num 14, the fate of northern Israel, or the fall of Judah. Plaut, *Exodus*, 375, in contrast, asserts without further demonstration: “This will come to pass after the incident with the spies (Num. 14:20–24).”
moments of Yahweh’s *manifest presence and self-revelation*. At the burning bush, God introduces himself while shrouded in fire, and Moses hides his face to avoid seeing God (3:6).

Regarding this appearance in flame, Larsson writes:

> God’s self-revelation in fire is a powerful expression of the divine holiness. This aspect of God is visible throughout the Bible. God is the elevated and holy one, the sovereign monarch who cares for the whole world as well as every creature. God reveals his character and will to the world while remaining the unfathomable one whose essence nobody can comprehend.215

In leading the people out of Egypt and through the wilderness, Yahweh both marks and obscures his presence by means of a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night (13:21–22). At Sinai, Yahweh appears visibly to meet with the people, yet comes hidden “within the denseness of the cloud” (בעב הענן, Exod 19:9).216

Occasionally, the “veil” seems to be drawn back. At the sea, “Yahweh, in the pillar of fire and cloud, looked down upon the Egyptians”—to their terror and dismay (Exod 14:24–25). After the blood covenant ceremony at Sinai, the elders of the people ascend part way up the mountain and “see God”—but the partial nature of this vision is implied by its described content: the pavement underneath his feet (24:10–11). Moses alone is permitted to ascend to the mountaintop and to enter the cloud. And although Moses has the exceptional experience of speaking to God “face to face, just as a man speaks to his neighbor” (33:11), even Moses must be shielded from seeing God’s face directly (33:20–23) and the consequent radiance of Moses’ face necessitates a

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216 Mark Zvi Brettler, “The Many Faces of God in Exodus 19,” in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, ed. Alice Ogden Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky, SBLSymS 8 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 364–66, overdraws the contrast between the revelatory and protective function of the cloud as mentioned in 19:9 and the fear-inspiring storm-cloud of 19:16, arguing that the varied theophanic phenomena in ch. 19 are mutually exclusive “faces of God,” suggesting a complex pre-history for the present text. It is in no way implausible, however, that Yahweh’s descent upon the mountain is portrayed as an overwhelming event within which the dark, theophanic cloud can certainly fulfill multiple functions, and in which the cloud, lightning, fire, and smoke imagery contribute to a single overall picture. The narrative effect is to convey that the event transcends description under analogy to any single natural phenomenon. Gregory C. Chirichigno, “The Narrative Structure of Exodus 19–24,” *Bib* 68 (1987): 468, describes a concentric pattern in the recounting of these theophanic elements in Exod 19, with thunder and lightning (v. 16b) corresponding to fire (v. 18a) and with thick cloud (v. 16c) corresponding to smoke (v. 18b)—and all these a part of a larger chiastic structure in 19:16–19.
veil before the people (34:30–35).

Dwelling with the people in the tabernacle, enthroned above the ark in the holy of holies, Yahweh’s presence is hidden behind both veil (26:31–33; 40:2–3) and cloud (40:34–38; cf. Lev 16:13). At its initial erection and consecration, not even Moses can enter the tabernacle because of the cloud (40:35). Maier notes: “The pillar of cloud, the Mount Sinai cloud, and … the cloud above the ark of the covenant, both revealed and concealed God…. These three clouds conveyed the reality of the immanence and transcendence of God, that is, his nearness to, and distance from, the Israelites.”

Thus, while fire, cloud, and veil reflect the theme of Yahweh’s coming near and revealing himself to the sons of Israel, they paradoxically stress Yahweh’s continuing inaccessibility and hiddenness.

**7.7.1.c. Yahweh’s Statements**

A number of Yahweh’s statements contribute directly to this theme. In Exod 3:14 and 33:19, two key passages closely related by their similar construction, Yahweh asserts his divine freedom and inscrutability with particular force:

“I will be whom I will be.” (3:14a).

איהיה אשר איהיה

I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will be merciful to whom I will be merciful (33:19b).

ותנת אתי ואתי רחמתי אתתי ואתי רחמתי

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Lundbom examines the function of this *idem per idem* rhetorical formula throughout the OT, and especially here in Exod 3:14 and 33:19. He concludes that it consistently leaves certain questions willfully unanswered:

> When the *idem per idem* terminates debate there is always tension, because the answer it gives will be perceived at the same time as a non-answer. Anyone who has been on the receiving end of an *idem per idem* used in this manner will attest to the fact that this is more than just an impression. Theologically it is important that we preserve this tension lest the dynamic quality of biblical revelation be destroyed. God reveals himself while at the same time remaining hidden.

While some commentators read God’s declaration of his name to Moses at the bush as a straightforward rebuff and refusal to answer, the narrative presents Yahweh at this point in the encounter as awesome, not irked. The formulation אֲהֵיהָ אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה, “I will be whom I will be” (3:14), echoes Yahweh’s preceding promiseךְ אֲהֵיהָ עַם, “I will be with you” (3:12), and directs the expectation of Moses (and the people, and the reader) forward to the redeeming and revealing events of the narrative about to unfold. G. Henton Davies captures this sense by a paraphrase: “I am what you will discover me to be.” Commenting on the “indefinite sense” of Exod 3:14, den Hertog writes: “In this context the indefinite effect of the construction is realized as indefiniteness in relation to the people’s expectations.” Likewise, Feldmeier and Spieckermann stress that “the interpretation of the name YHWH [in Exod 3:14ff] protects God’s sovereignty from any importune speculation while simultaneously announcing nothing other than God’s

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221 The narrative does not explicitly indicate any impatience on the part of Yahweh until Exod 4:14, when “the anger of Yahweh burned against Moses” at his bare refusal to go, even after multiple divine assurances and promises.

222 Childs, *Exodus*, 76, writes, “God announces that his intentions will be revealed in his future acts, which he now refuses to explain.”


saving attention to his people.” Parke-Taylor rejects interpretations of Yahweh’s answer as “evasive,” but he acknowledges: “The element of the numinous and the mysterious is present. Yahweh is not subject to precise and limiting definitions. There is a hiddenness, an inscrutability, in the deity who addresses Moses.” Thus, Yahweh’s strange “‘איה” (“I will be”) articulation of the divine name conceals even as it reveals: the name “asserts the transcendental and hidden nature of this deity, although the name is manifest and made known by God himself.” Yet the future orientation and the invitation to call upon “Yahweh” creates anticipation that there will be movement in the coming narrative toward a greater manifestation and accessibility. In this sense, “divine freedom is not a qualification of the Lord’s responsiveness to his people but rather the reason for it.”

Yahweh utters a second idem per idem in Exod 33:19, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, etc.” Robert Miller describes this as “a clear imitation of the revelation of the divine name in 3:14, ‘איה ‘אשר ‘איה ... tying ‘grace-giving’ to Yahweh’s very being.” The idem per idem statement in 33:19 anticipates the self-proclamation of 34:6–7: “I will be gracious (חנן) to whom I will be gracious, and I will be merciful (רחם) to whom I will be merciful” (33:19) corresponds to “Yahweh, Yahweh, a merciful (רחם) and gracious (חנן) God” (34:6).

While the idem per idem expression in Exod 3:14 anticipates the imminent revelation of

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226 Parke-Taylor, Yahweh: The Divine Name, 56.
228 Andrea Dalton Saner, “‘YHWH Is a Warrior’ Reevaluated,” in Struggles for Shalom: Peace and Violence across the Testaments, ed. Laura L. Brenneman and Brad D. Schantz (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 42. She explains: “The movement from verse 14 to verse 15 is one from divine freedom to manifestation, from hiddenness to accessibility. The God who is known as subject can nevertheless be called on; yet calling on this God ought never become manipulation or conjuring, as it is contingent on God’s will.”
Yahweh’s character in the acts of deliverance to follow, the *idem per idem* expression in Exod 33:19 serves a different function: it signals that even in the profound proclamation of the divine name in Exod 34:6–7—the apogee of Yahweh’s self-disclosure—strong notes of freedom, hiddenness, and mystery will remain. Yes, Yahweh will declare sublime truths about his own essential character as he passes by Moses, but even as he proclaims his profound mercy, set alongside his just punishment, the *idem per idem* expression in 33:19 declares divine freedom and preempts human presumption and manipulation. To paraphrase 33:19, Yahweh will indeed make his goodness pass before Moses and will proclaim his essential name and character, and his essential self will be revealed as overwhelming in divine mercy and grace, and yet, to be sure, he will exercise this overwhelming grace and mercy in complete freedom and in ways that may surpass human scrutiny—and in ways that humans cannot dictate or elicit by their own piety or performance. “It depends entirely upon Yahweh himself as to who is the recipient of his grace.”

Statements of Yahweh which precede and which follow 33:19 strongly support this reading. At the close of ch. 32, Yahweh asserts divine freedom in the timing of punishment, using a formula closely related to the *idem per idem* of 3:14 and 33:19: “But on the day when I visit, I will visit their sin in punishment against them” (32:34).

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230 See extensive defense of this claim above, §2.1.2.

231 It is interesting to compare the shift in meaning from the MT to the Vulgate on this point. Karla R. Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue: Exodus 32–34 in Post-Biblical Literature*, StBibLit 61 (New York: Lang, 2004), 62, notes the Vulgate use of four verbs in Exod 33:19 to give variety to the repetition of two verbs in the MT: *et miserebor cui voluero et clemens ero in quem mihi placuerit*, which Suomala renders, “I will be compassionate to those whom I desire and will be merciful to those who please me.” She notes, “Not only does the Vulg vary word choice, it leaves open the possibility that God can be merciful to those who have done something to please God. The MT does not indicate any sort of action on the part of the people” (author’s emphasis). On this point, see John Philip Koehler, August Pieper, and John Schaller, *Wauwatosa Theology*, ed. Curtis A. Jahn, 3 vols. (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2000), 2:480: “Only One can be truly gracious, he who is alone exalted, almighty, absolutely independent, who needs to seek no one’s favor or to fear anyone else, from whom grace flows forth out of unselfishness, out of pure goodness, love, and mercy of His heart.”

Immediately following 33:19, Yahweh announces how he will appear to Moses: “You cannot see my face, for mankind cannot see my face and then live…. Thus, you will see my back, but my face must not be seen” (33:20, 23). Regarding this, Boda notes, “Yahweh makes it clear that there are limits for human access to the divine character. Here we see how God discloses, and yet there remains part of God’s character that lies beyond mere mortal comprehension.” When the moment of theophany arrives, true to his promise Yahweh descends (ירד) upon the mountain, presents himself (יצב), and passes by (עבר) before Moses’ face—yet all this he does “in the cloud” (בענן, 34:4–5), again “denoting the paradox of presence hidden from view.” As Moberly notes:

The coming divine self-proclamation is thus linked with the partial and restricted nature of what Moses will be able to see. Thus the fullest account of the name and nature of God in the whole Bible (Exod 34:6–7) is preceded by an emphasis upon the limitation of what the privileged recipient is able to receive…. This dynamic preserves the true nature of knowing God, for such knowing rules out both complacent or arrogant over-confidence (‘we know all there is to know about God’) and disheartened ignorance or complacent agnosticism (‘we do not, and cannot, know God’).

Not only is Yahweh’s name-speech in Exod 34:6–7 preceded by strong notes of divine inscrutability, but the name-speech here contains its own notes of tension and paradox. Three features, in particular, contribute to this. First, Yahweh describes himself as doing seemingly opposite things in response to transgression: forgiving iniquity (נשׂא עון, 34:7a) and visiting iniquity in punishment (פקד עון...על, 34:7b). As Brueggemann observes, “God … deal[s] with violators of covenant in two very different ways that cannot be logically or in practice

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harmonized. Moreover, the formula itself gives no hint of how to work out this contradiction.”

Second, this visitation for fathers’ sins is described as “against sons and sons of sons, against third and fourth generations.” As discussed at length in this study, this visiting-formula has elicited a great many contradictory explanations, even prompting Propp to concede, “Just what Yahweh intends [by this phrase] in Exodus is unclear.”

Third, the explanatory qualifiers “with respect to those who hate/love me” from the parallel passage in Exod 20:5–6 are dropped in 34:6–7, which not only preserves the unmerited nature of Yahweh’s lovingkindness and forgiveness in this context, but also imbues the formula with a greater sense of mystrium divinum.

The Exodus tension between Yahweh’s increasing self-revelation and his continuing hiddenness thus comes to a head in Exod 32–34, a scene juxtaposing Yahweh’s wrath and mercy. Here he proclaims himself to be fundamentally merciful: “abounding in faithful lovingkindness” (בּוְחֶסְדֵּי אֲדֻמָּת). He is not abounding in wrath. Yet both in showing mercy


238 Leonard Rost, “Die Schuld der Väter,” in Studien zum Alten Testament, BWANT 6/1 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1974), 67, interprets the qualifying phrases “with respect to those who hate/love me” in Exod 20:5–6 as restricting God, subjecting him to human laws of accounting and retribution, and domesticating the sense of mystrium divinum created by the juxtaposition of God’s forgiving grace and punishing judgment in Exod 34. Rost reads Exod 20:5–6 as “eine jüngere Entwicklung” of the more original Exod 34:6–7 formula—a source-critical explanation which reverses the narrative sequence. Still, Rost’s comparison highlights the accent on divine freedom and inscrutability created by the omission of the explanatory qualifiers in Exod 34:6–7.

(33:19) and in exercising his prerogative to punish (32:34), Yahweh claims freedom.240 As Raitt observes:

By the covenant the people do not own [Yahweh]. He owns them. The Sinai Covenant does not harness his actions to the point of predictability; God’s right to express unmerited love is the only thing strong enough to counterbalance God’s right to punish covenant violations…. [Yet] forgiveness is not part of the Sinai structure. It is never guaranteed. Nothing locks God into forgiving or not forgiving. God never forgives in any way but as a free decision.241

Exodus “leaves open the freedom of Yahweh to be merciful as he chooses in a way that cannot be presumed upon … [and] shows that the experience of divine wrath in all its seriousness is a real possibility for Israel.”242 The theme of divine hiddenness and freedom serves to preclude the temptation of Israel, in the face of Yahweh’s massive mercy, to “tone down the primacy of command—Israel in covenant must trust itself to the terrible freedom of the God who will be obeyed.”243 Kessler’s description of the function of Exod 34:7b hits the nail on the head:

Wonderfully, forgiveness is possible, yet toying with Yahweh will have disastrous consequences. Divine forgiveness cannot be presumed upon in cavalier fashion, and sin should be avoided at all costs. That said, the precise relationship between sin and its consequences cannot be reduced to a formula, but is entirely dependent on the divine will (cf. Exod. 33:19).244

Therefore, even Moses, when addressing the people, speaks with humility regarding the prospect of divine forgiveness: “As for you, you have sinned a great sin. But now I will go up to Yahweh;

240 Lundbom, Biblical Rhetoric, 97–98, counters the objection that Yahweh’s idem per idem rhetoric is immoral because it resorts to “irrationality” by observing that in both Exod 3 and 33, God is acting “in a gracious capacity.” He suggests that if God had said “I will judge whomever I will judge” that this would be “capricious, and would tend to undermine any faith and trust we might have in him.” He catalogs a number of OT and NT passages in which “God does indeed act irrationally—if we may use that term—in the dispensation of his grace.” In my view, Lundbom is correct to note that Yahweh’s mercy is, perhaps, “irrational” but that his punishment is not. On the other hand, he overlooks the “inscrutability” which the Exodus narrative ascribes to Yahweh’s just punishment, especially the divine freedom in the timing of punishment: “on the day when I visit, I will visit their sin” (Exod 32:34).


242 Moberly, Mountain of God, 86–87.


244 John Kessler, Old Testament Theology: Divine Call and Human Response (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 259–60n146 (my emphasis).
perhaps (Perhaps) I can make atonement for your sin” (32:30). Even so, when addressing God, especially after the divine self-disclosure of Exod 34:6–7, he petitions for forgiveness directly and boldly (34:9). Yahweh is free—and mystery remains—but his enormous mercy stands as a sure basis for hope and restoration.

7.7.2. The Theme of Yahweh’s Hiddenness/Freedom and the Visiting Phrase

Yahweh’s abiding hiddenness in Exodus is directly relevant for understanding the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 and 34:7. When these passages are approached as utterances of the God who conceals even as he reveals himself, this shapes the interpreter’s expectations and goals. To invoke again the most salient observations of Raitt and Kessler just cited, “the Sinai Covenant does not harness [Yahweh’s] actions to the point of predictability,” and “the precise relationship between sin and its consequences cannot be reduced to a formula, but is entirely dependent on the divine will.”

An early frustration in the pursuit of the present project was the difficulty of shoehorning the visiting phrase into a single, defined transgenerational dynamic under which Yahweh’s actions in the Exodus narrative, and the broader OT, would neatly cohere. An original goal was, indeed, to reduce the utterance to a precise summarizing formula whose predictive accuracy could be judged by subsequent actions of Yahweh. Yet a pan-canonical investigation of Yahweh’s judgments yielded no single, consistent manner of Yahweh executing this forewarned transgenerational punishment. Such an approach accomplished little in adjudicating the widely diverging interpretations present in the scholarly literature—indeed, it seemed to justify a multiplicity of equally defensible understandings.

It would seem that much of the scholarly discussion regarding Exod 20:5 and 34:7 has clouded the narrative meaning and function of the visiting phrase by “ignoring the cloud,” so to speak—ignoring, that is, the limit of intended preciseness suggested by the narrative itself. The
God who utters this open-ended expression speaks, after all, from the midst of cloud and thick darkness, and his words must be weighed with this recognition, especially words which touch up against the crux of divine mercy and punishment, regarding which Yahweh has claimed particular freedom and sole prerogative (32:34; 33:19).

Appropriate attention to the theme of Yahweh’s hiddenness in Exodus offers an important caution and corrective for interpreters of the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 and 34:7. It calls into question proposals of a single explanatory framework for precisely how Yahweh’s transgenerational visitation of iniquity will and must work. Examples include, among several others, the common assertion that the phrase envisions the simultaneous destruction of an entire household (three or four generations), that it refers to Yahweh “examining” later generations to see if they walk in the iniquity of their fathers and then taking appropriate action, or that it refers to children sharing the burden of punishment with their parents only as long as the parents live. Due consideration of the hiddenness theme in Exodus also resists proposals which depend upon a precise understanding of the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers in punishment against sons” in 34:7 so that it stands neatly at one end of the spectrum in an evolutionary progression of Israel’s conceptions of divine justice, from wholly corporate and transgenerational to exclusively individual. While interpreters have leaned on various textual factors to provide a hermeneutical key to a precise understanding of the visiting phrase, the theme of Yahweh’s hiddenness and freedom may itself be regarded as a hermeneutical key, serving to maintain the broad and open-ended quality of the visiting phrase.

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245 As happens, for example, with Achan and his family in Josh 7.


If one overarching goal of Yahweh’s self-revelation is to reveal the limitations of human perception and to discourage human presumption in the face of divine mercy, then the visiting phrase is likely not presented as a precise formula by which his mercy and judgment can be predicted and by which his future actions will be dictated or curtailed. There is a certain open-endedness to the visiting phrase which is best left open. This is particularly true of the timing of Yahweh’s punitive visitation (cf. Exo 32:34). The rhetorical goals of the transgenerational expression in 20:5 and 34:7, which will be explored below, do not necessarily include informing Israel regarding the precise, mechanical operations of divine justice. In fact, in view of the major Exodus theme of divine inscrutability, the opacity of the visiting phrase may serve to engender in the sons of Israel a recognition that their knowledge of Yahweh has limits, that they know only what he has revealed, and that, as the incomparable God and redeemer of Israel, he bears radical authority and unique prerogatives. In employing the visiting phrase, Yahweh raises some questions for which neither he nor the Exodus narrator provides definitive answers. In particular, the phrase expresses and preserves the sole prerogative of Yahweh in determining the timing of judgment upon sin and in determining the terms and extent of divine mercy.

At the same time, of course, our phrase in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 is a part of meaningful, self-revealing utterances of Yahweh, who desires to be known. Though Yahweh is “clouded” on both of these occasions (Exod 19:9; 34:5), he does not sit in silence, nor does he speak in gibberish or some heavenly tongue. Thus, while the visiting phrase participates in and contributes to a sense of Yahweh’s freedom and inscrutability, the claims which it does make regarding Yahweh’s ways must be fully acknowledged: Yahweh lays claim to transgenerational prerogatives and purposes; he threatens not to leave sin unredressed but to come in visiting punishment; he subordinates his just punishment to his abundant lovingkindness; etc.
7.8. Summary of Narrative Theme Discussion

This chapter has covered a lot of ground in tracing themes in the Exodus narrative relevant to a contextual understanding of the visiting phrase. It will be helpful at this point to concisely review these themes and to draw together their several implications.

7.8.1. Summary: Fathers, Sons, and Generations

A dominant theme throughout Genesis and Exodus is Yahweh’s role as the eternal God who operates in the world with transgenerational purposes and prerogatives, both as the Creator God who blesses human beings with progeny and as the covenant God who promises the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob fruitfulness as a people and blessings in the land throughout their generations. Human beings in general, and the sons of Israel in particular, stand before Yahweh and relate to him as sons or offspring (זרע) of certain fathers through a line of generations.

With this theme in view, a number of implications emerge. First, the visiting phrase can be read as a claim by Yahweh to enduring potency throughout history—his capacity to judge continues from generation to generation. Second, the visiting phrase assumes Yahweh’s role as the Creator who himself brings forth each generation of “sons” through “fathers.” Third, the visiting phrase should be read as describing God’s justice and dealings with humanity not in timeless, abstract, or absolute terms, but rather as concrete decrees, dispositions, and actions which unfold across the history of Israel and the nations. Fourth, especially in connection with his slowness to anger in 34:6, the visiting phrase expresses Yahweh’s prerogative to permit a time of accumulating iniquity, even for generations, before punishing. Fifth, the visiting phrase echoes the narrative dynamics of Yahweh’s transgenerational dealings with Egypt, the Amalekites, and the inhabitants of Canaan, referenced in the surrounding narrative. Sixth, the visiting phrase invokes Yahweh’s promises of generations-long blessing and vocation for Israel which would be squandered if fathers and sons become enslaved again to other gods. Especially
important here is the parallel between Exod 20:5–6 with its warning against transgenerational sanctions for idolatrous fathers upon sons and Exod 20:12 with its promise of (generations-) long life in the land in Exod 20:12 when sons honor their parents, particularly in emulating their devotion to Israel’s God. Therefore, seventh, the visiting phrase both assumes and reinforces the duty of parents to pass on to their children the knowledge and exclusive worship of Yahweh.

7.8.2. Summary: Divine Presence, Divine Agency, and Divine Visitation

The Exodus narrative relates the descent and direct involvement of Yahweh in mighty acts of judgment against Egypt, bringing a period of generations-long impunity to a decisive end and bringing about Israel’s deliverance. Exodus labels this dynamic Yahweh’s “visitation” (פקד, Exod 3:16; 4:31; 13:19; cf. Gen 50:24–25). This weighs heavily against the common assumption that the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 refers to the natural passing of traits, behaviors, circumstances, and consequences from one generation to the next. In Exodus, Yahweh’s threat to “visit” the iniquity of fathers in punishment against sons is not Bible-speak for such natural hereditary results or for the self-unfolding consequences of sin. Rather, Yahweh’s “visiting against” (לַעֲבֹד) refers to his prerogative and penchant to come and punish, even when, and especially when, the created moral order has allowed rebellion against Yahweh to go unchecked and unredressed for some time. This theme is especially prominent in the first half of the Exodus narrative; thus, the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 functions as a cautionary allusion to the divine visitation against Egypt which has just been rehearsed. Israel should heed Yahweh’s demand of exclusive worship lest an Egypt-like visitation-in-punishment should befall them—or their sons.

7.8.3. Summary: Punishment as Lex Talionis

This strong Exodus theme of proportional, appropriate punishment suggests that the transgenerational visitation Yahweh threatens in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 will be justly restrained and measured. That is to say, punishment of iniquity across generations should not be interpreted as a
sanction that is unjustly extended, excessive, or disproportionate to the sin. The theme of *lex talionis* does imply that appropriate divine punishment for sin is warranted and even required:

Yahweh certainly does not leave iniquity unpunished (20:7; 34:7). At the same time, the divine mercy revealed in the golden calf episode, in which Yahweh relents from his talionic decree of bringing רעה upon those who are רע, indicates that our interpretation of the visiting phrase (at least in its reformulation in 34:7) must allow that Yahweh is not bound to *immediately, mechanically, or in every instance* repay evil for evil, eye for eye, etc.

7.8.4. Summary: Punishment as Withdrawal or Reversal of a Divine Gift

In Exodus, the threat of divine judgment is often expressed as the withdrawal of a previous divine blessing or gift, particularly the reversal or “undoing” of Yahweh’s Abrahamic and Sinaitic promises to Israel. This theme strengthens the observation under the “Fathers, Sons, and Generations” theme above that the transgenerational language of the visiting phrase invokes Yahweh’s purposes of generations-long blessing and vocation for Israel which would be squandered if fathers and sons turn aside to idolatry. The vast numbers of the Israelites camped before Sinai testify to the effective blessing of Yahweh in granting children; their apostasy from Yahweh—the Creator God and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—may forfeit and reverse his intended blessing upon subsequent generations.

7.8.5–6. Summary: Corporate Characterization, yet Concern for Individual Justice

In Exodus, the sons of Israel are prominently and predominantly portrayed as a corporate entity—addressed as a unified whole, speaking and acting as a single character, threatened with a shared punishment, spared and forgiven as a whole people. This corporate theme supports reading the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 as threatening Yahweh’s visitation of iniquity against an entire generation of the Israelites (sons) following one or more iniquitous generations (fathers). Running alongside the corporate perspectives of the narrative, however, is the clear
theme of Yahweh’s concern for justice on an individual level, exhibited in limited episodes in the narrative but especially notable in the legal sections. This theme excludes extreme applications of the concept of corporate personality, corporate identity, or corporate responsibility to the visiting phrase, so that the phrase becomes an expression of a supposed ancient social and psychic structure which had no consciousness of individual identity or responsibility. The theme of Yahweh’s concern for individual justice also prevents interpreting Exod 20:5 and 34:7 as portraying the punishment of the innocent as normative or characteristic of Yahweh. This supports reading the qualification “with respect to those who hate me” (לְשׂנֵי) in Exod 20:5 as referring to the punished sons along with their fathers, that is, to the divine punishment of wicked sons in a family line of rebels and idolaters.

7.8.7. Summary: The Hiddenness and Freedom of Yahweh

Even as Yahweh reveals himself, he hides himself. He speaks and acts so that people might come to know him, truly, as Yahweh. Yet, even as spatial barriers remain at the end of the narrative, so also conceptual tensions remain, partially clouded. This is particularly true of the precise relationship between Yahweh’s patient mercy and his just punishment, and of the timing associated with his acts of rescue and judgment. The theme of Yahweh’s hiddenness calls into question proposals for a single, exhaustive explanatory framework for precisely how Yahweh’s transgenerational visitation of iniquity works, and must work. It also resists developmental explanations which place the visitation phrase precisely at one end of an evolutionary spectrum moving from corporate to individual notions of divine justice. In fact, the Exodus theme of Yahweh’s inscrutability may function as a hermeneutical key of sorts, serving to maintain the broad and open-ended quality of the visiting phrase. In this sense, the ambiguity of the visiting phrase may contribute to the overall narrative theme of Yahweh’s ultimate hiddenness. The opacity of the visiting phrase may function, rhetorically, to engender in the sons of Israel a
recognition that their perception of Yahweh has limits, that they know only what he has revealed, and that, as the incomparable God and redeemer of Israel, Yahweh bears radical authority and unique prerogatives.

Seven narrative themes from Exodus have been explored in this chapter, each directly related to the characterization of Yahweh or to his manner of dealing with people. Because the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers in punishment against sons” occurs in two of the most important passages of Yahweh’s self-description within a narrative largely concerned with disclosing who Yahweh is, it makes good sense that the visiting phrase would be interpreted with due attention to these broader themes in the narrative relating to Yahweh’s character and ways, especially those touching on dimensions directly applicable to the language and dynamics of the visiting phrase. Such an approach cannot be dismissed as harmonizing or theodicizing; it is literarily appropriate, legitimate, and indispensable. One may consult any sampling of Exodus commentaries to discover, however, how rarely any such considerations have been brought into the discussion regarding the meaning of Exod 20:5 and 34:7.

This chapter has analyzed the narrative context of the visiting phrase in Exodus on a thematic level. The next chapter will analyze relevant contextual features from a different perspective: the locations of the visiting phrase in relation to the overarching two-part narrative structure of Exodus and along the gradually unfolding plot trajectory of Yahweh’s self-revelation through the story.
CHAPTER EIGHT
NARRATIVE STRUCTURE AND PLOT TRAJECTORY

As a foundation for situating Yahweh’s phrase “visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons” within its narrative-rhetorical context, this chapter analyzes the structure of Exodus as a two-part narrative, divided after chapter 18. This structure is significant for analysis of the narrative and rhetorical function of the visiting phrase because the phrase first appears in Exod 20:5, near the beginning of the narrative’s second movement. Standing at this point, it has a dual function. It is retrospective, summarizing the revelation of the character of Yahweh in the first narrative movement. The phrase in 20:5 is also prospective, establishing a portrait of Yahweh which will contribute toward the narrative conflict of the second movement—a portrait of Yahweh which is given further definition at the climax of the second movement in Exod 34:7.

Following the discussion of narrative structure, this chapter argues for the identification of Yahweh as the protagonist of Exodus and outlines his chief motivations which propel the story’s plot. Making his name known is highlighted as Yahweh’s central overarching motive, but a number of attendant purposes are also enumerated which will likewise inform the rhetorical analysis of Exod 20:2–6 and Exod 34:6–7 in Chapter 9.

The final section of this chapter looks more deeply at the central plotline of Yahweh making his name known. This exposition focuses on six key passages which serve as summary statements of the revelation of the divine character thus far in the narrative: Exod 3:14–15; 6:2–8; 15:1–18; 20:2–6; 29:45–46; and, the culminating passage, 34:6–7. Of particular relevance to this project will be the location and role of 20:2–6 and 34:6–7 in this plot trajectory and in relation to one another.
8.1. A Two-Part Narrative Structure: Exodus 1–18 and 19–40

8.1.1. Exodus as a Two-Part Narrative

The two great narrative arcs of Exodus tell the story of Yahweh, the incomparable God, who seeks to make his name—that is, his character, ways, and power—known. In the first part of the narrative, Yahweh delivers the sons of Israel and punishes Egypt. Faced with Pharaoh as the chief antagonist, Yahweh shows himself to be a God of faithfulness, justice, and incomparable power. In the latter part of the narrative, Yahweh covenants with the sons of Israel as a nation—His special possession—and makes His dwelling in their midst. Faced with a stiff-necked Israel as antagonist, Yahweh shows himself to be a God of holiness as well as compassion, grace, and forgiveness.¹ In the first part, Israel is freed from harsh service under a cruel lord; in the second, Israel is privileged with holy service under a gracious Lord.² While such a two-part structure is commonly recognized,³ it warrants some justification and elaboration.

While arguments can be made for dividing Exodus into two, three, four, or five major

¹ Dale Patrick, The Rendering of God in the Old Testament, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 107, characterizes the entire primary history of the OT as a two-part story (Genesis–Joshua, then Judges–2 Kings) and sees a “condensation” of this story in two-part prophetic passages such as Hos 11:1–2a: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me;” a passage which also nicely “condenses” the two-fold movement of the Exodus narrative itself.

² This two-fold and contrasting service is highlighted by the use of the word עבדה (servitude, service) to describe both the hard and heavy labor demanded by Pharaoh (Exod 1:14; 5:9; 6:9) as well as the holy observances of Israel’s people and priests commanded by Yahweh (e.g. 12:25–26; 13:5; 36:1, 3.5; 38:21; 39:42). The stark contrast between these two situations in the life of the sons of Israel is accent in the Exodus narrative by a number of devices. In the first part of the narrative, Pharaoh responds stubbornly to Yahweh’s demand and increases the burden on the Israelites (gathering their own straw). The taskmasters bark orders—“Complete (כלה) the daily amount of your work”—and beat the Israelite foremen when they cannot “complete” (כלה) their quota of bricks (Exod 5:13–14). Out of the supply from the Egyptian plunder and from willing hearts, however, the Israelites have “more than enough” materials for the “service” (עבדה) of constructing the tabernacle (Exod 36:5; cf. 30:16). So, in the final chapters of Exodus, the narrator reports: “Thus all the service (עבדה) of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished (כלה), and the sons of Israel did according to everything Yahweh had commanded Moses; thus they did it” (39:32). “And so Moses finished (כלה) all the work” (40:33).

³ For example, Christoph Dohmen, Exodus, 2 vols, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2004, 2015), divides the narrative, and his two-volume commentary, into chs 1–18 and 19–40, under the headings “Exodus” and “Sinai.” Stefan Kürie, The Appeal of Exodus: The Characters of God, Moses, and Israel in the Rhetoric of the Book of Exodus, PBM (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2013), 35, speaks of “two areas of antagonism” which drive the plot development: “the confrontation between Yhwh and the Egyptian king” and “the people’s unstable relationship with Yhwh.”
narrative movements, most literary analyses recognize an overarching twofold structure to the book.⁴ Arnold and Beyer describe the thematic shape of the book with the pairings “rescue and relationship” and “deliverance and covenant,” and Fokkelman, similarly, “liberation and covenant.” Stefan Kürle summarizes the “two main aspects of divine activity … in the plot of Exodus” as “deliverance and legislation.” Mark Smith and Christoph Dohmen both split the book by two major locations: Egypt and Sinai. Moberly speaks of Exodus revealing “Yahweh’s power” and then “Yahweh’s mercy.” And Dozeman combines divine qualities with narrative locations, labeling the first part of Exodus “The Power of Yahweh in Egypt,” and the second, “The Presence of Yahweh in the Wilderness.”⁵

A number of programmatic statements within the narrative confirm this fundamental bipartite structure. At Horeb, Yahweh assures Moses, “[a] When you have brought the people out from Egypt, [b] you will worship (عبد) God on this mountain” (3:12). After the initial resistance from Pharaoh, Yahweh reassures Moses: “[a] I will free you from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment, and [b] I will take you for my people and I will be your God” (6:6–7).⁶ Through Moses, Yahweh repeatedly demands of Pharaoh, “[a] Let my

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⁶ Göran Larsson, Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 89, notes that in rabbinic tradition, these four statements from Exod 6:6–7 are associated with the four cups of wine at the Seder meal, each describing Yahweh’s acts of saving his people. While there are indeed four statements, in terms of the Exodus narrative, the first three do not describe separate acts, but jointly refer to Yahweh’s actions in Exod 1–15 (or 1–18), while the final clause (“I will take you for my people and be your God”) refers to Yahweh’s covenant-making and dwelling with Israel in Exod 19–40.
people go, [b] so that they may worship (עבד) me in the wilderness” (7:16; 4:23; 7:26 [Eng 8:1]; 8:16 [Eng 8:20]; 9:1, 13; 10:3; and even Pharaoh and his servants echo this twofold formula in 8:4 [Eng 8:8] and 10:7). When they arrive at Sinai, Yahweh declares, “[a] You have seen what I did to the Egyptians … and [b] I have brought you to myself” (19:4). While giving instructions for the tabernacle, Yahweh states that the people will know that “[a] I am Yahweh their God who brought them out from the land of Egypt [b] in order to dwell in their midst—I am Yahweh their God” (29:46). Each of these two-fold statements supports a division of Exodus into an initial narrative arc of powerful rescue, followed by a second narrative arc which moves toward Yahweh’s merciful covenant relationship and dwelling with Israel.

8.1.2. The Division of Exodus into Chapters 1–18 and 19–40

While there is general agreement regarding its two-fold character, the precise point at which the first movement ends and the second begins is variously located. Propp’s judgment summarizes the current literary consensus: “Exodus is a bipartite book whose center is difficult

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7 The הבדע word group (“worship,” “serve,” “service,” “slaves,” etc.) is prominent in Exodus, and its usage supports a two-part view of Exodus: Israel’s rescue from the harsh servitude (עבדי עבד, 6:9) of Pharaoh is followed by the covenant of Israel’s exclusive service/worship of Yahweh, the latter sometimes resisted by Israel (Exod 14:12; 32:8) but ultimately secured through Yahweh’s mercy (34:9; 39:42). The function of העבד as a key-word in the Exodus narrative is established already in the opening chapter, where in 1:13–14, the “monotonous, drumlike repetition of serve … service … service … service … served, recreates the soul-deadening feeling of slave labor…. Through this … the narrative points to the conflict which will follow. It raises a central question of this epic cycle: which power will Israel serve—the life-giving power of God or the death-bringing power of Pharaoh?” James S. Ackerman, “The Literary Context of the Moses Birth Story (Exodus 1–2),” in Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives, ed. Kenneth R.R. Gros Louis, James S. Ackerman, and Thayer S. Warshaw, BLC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), 83–84. See also Charles Isbell, “Exodus 1–2 in the Context of Exodus 1–14: Story Lines and Key Words,” in Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Narrative, ed. David J. A. Clines, David M. Gunn and Alan J. Hauser, JSOTSup 19 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), 43–45.

8 While “I have brought you to myself” (19:4) refers to the accomplished work of leading the people through the wilderness to the mountain of God, it also introduces the second movement of the narrative, which focuses on covenant relationship and Yahweh’s dwelling in the midst of the people—a total, and not merely geographical, bringing-near of the people and coming-near of Yahweh. Similarly, the programmatic statements that Israel will “worship” Yahweh at the wilderness mountain (3:12; 7:16; etc.), while initially fulfilled in Exod 19 and 24, also describe the story’s second movement in its entirety. Their ultimate fulfillment comes in the completion and setting up of the tabernacle, and its filling by divine glory, in Exod 40.
to determine.”

9 The key pivot point has been identified at ch. 12 or 13 with the initial departure from Egypt, or especially at ch. 15 with the victory song at the sea. Clearly, chs. 14–15 present a watershed moment in the narrative. After this Pharaoh and Egypt no longer threaten Israel (14:13, 28–30), and the extended poetry of the song offers fitting dramatic closure (15:1–12) even as it looks ahead to Sinai, the promised land, and Yahweh’s enduring reign (15:13–18). Others locate the beginning of the second part of the narrative at the meeting with Jethro in ch. 18, with the arrival at Mt. Sinai in ch. 19, or with the utterance of the Decalogue in ch. 20. In my view, the strongest case can be made for viewing chs. 1–18 and 19–40 as the two narrative

9 Propp, Exodus 1–18, 37.


12 Umberto Cassuto, Commentary on Exodus, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 211–12, takes ch. 18 as a prologue to the next narrative section, “The Torah and Its Precepts.” For Cassuto, two main observations justify this. First, the mention of Moses as the mediator of “the statutes of God and his instructions” in 18:16 looks ahead to the giving of the law at Sinai. Second, Cassuto enumerates extensive verbal correspondence between the war with Amalek in ch. 17 and the peaceful reception by Jethro in Midian in ch. 18. This second point, however, while convincing, does not require a narrative separation between chs. 17 and 18. In fact, in my view, it suggests the opposite: this artful juxtaposition strengthens the case that ch. 18 should not be separated from ch. 17.


14 Wilson G. Baroody and William F. Gentrup, “Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy,” in A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible, ed. Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 123–25, label chs. 1–19 as “primary narrative” and chs. 20–40 as “legal material.” William Johnstone, Exodus, 2 vols., SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2014), also divides the narrative (and his commentary) into 1–19 and 20–40, locating the turning point at 20:2, which both recalls the deliverance narrative of the first part and also introduces the laws and covenant of the second part.
arcs within Exodus, with Exod 18 drawing part one to its close and 19:1 introducing a second, distinct movement. A number of observations support such a division.

First, while the narrative slows for an initial summation with the songs in 15:1–21, the following scene in 15:22 is joined with a vav-consecutive imperfect. In fact, every new scene in chs. 15–18 is introduced with vav (15:22, 27; 16:1; 17:1, 8; 18:1, 13). In contrast, the asyndetic construction of Exod 19:1, which begins with neither vav consecutive nor vav conjunctive, suggests “a decisive break from the preceding narrative.”

Second, and perhaps the most weighty point, the emphasis on accomplished deliverance in Exod 18 stands as a fitting conclusion to the first narrative arc, recounting and praising not only Yahweh’s deliverance of Israel out from Egypt, but also from the hardships encountered in the wilderness. While a number of Exodus commentators summarize the two parts of the story as “deliverance” and “covenant,” the deliverance arc is often (and, I would argue, unjustifiably) restricted to Exod 1–15:21, overlooking the continuation of Yahweh’s deliverance in the wilderness chapters and its summative celebration in ch. 18. Here, Moses and Jethro repeatedly refer to Yahweh’s preceding works as “deliverance” (18:4, 8, 9, 10 (2x)), and 18:8 makes it clear that “deliverance” characterizes not only Yahweh’s acts against Egypt, but also his rescue of Israel from the threats faced later in the wilderness: “And Moses recounted to his father-in-law all which Yahweh had done to Pharaoh and to Egypt for Israel’s sake, all the hardship which had found them along the way (ךְכל־התלאה אשׁר מצאתם בדרוֹק), and [how] Yahweh had delivered them.” This emphasis on deliverance in ch. 18 may also account for the narrator’s deferral of the

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15 Currid, Study Commentary on Exodus, 2:13–14.

16 An example of restricting the deliverance theme to Exod 1–15 is Fokkelman, “Exodus,” 56. In contrast, Eugene E. Carpenter, “Exodus 18: Its Structure, Style, Motifs,” in A Biblical Itinerary: In Search of Method, Form and Content, ed. E. E. Carpenter, JSOTSup 240 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1997), 91, argues, “Exodus 18 is perhaps the major transitional chapter in the book of Exodus, summarizing the past events (Exod. 1–17) and preparing for the coming revelations at Sinai (Exod. 19–40). To be sure, there are other transitional passages (e.g., 1:1–7; 15:22–24). But ch. 18 seems to be the major hinge in the structure of the total composition.”
name of Moses’ second son, Eliezer, until this point in the narrative. While Gershom’s name is given and explained in both 2:22 and 18:3, only in ch. 18 does the reader learn: “And the name of the other was Eliezer, for he had said, the God of my father was my help, and he delivered (נחל) me from the sword of Pharaoh” (18:4).

Third, and closely related, the deliverance characterizing the Exod 1–18 narrative arc takes place in the face of external threats: bitter slavery and oppression, infanticide, military foes (Egypt and later Amalek), and life-threatening hunger and thirst in the wilderness. In contrast, the tension which drives the plot in the Exod 19–40 narrative arises from an internal threat: the rebellious, stiff-necked character of the sons of Israel, requiring a “deeper liberation and renewal.” Larsson describes the dynamic well: “The path toward liberation is paved with dangers and temptations. The liberated people immediately face challenges. One comes from outside: Pharaoh and his army. The second one is already there in their midst: doubt, distrust, and disbelief. The external enemies will change; the internal ones remain the same.”

Fourth, there is a chiastic structure to the external threats encountered by Israel in chs. 14–

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17 As Moses takes leave of Jethro to return to Egypt in ch. 4, the reader learns that Moses already has more than one son: “So Moses took his wife and sons and mounted them on a donkey” (Exod 4:20). But while Moses’ naming of Gershom is explained in both ch. 2 and 18 (“I have been a sojourner in a foreign land,” Exod 2:22; 18:3), the narrator discloses the name of the second son, as a flashback, only in the deliverance-themed encounter with Jethro here in ch. 18. Cornelis Houtman, Exodus, trans. Sierd Woudstra, HCOT, 4 vols. (Leuven: Peeters, 1993–2002), 2:405, suggests that this flashback serves the reader as a “prelude” to the events Jethro had heard of in 18:1. Houtman also discusses a number of attempts to explain the fact that Moses’ second son is not mentioned until this point in the narrative, including the proposal that it was only at this point that Moses gave him the name Eliezer, in light of the Exodus deliverance. This understanding, however, ignores the narrative sequence in ch. 18, in which the names of the sons are mentioned prior to Jethro (and Zipporah and the two sons) meeting with Moses. The act of naming, to which 18:4 flashes back, must have taken place prior to ch. 4. The “deliverance from the sword of Pharaoh” (18:4) which inspired Eliezer’s name fits easily in the context of chs. 1–4 (see esp. 2:15 and 4:19), yet its additional significance after the exodus events makes the deferral of Eliezer’s name and its explanation to ch. 18literally effective.

18 Larsson, Bound for Freedom, 85. See also Patrick, Rendering of God, 110. The observation of Patrick about the overall narrative of the Old Testament holds true for the Exodus narrative as well: “The final battleground is the human heart, and in particular, the heart of God’s own people.” In confronting the inner threat of Israel’s sin and apostasy, not merely Yahweh’s giving of Sinai commandments and just ordinances (משׁפטים) but especially his provision of priestly mediation and atonement, Moses’ intercession, and divine forgiveness become essential.

19 Larsson, Bound for Freedom, 98–99.
17, and from which Israel required deliverance, beginning with the onslaught of Egypt’s chariots and horsemen and concluding with the battle against Amalek.20

14:1–15:21 Death by Egypt’s army
15:22–27 Death by thirst
16:1–35 Death by hunger
17:1–7 Death by thirst
17:8–16 Death by Amalek’s army

This concentric pattern indicates that the wilderness episodes of 15:22–17:16 are bound more closely to chs. 1–15 than to chs. 19–40, consistent with a bipartite narrative division after ch. 18.21

Fifth, in the face of such threats, the sons of Israel make accusation against Moses so consistently—suspecting that he will bring about their death—that their complaint emerges as a refrain, intentionally highlighted by the narrator. In Moses’ initial scene as a grown man, one of the quarreling Hebrews exclaims, “Are you planning to slay me just as you slayed the Egyptian?” (2:14) After Moses and Aaron first confront Pharaoh and he increases the burdens of the people, the Israelite elders turn on them: “You have made us a foul odor to Pharaoh and his servants, so that you have put a sword in their hand to slay us” (5:21). When apparently trapped by the Egyptian army at the sea (14:11) and later when hungering (16:3), the sons of Israel accuse Moses of bringing them out into the wilderness to die. And when there is no water, they again complain: “Why did you bring us up from Egypt in order to kill me and my children and

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20 Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:370, observes, “Amalek’s attack is tantamount to a rebirth, outside Egypt, of Pharaoh, YHWH’s adversary.” Kürle, *Appeal of Exodus*, 180, suggests a very similar chiastic structure to these episodes.

21 Bernard P. Robinson, “Israel and Amalek: The Context of Exodus 17:8–16,” *JSOT* 32 (1985): 16–17, provides evidence for extending this close relationship to include ch. 18. Robinson traces shared keywords and themes (esp. Moses’ reliance upon others for help) which unite the Amalekite episode in Exod 17:8–16 with the immediately preceding episodes of 17:1–7 (Massah and Meribah) and 18:1–17 (Jethro), and he concludes, “The [Exod 17 and 18] narratives are clearly meant to hang together and to be read together.”
my livestock with thirst?” (17:3)²² The expanse of this refrain through plague, sea, and wilderness episodes further unifies chapter 1–18 as a single narrative movement.

Sixth, the narrator introduces Moses as a grown man through two scenes in ch. 2 which foreshadow, summarize, and thus unify the great events of Exod 1–18. In 2:11–12, Moses “goes out” (יצע), “sees” (ראה), and “strikes” (נכה) the Egyptian man who is striking (נכה). In 2:15–19, having fled to Midian, Moses rescues the daughters of Jethro “from the hand of the shepherds and even drew water for [them] and watered the flock.” In parallel fashion, Yahweh sees the plight of Israel (ראה, 2:25; 3:7) and through Moses he “strikes” Egypt (נכה, 3:20; 7:17; 12:12–13; etc.) which has been “striking” Israel (נכה, 5:14–16) and leads the people out (יצע, 3:10–12; 12:17; etc.). This is followed by acts of protection and provision in the wilderness. In particular, having journeyed to the Rehidim, Yahweh through Moses provides water to sustain the people and their children and their livestock (17:3) and rescues them there from the hostile Amalekites (17:8).²³

Seventh, even if one follows a spatial or geographic division of the narrative into “Egypt” and “Sinai,” or even if one divides the narrative by the primary conflicts between “Yahweh and Pharaoh” and “Yahweh and Israel,” the 1–18 and 19–40 structure stands. While the decimation of the Egyptian host at the sea in chs. 14–15 removes Pharaoh as a direct threat to the sons of Israel, a certain “Egyptian orientation” carries on in the narrative through chs. 16–18. When the people grumble in the wilderness in 16:3 and 17:3, their complaints echo that of 14:11–12: they would have been better off if Moses had just left them alone in Egypt. This undercurrent of

²² In this final accusation, although it is “the people” (עם) who grumble and bring the charge against Moses, their complaint rhetorically shifts from first person plural to singular voice, heightening the poignancy of their plea in the reader’s ears, and resonating with the first person language of the initial accusation in Exod 2:14.

²³ Gerald L. Mattingly, “Amalek,” ABD 1:169–70, describes the Amalekites as a nomadic or seminomadic people. While the Exodus text gives no specific rationale for their unprovoked attack on Israel at Rehidim, Mattingly speculates, “Perhaps the Amalekites thought the Hebrews represented competition for water”—a comment that invites association with the scene of Jethro’s daughters, Moses, and the shepherds in Exod 2. The extensive livestock of the Amalekites is noted elsewhere in the OT, for example 1 Sam 15:7–9.
ambivalence or even skepticism regarding the departure from Egypt is only removed in ch. 18, with Jethro’s ringing approbation of Yahweh’s work in bringing the people out from under the hand of the Egyptians. While 112 of the 115 occurrences of “Pharaoh” in Exodus are in chs. 1–15, the story’s final three references to Pharaoh come in the Moses-Jethro discourse of ch. 18 (vv. 4, 8, 10). In fact, Jethro’s exclamation, “Now I know that Yahweh is greater than all gods” (18:11), balances the Pharaoh’s previous rebuff, “Who is Yahweh, that I should obey his voice by letting Israel go? I do not know Yahweh, and I will not let Israel go” (5:2). Kürle observes, “The contrast between the stubborn, ignorant and less than helpful Egyptian monarch and this Midianite priest exemplifies the way non-Israelite people should respond to Yhwh’s representatives.”

Eighth, it is only here in Jethro’s confession that the dramatic conflict between the hand of Yahweh and the hand of Pharaoh finds its summary conclusion. At the burning bush, Yahweh had announced, “I have come down to deliver them from the hand of the Egyptians” (3:8). Eleven times the plague narratives then mention Yahweh’s mighty hand (3:19; 6:1; 13:3, 9, 14, 16) or Yahweh stretching out his hand (3:20; 7:4, 5; 9:3, 15). At the sea, “Israel saw the great hand (יְדוּ הָבְלָד) which Yahweh used against Egypt” (14:31). So Moses praises the triumph of Yahweh’s right hand (15:6, 12) over the Pharaoh who had boasted, “I will pursue, I will

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25 Kürle, Appeal of Exodus, 59. As a priest of Midian, Jethro’s acknowledgement of Yahweh and his welcoming of Israel stand in contrast also to the hostile confrontation by the Amalekites in the immediately preceding scene (Exod 17:8–16), since Amalekites and Midianites are closely related and oft-associated people groups (cf. Judg 6:3, 33; 7:12).

26 David Rolph Seely, “The Image of the Hand of God in the Book of Exodus,” in God’s Word for Our World, Volume 1: Biblical Studies in Honor of Simon John de Vries, ed. J. Harold Ellens et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 53. I am dependent on Seely for this series of observations about the “hand of God” theme in Exodus. Seely’s discussion folds in references to Yahweh’s arm (יָדוֹ), hand (יָד), right hand (יָדוֹן), and finger (יָדוֹ), but my remarks focus more narrowly on texts with “hand” and “right hand.”
overtake…, my hand will bring them to ruin” (15:9). Finally, here in ch. 18, following the narrator’s comment in v. 9 regarding Jethro’s joy that Yahweh “had delivered them from the hand of Egypt,” Jethro declares, “Blessed be Yahweh who has delivered you from the hand of the Egyptians and from the hand of Pharaoh” (18:10)—a threefold repetition of “hand” which summarizes and concludes this Exod 1–18 theme.

Ninth, as Olson observes, the time and geographical references at the beginning of ch. 19 represent a key turning point:

After these wilderness events, Exodus 19:1 clearly begins a new literary unit with time and place indicators: “On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai.” In the context of the larger Exodus narrative, this arrival at Sinai is not just another stage in the wilderness journey like the rest. Israel has at last come to ‘the mountain’ where God dwells, the mountain to which God had promised to bring Moses and the Israelites after their rescue from Egypt as a “sign” of God’s faithfulness (see Exod 3:12)…. Thus, Exodus 19–20 marks the beginning of the large and central Sinai complex.

The stage-by-stage journeying of Israel, begun in 12:37 and regularly detailed in the following chapters (13:20; 14:15; 15:22; 16:1; 17:1) receives its climactic statement in 19:1–2, reporting that they have arrived at their destination mountain. After 19:2, no reference to journeying appears again in Exodus until the closing scene (40:36, 38).

Tenth, as the narrative turns from stories of deliverance to stories of Yahweh’s commands, covenant, and presence in the camp of Israel, his initial covenant utterances in 19:4–6 and 20:2–6 are both retrospective (summative) as well as prospective (introductory). On this basis, Johnstone divides the book into 1–19 and 20–40:

For reading and understanding the book of Exodus as a whole, these [Ten] Words also provide a good starting point. They stand in Exodus 20 in virtually central place in the book and divine it into two roughly equal parts. Their “Prologue” looks back at the story of the first nineteen chapters, God’s great act of deliverance of Israel from

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crushing slavery in Egypt. The remaining chapters state the response that God expects from Israel as the redeemed community.\textsuperscript{28}

This observation regarding 20:2 is helpful, yet Johnstone overlooks the parallel retrospective-and-prospective function of 19:4–6: “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt and [how] I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. And now, if you will diligently obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you will be my treasured possession,” etc. This transitional function of 19:4–6 further supports the 1–18/19–40 structure of the Exodus narrative.

Eleventh, just as chs. 1–18 share a narrative coherence around the theme of deliverance (the second point above), so also chs. 19–40 cohere around the theme of \textit{Yahweh’s covenant and presence with his people}. The theophanic appearance to Israel in Exod 19–24, with words of the covenant, book of the covenant, and blood of the covenant, remains incomplete without the tabernacle instructions and constructions, the tension between divine presence and the people’s sin, and the theophanic transfer from mountain to tabernacle in chs. 25–40. As Larsson notes, “It is only with the building of the tabernacle that the covenant is sealed and its confirmation finally fulfilled, for it is clear that God’s intention to ‘dwell among them’ (Exod 25:8) will now be demonstrated to the people.” The movement of the glory cloud into the traveling sanctuary is a “compelling sign” that the miraculous giving of Sinai law has “achieved its purpose.”\textsuperscript{29}

And twelfth, the final point, both Exod 1–18 and Exod 19–40 are bracketed by recurring elements, bounding each section by inclusio. In the first narrative movement, note the repetition of scenes in Midian involving Jethro, Zipporah, and Moses’ son(s) in Exod 2:15–22 and Exod 18:1–12.\textsuperscript{30} In ch. 2, the daughters report to Jethro that “an Egyptian delivered (יָדַע) us out of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[28] Johnstone, \textit{Exodus}, 1:1. Also Kürle, \textit{Appeal of Exodus}, 99, notes simply: “Exod 20:2 serves as an introduction to the following law but, also, as rhetorically effective recapitulation of all preceding events.”
\item[29] Larsson, \textit{Bound for Freedom}, 207–8.
\end{footnotes}
hand (יד) of the shepherds,” and Moses is invited to “eat bread” with Jethro’s family (2:19–20).

In ch. 18, Jethro hears and rejoices that Yahweh has “delivered (ברך) Israel out of the hand (יד) of the Egyptians” (18:8–10) and Aaron and the elders of Israel “eat bread” with Jethro before God (18:12).32

In addition, there are extensive verbal connections between the judging scene in 18:13–27 and the challenge posed by the guilty Hebrew man in 2:14. When Moses intervenes with the contending Hebrews in ch. 2, the man retorts: “Who appointed (שים) you as a chief (שר) and a judge (שופט) over us?”33 As the first narrative arc draws to a close, we see Moses sitting from morning until evening to judge (שופט) the people (18:13). Jethro suggests that Moses appoint (שים) others as chiefs (שרים) over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, so that they can judge (שופט) the people with him (18:21–22).34 Fretheim observes an additional tie here: Moses’ intervention in 2:13, “Why are you striking your neighbor (ךָרע)” is echoed by Moses judging

Exod 18.

31 Aelred Cody, “Exodus 18,12: Jethro Accepts a Covenant with the Israelites,” Bib 49 (1968): 161, demonstrates that “eating bread” here is a general idiom for sharing a meal. It likely has the same sense in Exod 2:20, even though there it lacks a prepositional modifier such as “with us.” It makes more sense that Jethro appeals to his daughters to invite Moses in order to “eat bread=share a meal” than simply in order that he may “have something to eat,” as NIV translates 2:20.

32 Brevard S. Childs, The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary (Louisville: Westminster, 1974), 327, speaks in broader terms about the ties between chs. 2 and 18 and the concluding function of the latter: “These chapters . . . perform a simple and straightforward function within the Exodus narrative. Chapter 2 pictures the quiet period of preparation. Moses pastures sheep for forty years in the wilderness. It is the quiet before the storm which erupts in ch. 3 and drives him back to Egypt. Now ch. 18 functions as a concluding scene. Once again the writer pictures an idyllic family scene, reminiscent of the patriarchs in Genesis. Not yet is there any hint of the momentous event of Sinai which lies just ahead. Just for a moment the writer pauses in the story to look backward and rejoice.”

33 Rolf Rendtorff, “Some Reflections on the Canonical Moses: Moses and Abraham,” in A Biblical Itinerary: In Search of Method, Form, and Content (Essays in Honor of George W. Coats), ed. Eugene E. Carpenter, JSOTS Sup 240 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 13, “At this point [in Exod 2:14] it is just a rhetorical question that has to be answered by ‘No one did.’ But later on we learn that God did exactly that: He made Moses a judge over his people (18.13–27).”

34 Keith Bodner, An Ark on the Nile: The Beginning of the Book of Exodus (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 177, observes: “The foreign priest of Midian becomes an ironic foil himself to the recalcitrant Israelites, represented by the brawler whom Moses encounters in Exod 2:13–14. One of the prime reasons Moses has to flee from Egypt is because he is sarcastically asked, ‘who made you a judge (שופט),’ only to take refuge with the priest of Midian, who later offers great help when Moses is judging (שופט) the Israelites in Exod 18:13–26.”
“between a man and his neighbor” (בין אישׁ ובין רעהו) in 18:16.35 Even Moses’ fearful realization that “surely the thing (דבר) has become known” (2:14) resonates with Exod 18:13–27, where Jethro and Moses employ the noun דבר (“word, matter, legal case”) ten times in their conversation.36 Viewing these elements more broadly, a double inclusio can be seen between Exod 2 and 18:

Exod 2:13–14: Who appointed Moses chief and judge of cases between neighbors?

Exod 2:15–22 – Midian, Jethro, Zipporah, son; deliverance report; bread.

Exod 18:1–12 – Midian, Jethro, Zipporah, sons; deliverance report; bread.

Exod 18:13–27 – Moses judges cases between neighbors; appoints chiefs, judges.

The second arc of the Exodus story is also bounded by recurring elements: there are numerous points of correspondence between the theophany on the mountain in ch. 19 and the theophany in the newly erected tabernacle in 40:34–38. These are most readily noted by working backwards from Exod 40:38, the final verse of the narrative: “For the cloud (ענן, cf. 19:9, 16) of Yahweh was over the tabernacle by day, and there was fire (שׁא, cf. 19:18) in it by night, in the sight of (לעיני, cf. 19:11) the whole house of Israel (בית ישׂראל, cf. 19:3) throughout all their journeys (מסעים, cf. 19:2).” It is notable that nowhere else in Exod 19–40 are the people referred to as the house of Jacob/Israel,37 other than here in 19:3 and 40:38. Similarly, the verb “journey”

35 Terence E. Fretheim, Exodus, IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 44.

36 Victor H. Matthews, More Than Meets the Ear: Discovering the Hidden Contexts of Old Testament Conversations (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 73, views the prominent repetition of דבר in 18:14–18 as an intentional wordplay, representing “a conscious effort on the part of the storyteller to highlight the judicial nature of this scene.”

37 The expression “the house of Israel/Jacob” occurs three times in Exodus, in 16:31 in addition to its use in 19:3 and 40:38. The default nomenclature for the people throughout the book is “the sons of Israel” (בני ישראל, 122x). Less frequently, the narrative refers to them as “the congregation of Israel” (עדת ישראל, Exod 12:3, 6, 19, 47), “the congregation of the people of Israel” (עדת בני ישראל, Exod 16:1, 2, 9, 10; 17:1; 35:1, 4, 20), or “Israel” (17x). They are often simply called “the/this people” (93x) or “my/your/his people” (27x). However, they are never called “the people of Israel” ( בני ישראל), although the expression “the people of the sons of Israel” (בני בני ישראל) does occur once, in Exod 1:9, where it seems to bridge between the use of בני ישראל (“the sons of Israel”) in reference to the twelve first-generation sons of Jacob in 1:1–6 and the use of בני בני ישראל (“the sons of Israel”) in reference to the vast people-group of Jacob’s descendants through the rest of the narrative (1:12–13; 2:23, 25; etc.).
(חָ֣שַׁם, 19:2) and the noun “journeys” (מְסָעֵ֣ים, 40:38) are the only occurrences of נָסָ֖ע and its derivatives in chs. 19–40. Theophanic fire (שָׁאַר) and the expression “in the sight of” (לְעֵינֵי) occur together in only one other passage in the second narrative arc (24:17) outside of 19:11, 18 and 40:38. Thus, the second narrative movement begins in ch. 19 with the journeying of the house of Jacob to Sinai, where Yahweh comes in cloud and fire in their sight. It closes with the glory of Yahweh settling in cloud and fire upon the tabernacle, in the sight of the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.

For these several reasons, Exodus falls into two major movements: the deliverance narrative in Exod 1–18 and the narrative of covenant and divine presence in Exod 19–40. In the first part, Yahweh prevails in his purposes for Israel in the face of external threats. In the second part, Yahweh prevails in his purposes for Israel in the face of Israel’s own sin and rebellion.³⁸

8.1.3. Exodus 2:11–14 as Proleptic Paradigm

In view of this two-part structure to the Exodus narrative, it is interesting to consider the scene in Exod 2:11–14 as an example of literary prolepsis, anticipating in microcosm the two-fold structure of the events which will follow. A major character’s initial entrance onto the stage is often literarily strategic, introducing ideas which become important for understanding the character and the narrative. Here in 2:11–14 the adult Moses enters the narrative, twice intervening in conflicts:

Now it came about in those days, when Moses had grown up, that he went out to his brothers and looked on their burdens. He saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man, one of his brothers. He looked this way and that, and he saw that there was no one. Then he struck the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. (2:11–12)

³⁸ Fretheim, Exodus, 8, speculating regarding an exilic provenance for Exodus, summarizes the shape of the story in much the same way: “Israel in exile finds herself in straits similar to its forebears in two major respects: (1) captive to outside forces and (2) suffering under just judgment because of its disloyalty to God. It faces a situation not unlike that portrayed in chapters 1–6 and chapters 32–34. The community of faith stands in need of both deliverance and forgiveness.”
And he went out on the second day, and behold: two Hebrew men brawling! So he said to the guilty one, “Why do you strike your neighbor?” And he said, “Who appointed you as a chief or as a judge over us? Are you planning to slay me just like you slayed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and said, “Surely the thing has become known.” (2:13–14)

The verbs associated here with Moses’ debut anticipate the close alliance and overlap between the characters of Moses and Yahweh throughout Exodus: go out ( יצא), see (ראה, 3x), and strike (נכה, 3x). The verb יצא (“go out, bring out”) is central to the story, occasioning the LXX title for the book: Ἔξοδος. It summarizes the chief actions of both Moses and Yahweh in the first narrative arc of the book. The triple use of ראה in this scene, with Moses “seeing” the burdens of his brothers and the blows struck by the Egyptian, will be reprised by Yahweh: “I have surely seen (ראיתי) the affliction of my people…, and I have also seen (קרב ריאתי) the oppression with which the Egyptians have been oppressing them” (3:7, 9; cf. 2:25). The verb נכה is also used three times here, depicting Moses striking an Egyptian who is striking a Hebrew, an episode of lex talionis which will soon be reprised by Yahweh on a much larger scale. Thus, Moses’ action toward the Egyptian man on the first day anticipates Yahweh’s actions toward Egypt in the plagues and the exodus.

Moses’ interaction with the two brawling Israelites on the second day also resonates with later scenes in the narrative, particularly with the repeated episodes of Israel’s skepticism and

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39 Bodner, Ark on the Nile, 121–23, also traces the intertextual significance of these three verbs— יצא, ראה, and נכה—in relation to the surrounding narrative, although in a more haphazard way than is suggested above. He relates יצא (“go out, bring out”) especially to Israel’s eventual going out of Egypt; ראה (“see”) especially to the actions of Moses’ mother and Pharaoh’s daughter in “seeing” Moses in Exod 2:2, 6; and נכה (“strike”) especially to the later acts of Yahweh against Egypt in retaliation for such actions of the Egyptians against Israel.

40 Moses is sent to “bring out” (Hiphil of יצא) the sons of Israel from Egypt (3:10–12; 14:11; 16:3); Yahweh, likewise, “brings out” Israel (6:6–7; 7:4–5; 12:17, 42; 13:9, 14, 16; 16:6, 32; 18:1; 20:2; 29:46; 32:11–12). Yahweh “goes forth” (Qal of יצא) to strike the climactic blow against the firstborn of Egypt (11:4); thereby, Moses and the people “go forth” from the land (11:8; 12:31, 41; 13:4–5, 8; 14:8; 16:1; 19:1; 23:15; 34:18).

41 The root ראה serves as a key word in the narration of the burning bush scene, occurring 9x in Exod 3:2–9 after the near-homonym ראה used in 3:1. It is self-predicated by Yahweh three times in his speech to Moses from the bush in vv. 7–10, including the emphatic pairing of infinitive absolute plus perfect in v. 7: “I have surely seen.”

42 On the verb נכה, “to strike,” as predicated of Egypt and of Yahweh in the narrative, see the more extensive discussion of the Exodus lex talionis theme in §7.3.1 above.
resistance toward Moses’ authority and their constant refrain that Moses’ actions will “kill” them (5:21; 14:11–12; 16:3; 17:3). On this second day, only Hebrews are on stage, and the threat to the well-being of Moses’ brothers is no longer Egyptian but rather Hebrew wickedness (רשׁע, 2:13). Moses’ question to the guilty man indicted him for human mistreatment: “Why are you striking your neighbor (ךָרע)”? The man’s own retort indicted him, albeit proleptically, for rebellion against God and God’s appointed agent: “Who appointed you as a chief or as a judge over us?” The two days of Moses’ first appearance thus anticipate the two great narrative arcs of Exodus: Yahweh’s quest to deliver his people from the oppression of Egypt and from other threats (Exod 1–18) and Yahweh’s quest to rule over and dwell in the midst of stiff-necked Israel (Exod 19–40).44

From this vantage, the Hebrew man’s final question takes on particular significance: “Are you planning to slay (הרג) me just like you slayed (הרג) the Egyptian?” (2:14) This question will reemerge later in the narrative—implicitly, but powerfully—after the golden calf apostasy. Yahweh responds to their idolatry by resolving to destroy Israel: “Now, leave me alone so that my anger may burn and so that I may make an end of them” (32:10). One of Moses’ appeals is: “Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent he brought them out in order to slay (לגר) them in the mountains’?” (32:12) The matter has come to a head: when Israel is revealed to be just as stubborn and rebellious as Pharaoh, will Yahweh slay Israel just like he slayed the Egyptians?45

43 Not only is Moses’ term for the man’s offense—“striking”—the same verb involved in the Egyptian’s offense on the previous day, but also the narrator’s initial description of the men’s struggle with the verb נצה suggests a violent encounter likely ending in death. See Houtman, Exodus, 1:302; Bodner, Ark on the Nile, 130–31.

44 Moberly, Mountain of God, 79, speaks of the “two stages of Yahweh’s self-revelation” represented by Exod 3:14 and 33:19 (along with 34:6–7). Moberly’s description of these “two stages” fits precisely with the dynamics of Moses’ “two days” in Exod 2:11–14. For Moberly, the first stage of the Exodus narrative focuses on “Yahweh’s triumphant acts of deliverance.” In the second stage, following Israel’s “first sin” with the golden calf, “Yahweh’s character is revealed in entirely moral terms, showing how he deals with sin and the need for forgiveness in the life of Israel.”

45 Bodner, Ark on the Nile, 136, likewise relates the “wicked” Hebrew man’s questions in Exod 2:14 to the overall two-fold shape of the narrative, but he focuses on the first question, challenging Moses’ authority: “In my
This question is thus placed proleptically on the lips of a representative Hebrew in ch. 2 as Moses first enters the stage, for it stands at the theological heart of the book of Exodus. Will the God who acts in appropriate *lex talionis* fashion over against hard-hearted Pharaoh likewise repay evil for evil against stiff-necked Israel?

I propose, then, that Exod 2:11–14 functions as a proleptic paradigm for the overall Exodus narrative. The first day anticipates the first narrative arc, with Yahweh’s *lex talionis* judgment upon Egypt to deliver his people. The second day anticipates the subsequent sin and rebellion of Israel against Moses and Yahweh. And it poses a question that will linger and starkly reemerge in ch. 32: will Yahweh deal with stubborn Israel the same way that he dealt with stubborn Pharaoh and Egypt? The tension surrounding this question will be resolved only on the backside of the golden calf rebellion.

Exodus 20:5–6 and 34:6–7, the two passages containing the visiting-phrase, play key roles in heightening and resolving this tension (although it is never completely dissipated). In Exod 20:5–6, God describes himself as visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons with respect to those who hate him, but acting in lovingkindness with respect to those who love him and keep his commandments. He has acted in the first way already in the narrative, in transgenerational punishment against Egypt and against Amalek. As the narrative proceeds, it becomes increasingly apparent that Israel, like Pharaoh, is a stubborn and rebellious people who do not observe Yahweh’s explicit commands. Thus, the prominent language of Exod 20:5–6 fuels the narrative conflict and angst: is Yahweh going to slay Israel just like he did the Egyptians? While the golden calf episode does bring chastisement and even death, the Exodus

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view the guilty Hebrew is an anonymous character who is represented as much more than an individual: to be sure, he has a characterization of his own, but he also represents those voices of criticism frequently heard in the narrative…. The questioning here [in 2:14] presages that the eventual task of liberating Israel has now become doubly difficult, as Moses will be challenged to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, and from themselves as well.”
answer to this question is ultimately no. Yahweh will not treat Israel just like he treated Egypt, even when Israel is shown to be very much like Egypt. This asymmetry in judgment emanates from the mercy, grace, and lovingkindness of Yahweh, expounded by Yahweh himself in Exod 34:6–7.

Thus, in Exod 20:5, the visiting-phase participates in a divine self-revelation which warns regarding Yahweh’s just response to disobedient enemies. In Exod 34:7, the visiting phrase participates in a divine self-revelation which opens up a new possibility of hope—divine compassion, forgiveness, and restoration—for God’s stiff-necked people. The distinct narrative situations of 20:5 and 34:7 will be elaborated further below in the discussion of the plot trajectory of the revelation of Yahweh’s name within Exodus (§8.3). These distinct narrative situations will also inform the analysis in the next chapter of the distinct rhetorical functions of the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 and in 34:7.


Within a two-part division, however, it should also be noted that, while chs. 15–18 stand as a continuation and conclusion of the deliverance movement, they also introduce elements which anticipate themes in chs. 19–40. References to keeping Yahweh’s “statutes” (חקי, 15:25–26; 18:16, 20), “laws” (תורות, 16:4, 28; 18:16, 20), “commandments” (מצות, 15:26; 16:28), and “ordinances” (משׁפטים, 15:25) point ahead to the giving of the law at Sinai in Exod 19–40.66 When

66 Carpenter, “Exodus 18: Its Structure,” 92, suggests that ch. 18 serves as a hinge between the two narrative movements of the book, with 18:1–12 serving as an epilogue to what precedes and 18:13–27 as a prologue to the giving of the law which follows. In his view, the two parts of the Exodus narrative exhibit “two ways of knowing Yahweh that are, indeed, complementary: (1) the knowledge of Yahweh available in and through the event of the exodus itself and its recitation (18:7–8); and (2) the knowledge of Yahweh found in the way (דרך) of Yahweh—his Torah.” Arie C. Leder, “The Coherence of Exodus: Narrative Unity and Meaning,” CTJ 36 (2001): 258–59, treats Exod 15:22–18:27 as the second of three narrative movements (“The Second Conflict: Israel, God, and Complaints in the Desert”), noting the “legal vocabulary clustered at the beginning and ending of the desert pericope which create a frame … within which the entire desert episode takes place and within which it should be read.” Nathan MacDonald, “Anticipation of Horeb: Exodus 17 as Inner-Biblical Commentary,” in Studies on the Text and Versions of the Hebrew Bible in Honour of Robert Gordon, ed. Geoffrey Khan and Diana Lipton (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 7–19.
the sons of Israel repeatedly test Yahweh (17:2, 7), grumble (15:24; 16:2; 17:3), refuse to keep his commandments (16:28), and accuse and disparage Moses (16:3, 7–8; 17:2–4), this sets the stage for their climactic golden calf apostasy in the second movement, and for Yahweh’s ensuing statement regarding their character: “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people” (32:9). When Yahweh responds patiently to their wilderness grumblings, graciously continuing to protect and provide for them, this anticipates his later display of grace, compassion, and forgiveness with his self-description as “slow to anger and abounding in faithful lovingkindness” in 34:5–10. At the same time, Moses’ anger (16:20) and God’s frustration (16:28) in the manna chapter foreshadow God’s self-description as “a jealous God” (20:5) and the responses of anger provoked by Israel’s golden calf apostasy (Yahweh’s anger in 32:10; Moses’ anger in 32:19).

For such reasons, Kürle associates the wilderness chapters with the second of “two areas of antagonism” in the plot of Exodus: “The plot development is driven in the first third of the book by the confrontation between Yhwh and the Egyptian king. The remainder of the book is concerned with the portrayal of Israel in the wilderness and with how the people’s unstable relationship with Yhwh develops.” At the same time, Kürle’s emphasis on two distinct types of divine characterization in Exodus—narrative characterization and legal characterization—fits well with the division into chs. 1–18 and 19–40 for which I am arguing. In fact, Kürle observes that, while in some ways the wilderness chapters “portray Israel as, in effect, assuming the pharaoh’s role as God’s chief adversary,” Israel’s rebellion does not become the center of

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47 Kürle, *Appeal of Exodus*, 5, 70, “Divine patience is never expressed explicitly before Exod. 34, but the wilderness episodes of Exod. 15–17 make the same point…. Both [Exod 15–17 and 32–34] stress the divine goodness toward Israel, despite several shortcomings in the people’s responsiveness to Yhwh’s presence.”

attention in these chapters, since God does not react to their complaints but “simply resolves the problem.” The emphasis remains on Yahweh’s self-revelation as the incomparable god with power to deliver his people in need.

Thus, Exodus can be seen as a two-part narrative, with the closing chapters of the first movement (15:22–18:27) serving also an intermediate and transitional function as they anticipate major themes to be developed in the second movement.

8.2. The Narrative Goals of the Protagonist, Yahweh

8.2.1. Yahweh as the Protagonist

Ordinarily, the main character or protagonist is present (“onstage”) through most scenes of the narrative, and it is his or her purpose or quest, in the face of conflict, which drives the narrative action and plot. In Exodus, the narrative begins and ends with references to the sons of Israel. The opening verse presents “the sons of Israel who went down to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household,” and the book closes with the image of Yahweh’s fiery glory in sight of “the whole house of Jacob” throughout all their journeys (40:38). However, the sons of Israel are not the main characters of the narrative, since they are largely passive beneficiaries of the divine or Mosaic actions and purposes which move the narrative forward—and they are usually

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49 Kürle, Appeal of Exodus, 70.


51 J. P. Fokkelman, Reading Biblical Narrative: A Practical Guide, TBS 1 (Leiderdorp: Deo Publishing, 2000), 82, suggests three criteria in identifying the protagonist. The main character will be the subject of a quest. He or she will be mostly or permanently present throughout the narrative. Finally, the hero or heroine will show initiative.

52 Jo Bailey Wells, “The Book of Exodus,” in A Theological Introduction to the Pentateuch: Interpreting the Torah as Christian Scripture, ed. Richard S. Briggs and Joel N. Lohr (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 56, takes even these beginning and ending passages of Exodus to indicate that God is the central character: “The book begins by describing the (partial) fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel’s forbears (1:1–7) and ends with the assurance of God’s guiding presence for future travel (40:34–38). That is to say, God sets the story in motion, and God sustains it.”
noted by the narrator in terms of how they concur, obey, and act appropriately vis-à-vis divine or Mosaic initiative, or in terms of how they doubt, resist, or disobey it.

Good arguments can be made for identifying either Moses or Yahweh as the protagonist, or indeed both, since their purposes and actions are so intricately allied and aligned in the narrative. However, it makes the best sense, in my view, to consider Yahweh as the story’s chief protagonist, especially because it is his purpose or quest which drives the narrative action. The narrative opponents and obstacles which create conflict in the Exodus narrative are presented as resisting or rebelling against Yahweh’s expressed purposes. While Moses is a towering figure, he consistently functions as the agent of Yahweh in service to Yahweh’s purposes, even when interceding with Yahweh to change his mind (chs. 32–34). These divine purposes precede Moses, being tied to Yahweh’s promise to the patriarchs. And while Moses is often the actor (plague-sender, sea-parter, law-giver, etc.), as Yahweh’s proxy, there are key moments in which Yahweh himself acts—and certainly not as partner to, much less proxy for, Moses, but as the matchless Doer of rescuing wonders, mighty judgments, victorious warfare, profound forgiveness, and glorious dwelling. Unless Yahweh acts, Moses is powerless: “O Lord…, why did you ever send me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done harm to this people, and you have not rescued your people at all!” (Exod 5:22–23) Thus, my analysis will treat Yahweh as the Exodus protagonist.

The remaining characters can be identified as helpers or opponents, to use Fokkelman’s terminology, based on whether they “further or obstruct” the action of Yahweh’s quest. Clearly, Moses is the primary helper. Pharaoh and Egypt, the Amalekites, and hunger and thirst stand as opponents and obstacles. The sons of Israel are portrayed as sometime-helper, sometime-

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53 For example, Robertson, *Old Testament and the Literary Critic*, 25–26, speaks of Moses as the “visible, immediate hero” and Yahweh as the “invisible, ultimate hero.”

opponent—or even antagonist—a shifting role with key significance in the plot structure of the book.

8.2.2. Main Plotlines—Yahweh’s Central Goals

The plot of a narrative can be centered or framed in more than one way, although such descriptions must arise from the story itself and be consonant with it. In fact, the consideration of multiple articulations of the protagonist’s quest often produces a richer thematic appreciation—and in the case of Scripture, a richer theological appropriation—of a narrative. This is certainly the case with the book of Exodus, in which multiple aims of Yahweh give rise to the story’s action and dialogue.

If it is the protagonist Yahweh’s initiative which drives the narrative, then what does Exodus present as his great quests, his overarching goals? These central plotlines can be described using an infinitive statement: “In Exodus, Yahweh seeks to…."

55 In Exodus, Yahweh seeks to fulfill his promise to the fathers, that is, he seeks to bring the sons of Israel out from Egypt and give them the land of Canaan. In Exodus, Yahweh seeks to obtain and consecrate a people as his special possession.

56 In Exodus, Yahweh seeks to dwell in the midst of his people. In Exodus, Yahweh seeks to establish justice (משׁפט). In Exodus, Yahweh seeks to make his name known. While a narrative may convey a character’s motives implicitly, Exodus expresses these five motives explicitly through statements of Yahweh’s purposes made by reliable voices: the narrator, Moses, or, most often, Yahweh himself.

57 Syntactically, these statements of purpose involve various constructions, including ל + infinitive construct
discussed as discrete motivations in what follows, it will become obvious that there is also a
great deal of textual and conceptual overlap between them.

8.2.2.a. Yahweh Seeks to Fulfill His Promise to the Fathers: Rescue Their Descendants
from Egypt and Give Them Long Life in the Good Land

At the burning bush, after introducing himself as “the God of your father, the God of
Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” Yahweh announces to Moses, “I have come
down in order to deliver [my people] from the hand of the Egyptians and in order to bring them
up from this land, to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, to the
place of the Canaanites.” (3:8). This intention is reiterated in 6:6–8:

Therefore say to the sons of Israel, “I am Yahweh, and I will bring you out from
under the burden of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from servitude to them, and
I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. And I
will take you as my own people, and I will be your God…. And I will bring you into
the land which I lifted my hand in oath to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob,
and I will give it to you as a possession. I am Yahweh.”

Yahweh’s sworn intention is not merely the granting of real estate, but the rescue of the people
out of their “affliction” (עין, Exod 3:7, 17) and to a place where all of the people, and even their
animals, may enjoy rest (23:12; 33:14), security (23:22, 29), provision (3:8; 23:11), health
(15:26; 23:25–26), and enduring life (20:12; 23:26).58 In spite of their recurring suspicion that

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58 Most of the texts here cited come from explanatory or motive clauses in legal sections of Exodus. The
assumption here is that the goal or resulting benefit attached to keeping a statute reflects the intention of the
lawgiver, e.g., when Yahweh instructs the people, in the seventh year, to leave fields, vines, and olive trees
unharvested “so the poor among your people may eat,” this suggests that it is Yahweh’s intention that the people
Yahweh’s plan will end in death, numerous statements establish Yahweh’s intention that the people live and not die (Exod 19:21, 22, 24; 20:19 (cf. Deut 18:16–17); 28:35; 28:43; 30:21; 33:3, 5; 33:20).\textsuperscript{59}

In Exod 1–18, Yahweh’s intention to fulfill his promise to the patriarchs motivates his deliverance of the people from Egypt and from wilderness threats. In Exod 19–40, this intention motivates his instruction of the people in ways which will lead to life—and not death—in his presence, and to fullness of life in the land.

8.2.2.b. Yahweh Seeks to Obtain a People—a Holy, Priestly People Who Worship Him Alone Throughout Their Generations

The “sons of Jacob” are portrayed as a new, emerging, distinct people, even a new humanity—fruitful and multiplying and filling the land (Exod 1:7; cf. Gen 1:28). From the outset, Yahweh lays claim to them as “my people” (3:7; 5:1; 7:4; etc.) and even “my firstborn son” (4:21). The purpose of Yahweh’s redeeming and covenant-making acts is to take Israel as his own people (7:4; 19:4–6). Yahweh liberates his people so that they may serve and worship him alone (3:12; 4:23; 7:16, 26 [Eng 8:1]); 8:16 [Eng 8:20]; 9:1, 13; 10:3; 20:2–5; 23:23–24; 34:13–16), holding feasts and offering sacrifices to Yahweh (3:18; 5:1, 3; 8:23–24 [Eng 8:27–28]; 12:25; 13:5, 12). He seeks a people who receive and walk in his Torah, mediated through Moses (4:5–9; 14:31; 19:9), obediently avoiding sin (20:20; 23:33). Yahweh consecrates them from among all the other nations for a priestly vocation on behalf of all (19:5–6, 10).\textsuperscript{60} From this may enjoy a life of provision.

\textsuperscript{59} When the people’s idolatry provokes Yahweh to decree their destruction, Moses intercedes: “Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent he brought them out in order to slay them in the mountains and to exterminate them from the face of the earth’?” (Exod 32:12) Yahweh’s relenting makes clear that death is not, in fact, his aim or intention for the descendants of the patriarchs, but rather that they find life in the land.

\textsuperscript{60} Larsson, \textit{Bound for Freedom}, 129, “God has a purpose for saving Israel: it is to use them for the good of humankind—not abuse them as Pharaoh did. It is to make servants of the divine out of the slaves of Pharaoh, now responsible to God alone.” See also Thomas B. Dozeman, “The Priestly Vocation,” \textit{Int} 59 (2005): 115–28, esp. pp. 27–28.
priestly and consecrated people, Yahweh will consecrate Aaronide priests throughout their
generations (28:1–4; 29:9, 44; 40:15; etc.) to serve before him in a consecrated tabernacle
(29:36–37, 43–44; 40:9; etc.). The people will imitate Yahweh in sanctifying the seventh day, the
Sabbath, as a sign throughout their generations that Yahweh is the one who has set them apart as
a people (Exod 20:8, 11; 31:13).

In Exod 1–18, Yahweh’s intention to obtain a people motivates him to multiply the sons of
Jacob, to strike Egypt and its gods with humbling blows so as to gain the release of Israel from
servitude to Pharaoh, and to preserve the people through the wilderness, bringing them to the
mountain of God (3:1, 12). In Exod 19–40, this intention motivates Yahweh to make a covenant
with Israel, consecrating them as his treasured people and instructing them in their new identity
and holy service. It also motivates him to mercifully forgive their sin and rebellion, preserving
their identity and service as his holy people.

8.2.2.c. Yahweh Seeks to Dwell in the Midst of His People

This goal is closely related to the previous, since it is especially by virtue of Yahweh
dwelling in the midst of the sons of Israel that they are a distinct and holy people (Exod 33:16).
In Exod 3:12, Yahweh’s promise to be with Moses is joined to his promise to bring Israel to
Horeb, the place of his presence. When they finally arrive at Sinai, Yahweh notes the crucial
point that “I have brought you to myself” (19:4), which stands as a summary of the first
movement of the narrative. The very goal of the redemption from Egypt was “in order that I
might dwell in their midst” (29:46). In the second narrative movement, the proximity and
communion achieved between Yahweh and the people in Exod 24:9–11 is sublime, and Yahweh
gives tabernacle instructions so that it might continue. The lengthy tabernacle section (chs. 25–
40) unfolds from Yahweh’s directive, “Let them build me a sanctuary so that I may dwell in their
midst” (25:8), and has at its crux the golden calf apostasy which threatens this dwelling of
Yahweh with his people (see esp. 20:3; 33:3, 5). The antagonist impeding Yahweh’s intention is no longer Pharaoh or other external enemies, but Israel’s own rebellion and idolatry. The narrative tension finally gives way after the theophanic proclamation of Yahweh to Moses, and Moses’ worship and prayer in response: “If I have found favor in your eyes, O Lord, may the Lord go in our midst—for this is a stiff-necked people—and forgive our iniquity and our sin and take us as an inheritance” (34:9). Yahweh’s affirmative response is confirmed in the closing scene of the book, as the glory of Yahweh dwells in cloud and fire upon the tabernacle, in the midst of Israel’s camp, throughout their journeys.

8.2.2.d. Yahweh Seeks to Establish Justice

Yahweh’s compassion for those suffering injustice and his concern to enact, uphold, and command justice significantly drives the narrative. Already in the opening chapters, the theme of divine justice is intimated by the actions of the Hebrew midwives (fearing God and so not listening Pharaoh’s wicked demand, Exod 1:17) and the adult Moses (talianic punishment, 2:11–12; rebuking the guilty, 2:13; and rescuing the harried and the oppressed, 2:17). The pregnant affirmations of Exod 2:23–25—“God heard their groaning…, God saw the people of Israel, and God knew”—indicates Yahweh’s vigilance and concern over injustice and his compassion for human suffering.

The wondrous plagues against Egypt which follow, then, are characterized as “great acts of

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61 Sin as an impediment to humanity dwelling with God in the second movement of Exodus clarifies that Israel’s plight in Exod 1–18 was not merely the tyranny and oppression of Pharaoh, but an alienation and banishment from the Creator God which has carried over from the preceding Genesis story. W. Lee Humphreys, The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 49, comments, “Apparently what was pronounced in Genesis 3:16–19, as transformative as it was, is not enough…. He sends out ha’adam and sets guards on the way to the Tree of Life. The double statement, ‘expels’ and ‘sends out’ (Gen 3:23, 24), reinforces a new structure that will define whatever pattern of relationship is now to exist between Yahweh God and his transformed creation.” Ackerman, “Literary Context,” 114, after outlining numerous ways in which Exod 1–2 recalls the language and themes of Gen 1–11, queries, “Is the narrative, moving back with its allusions through the primeval story sequence, portraying a God who, through Moses and the people of Israel, is in the process of reversing the alienation and broken community which had been man’s condition since earliest times?”
and as “acts of judgment (םְפַרְעִים) upon all the gods of Egypt” (12:12). Yahweh’s actions against Egypt embody lex talionis: the striker of Israel is struck; the river used to murder Israel’s boys is turned red with blood; and the one refusing to release Israel, Yahweh’s firstborn son, must mourn for his own firstborn son (4:22–23). Yahweh’s justice in these doings is attested by Pharaoh himself: “Yahweh is in the right (צדק; I and my people are the guilty ones (הרשׁעים)” (9:27).

Having delivered Israel from Egypt, Yahweh’s concern for justice among his people is manifest in the daily role of Moses and other appointed judges (18:13–26), but especially in the specific commandments and “just ordinances” (משׁפטים, 21:1; 24:3) which he decrees at Sinai. The Decalogue and the Book of the Covenant not only depict the just community desired by Yahweh, but they specifically command that human jurisprudence be safeguarded: false witness, partiality, and bribes are forbidden (20:16; 23:1–3, 6–9). Human judges must not “stretch justice” (נטה משׁפט, 23:6). The fundamental charge, “Do not slay an innocent man or a righteous man” (נקי וצדיק, 23:7a), is explained and sanctioned by a fundamental statement of divine justice, “For I will not justify a guilty man” (כי לא־אצדיק רשׁע, 23:7b).

As in the judgment on Egypt, so Yahweh continues to hear the cries of the wronged (22:20–26 [Eng 22:21–27]). The culminating motive clause “for I am compassionate” (22:26 [Eng 22:27]) implies a warning of punishment while at the same time invites imitation of Yahweh’s just and compassionate ways. Commenting on these verses, Kürle observes:

Even more explicit is the characterization of Yhwh as the one who will never pervert justice. Thus, Yhwh becomes a model of justice for the Israelite community. These regulations contrast God himself (the righteous and caring God) with the offender to encourage obedience by posing a threat for an eventual perpetrator.
The Exodus narrative, then, “focuses on the realisation of divine justice and compassion.” This is another central motivating goal of Yahweh: that his own compassionate justice would be established and upheld in the world, and especially among his chosen people.

8.2.2.e. The Chief Motive: Yahweh Seeks to Make His Name Known

Of these five formulations of Yahweh’s quest, however, it is Yahweh’s quest to make his name known which stands as the dominant goal driving the plot of Exodus and under which the other goals can be subsumed. Eslinger identifies the manifestation of the divine name as the “fundamental purpose of all that occurs in the exodus story.” And Fokkelman observes:

The Book of Names—as Exodus is called in Jewish tradition because of its opening words—is in effect the book of the Name…. The divine revelation in Exodus concerns God himself, both his name and his nature…. The word yhwh … is uttered

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63 Fretheim, Exodus, 14–15, describes Yahweh’s personal disclosure to Pharaoh, Egypt, Moses, and Israel as his “divine quest.”

64 Thus the title and organizing motif of a recent study by W. Ross Blackburn, The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus, NSBT 28 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012). Christopher J. H. Wright, The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 75–104, after identifying God’s making himself known as the central dynamic in the Exodus narrative, traces this seminal plotline across the rest of the OT. So also, C. John Collins, “The Theology of the Old Testament,” in ESV Study Bible (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 30, subsumes other divine goals within Exodus under the overarching goal of self-revelation: “God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt in fulfillment of this plan, and established them as a theocracy, for the sake of displaying his existence and character to the rest of the world.”

65 Lyle M. Eslinger, “Knowing Yahweh: Exodus 6:3 in the Context of Genesis 1–Exodus 15,” in Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible, ed. L. J. de Regt, J. de Waard, and J. P. Fokkelman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 194–95. Eslinger asserts that Yahweh’s effort ultimately fails within the narrative: “There is nowhere in the entire exodus story, or even the entire Bible, where Yahweh’s hope for recognition is fulfilled. There is no confirming, ‘and X knew that he was Yahweh’—either for ‘Jew or Greek’—anywhere in the Old Testament.” Contra Eslinger, however, the assessment of Yahweh’s success in his quest to make his name known cannot be restricted to texts which employ the verb ידוע. As the plagues progress, Pharaoh acknowledges Yahweh by confessing that he has sinned but that Yahweh is righteous in what he has done, and when Pharaoh summons Moses and Aaron on the night of the Passover, he orders them to go and serve Yahweh, imploring them to “bless me also” (Exod 12:31–32). The recognition of Yahweh by Israel and other nations is also expressed emphatically in the narrative. At the sea, “Israel saw the great hand which Yahweh wielded against the Egyptians, and so the people feared Yahweh and believed in Yahweh, and in Moses, his servant” (14:31); they acknowledged Yahweh as their saving God (15:2), a great warrior (15:3), unequalled by any other god in majestic holiness and mighty deeds and wonders (15:11). Their song of victory anticipates the recognition (and dread) of Yahweh by “people … inhabitants of Philistia … chiefs of Edom … leaders of Moab … inhabitants of Canaan” (Exod 15:14–16a). And as the first narrative arc reaches its destination, Jethro explicitly acknowledges: “Now I know that Yahweh is greater than all the gods” (18:11a).
and explained by the bearer himself, and Exodus as a whole offers a valuable, contextual explanation for the name.  

Propp discusses the verb ידוע (“to know”) fifth among overall themes in Exodus, but observes that the themes he has previously discussed (Yahweh’s fire, glory, arm/hand, and name) all serve the fifth: they “are all the means by which he is known in the world.”

Yahweh seeks to make his name—his character, ways, power, incomparability, glory, and goodness—known to Pharaoh and Egypt, to all the nations, and to Israel throughout its generations. Fokkelman notes that in Exod 7–14 the “elementary and powerful line, ‘I am YHWH’” is proclaimed five times to Egypt (7:5, 17; 8:22; 14:4, 18) and five times to Moses or Israel (6:2, 6, 7, 8, 29).

In the first narrative movement, this intention to make His name known prompts Yahweh to send Moses as his spokesman to Israel and Pharaoh, to harden Pharaoh’s heart so as to multiply his signs and wonders, to stretch out his hand in crushing blows against Pharaoh and Egypt, to make clear distinctions between his treatment of Egypt and Israel, to bring Israel to safety and to gain glory over Pharaoh and his hosts at the sea, and to provide miraculous water and food in the wilderness.

In the second narrative movement, Yahweh’s intention to make his name known motivates his promulgation of Sinai law and his directives for tabernacle and priesthood. The supreme revelation of His merciful character in the name-speech of 34:6–7 and in his succeeding actions (forgiving the people and coming to dwell in the midst of this stiff-necked people) brings Yahweh’s quest for self-disclosure to its Exodus climax and greatest realization. Propp sketches

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67 Propp, Exodus 1–18, 37.
68 Fokkelman, “Exodus,” 64. Larsson, Bound for Freedom, 78, supports the rabbinic observation that the ten plagues correspond to the ten acts of creation in Genesis, and he notes that the phrase “that you may know that I am Yahweh” likewise occurs ten times in Exod 7–14. These include 7:5, 17; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 29; 10:2; 11:7; 14:4, 18.
the progress of the name-theme in Exodus as follows:

Yahweh’s šēm ‘name’ connotes his fame, posterity, memorial, concept, and essence. The Burning Bush, the Plagues, the drowning of Pharaoh’s host—all teach Yahweh’s ‘name’. At the Sea, Moses and Israel exult, ‘Yahweh Man of War … is his name.’ The climax of this theme is 33:12, 17, 19; 34:5–7, where Moses receives the fullest revelation of God’s name and qualities that man may bear. Never again will the foreigner scoff, ‘Who is Yahweh? … I have not known Yahweh’ (5:2).69

8.2.3. Yahweh’s Narrative Motives and the Visiting-Phrase

The five motivating purposes of Yahweh discussed above provide interpretive lenses through which to comprehend the action and speech of the character Yahweh within the Exodus narrative. All five will be considered in the rhetorical analysis of Yahweh’s speeches in Exod 20:2–6 and 34:6–7 in the next chapter. In particular, we will consider how the character Yahweh employs the phrase “visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons” in these speeches to accomplish one or more of these goals within the narrative.

Because Yahweh’s goal to make himself known is so central to Exodus, and because the two texts of this study—Exod 20:5 and 34:7—function as key texts at key locations along this plot trajectory, the narrative unfolding of this self-revelation will be explored at greater length in the final section of this chapter, with particular attention to Exod 20:2–6 and 34:6–7 along with four other key “Yahweh-name” passages.

69 Propp, Exodus 1–18, 36.
8.3. Yahweh’s Self-Revelation in Exodus: Plot Trajectory with Six Key Texts

Yahweh’s quest to make his name known stands in particularly close relation to our two texts: Exod 20:5 and 34:7. Both are unique episodes of divine self-naming and self-description and thus play key roles within this name-revelation trajectory. Because the meaning and function of the visiting-phrase in these texts is tied to the function of these texts in the overall plotline of the revelation of Yahweh’s name, it is important to consider the sequence and flow of this divine self-disclosure within the story, and the location and role of 20:5 and 34:7 within that sequence and flow. A description of this trajectory is presented here at some length in order to demonstrate the essential narrative relationships and interpretive clues so often ignored in discussions of Exod 20:5 and 34:7, especially by those who explain Exod 20:5–6 as an editorial adaptation and reutilization of an earlier version of the formula from 34:6–7.71

As Sternberg notes, the biblical portrayal of Yahweh’s nature and character is remarkably stable, especially in comparison with human characters.72 However, while Yahweh is assumed to be and is presented as constant in himself, it is also true that, from the perspective of the


71 On this common reversal of the interpretive sequence of 20:5–6 and 34:6–7, see §3.1 above, esp. footnotes 6–10.

characters within the Exodus narrative and from the perspective of its reader, the *revelation* and the *knowledge* of Yahweh’s character unfolds gradually, historically, narratively—as Yahweh acts, interacts, and speaks from the beginning of the story to its end. Thus, while Yahweh is the covenant God of Israel from the outset of the book, the *fullness of what this means* is revealed across the narrative and is “discovered” by Israel and by the reader only after the events of the story. So profound is this historical and relational self-involvement of Yahweh, that God’s identity is not merely revealed, but also, at least in some sense, attained. For example, only part way through the story does he become, “Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves” (Exod 20:2).73

The emphasis on Yahweh’s self-revelatory acts, appearances, and utterances in Exodus is fueled by three statements early in the narrative. First, Moses anticipates the people’s question, “What is his name?” (Exod 3:13). Shortly after this, Pharaoh queries with defiant cynicism, “Who is Yahweh, that I should obey him by letting Israel go?” (5:2) And third, God declares, “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, but *by my name Yahweh I did not make myself known to them*” (6:3)—yet now he emphatically will. Yahweh’s characterization in the rest of the story is, in a sense, seeded by these statements.

This narrative disclosure of Yahweh’s character is largely *indirect*, arising implicitly from his speech, actions, and interactions. Within this complex narrative disclosure of Yahweh’s character, however, there are also a handful of statements which serve this descriptive, revelatory

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73 Fretheim, *Exodus*, 15, writes, “This is not simply a matter of ‘progressive revelation’ on God’s part or ‘progressive understanding’ on Israel’s part, as if the identity of Yahweh is set from the beginning and only needs to be unfolded. God does not remain unchanged by all that happens. God does some things that God has never done before; the interaction with other characters also shapes the divine identity. God is not only one who is; God is also one who in some sense becomes. Hence the identity of Yahweh, not very clear at the beginning of the narrative, achieves a depth and clarity as the narrative progresses through divine speech and action as well as human alertness and boldness.”
purpose directly. Direct characterization is more rare in biblical narrative than in modern literature, and, in the book of Exodus, it is “largely limited to passages which serve a summarial function” employing epithets for Yahweh. Kürle mentions three such texts: Exod 3:14–15; 15:1–18; and 34:6–7. However, three additional passages—Exod 6:2–8; 20:2–6; and 29:45–46—also function as direct characterizations of Yahweh, pronounce the divine name and epithets, and stand as benchmark summaries of the characterization of Yahweh up to that point in the narrative.

Five of these six are utterances of Yahweh himself, distinct moments in the narrative when God proclaims his name along with a self-description fitted to his revelatory divine actions in the immediate context. To these, the Song of the Sea in Exod 15 is added because of its ten-fold repetition of the divine name, extensive commentary on the divine character, and summative function in the narrative. It is interesting that all six passages exhibit a preoccupation with the divine name and character through some manner of doubling:

Ahîah אายא
I will be who I will be. (Exod 3:14)

כִּה תֹּאמְר לְבַן יִשְׂרָאֵל אֱהִי שָלַחְנִי אֵליכֶם... כִּה תֹּאמְר אֲל־בָּנָי יִשְׂרָאֵל יהוה... שלחניך אליכם
Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, “I Will Be has sent me to you”…. Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, “Yahweh … has sent me to you.” (3:14, 15)

אֵינַי יהוה... אני יוהו

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74 Jo Bailey Wells, “The Book of Exodus,” in A Theological Introduction to the Pentateuch: Interpreting the Torah as Christian Scripture, ed. Richard S. Briggs and Joel N. Lohr (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 57, observes that Exodus “provides an unusual emphasis on moments of direct theological revelation, where the name and nature of God are reported and revealed in a strikingly direct manner.” In expounding such direct characterization in Exodus, Wells focuses on the three theophanies in Exod 3, 19–20, and 34. Fokkelman, “Exodus,” 62–63, highlights these same texts: “As a text that articulates a large spiritual vision, Exodus is defined by the three climaxes of revelation on the mountain of God.”

75 Kürle, Appeal of Exodus. 4. Walther Zimmerli, I Am Yahweh, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 64, in describing the recognition formula in Ezekiel, makes a similar observation regarding the divine name and the events of the surrounding narrative: “The knowledge implied by the statement of recognition [“will know that I am Yahweh”] can only be described in connection with the actions of Yahweh that proceed the recognition, prompt it, and provide it with a basis. Nowhere does the statement of recognition speak of recognition apart from the divine acts which nourish it.”
I am Yahweh… I am Yahweh. (6:2, 8—-the first and last statements in this utterance)\textsuperscript{76}

I am Yahweh is a man of war. Yahweh is his name. (15:3)\textsuperscript{77}

And they will know that I am Yahweh their God…. I am Yahweh their God. (29:46)

And he proclaimed, “Yahweh, Yahweh.” (34:6)

The trajectory of Yahweh’s increasing, unfolding self-revelation will be traced then, along the axis of these six passages: Exod 3:14–15; 6:2–8; 15:1–18; 20:2–6; 29:45–46; 34:6–7.

Fretheim observes: “The book of Exodus is enclosed by speeches of divine self-portrayal [3:14–15 and 34:6–7]…, and [Exod 34:6–7] may be said to be a statement about God toward which the entire Exodus narrative is driving.”\textsuperscript{78} These six passages are not equal, independent, alternative descriptions of God’s character; instead they stand in an ordered, progressive, cumulative sequence. Yahweh “fills up” the content of His revealed name among his people, among the nations, within the narrative. The six name-passages stand in sequential and cumulative relation to one another, even as each stands in summary relation to the indirect characterization of Yahweh in the narrative up to that point. This accounts for the frequent observation that Exod 34:6–7, the last of the six, is the most complete revelation of Yahweh’s name and character in

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\textsuperscript{76} The expression “I am Yahweh” (אני יהוה) actually occurs four times in Exod 6:2–8, and its location in the rhetorical structure is complex and interesting. Yahweh’s entire speech to Moses is bracketed with the bare formula “I am Yahweh” (6:2, 8). The words here which Yahweh commands Moses to relay to the Israelites are similarly bracketed by “I am Yahweh” (6:6, 8) and contain, as their center, the result statement “so that you may know that I am Yahweh your God” (6:7).

\textsuperscript{77} Exod 15:3 also employs a sound play which heightens the “doubling” of Yahweh’s name here; in each clause “Yahweh” is followed closely by the phonetic sequence sh-m: \textit{Yahweh ‘ish-milchamah, Yahweh sh’mô}.

\textsuperscript{78} Fretheim, \textit{Exodus}, 16–17. Wells, “Book of Exodus,” 57, notes that Exod 3 and 34, both theophanies, are “two occasions when Moses is alone with God…. Moses boldly asks God who God is and what God is like, and God answers. The answers that Moses receives bear great weight theologically and warrant our close attention.”
Again, because the meaning and function of the visiting-phrase is related to the location and role of 20:5 and 34:7 within this cumulative sequence, an analysis of the divine name trajectory in Exodus across these six texts is now offered.

8.3.1. The Divine Name in Exodus 3:14–15

The narrative first employs the divine name “Yahweh” at the burning bush, as the “angel of Yahweh” (מלאך יהוה) appears in the flame (3:2). The narrator names this divine speaker in the bush as both “Yahweh” and “God” (אלהים), identifying the two (3:6). Yahweh first introduces himself to Moses as the God of his father, the God of the patriarchs, who has seen the affliction of his people and who has come down to deliver them from Egypt and bring them up to Canaan (3:7–8). He is sending Moses as his agent in this deliverance, and God assures, when Moses hesitates, “Indeed, I will be with you” (יְהִי אֶתִי עָבְדֵךְ), promising that the people will indeed come out of Egypt and will worship him on that very mountain (3:12). Moses then requests an answer for the people’s hypothetical question, “What is his name?” (וֹ มาֹ שֹּׁמֶר, Exod 3:13), occasioning the first of our key summary name proclamations:

And God said, “I will be who I will be” (אֶהְיָהָ אֶהְיָה). And he said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I Will Be’ (יהיה) has sent me to you.” And God said, further, to Moses: “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel: Yahweh (יהוה), the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and this is my memorial from generation to generation.” (Exod 3:14–15)

For the first time in Exodus, then, ch. 3 brings the divine name and character into pronounced focus.

Exodus 3:14–15 summarizes the established character of God from the Genesis backstory and Exod 1–3, even as it sets the stage for a profound new revelation of “Yahweh” to be realized

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79 Propp, Exodus 19–40, 609, even suggests reading the self-description in 34:6–7 as one long divine name, “Yahweh’s full name, which, in the composite Torah, he has been progressively revealing to humanity and Israel…. It is also a description, so that the word šēm bears both its literal meaning, ‘name,’ and its extended meanings of ‘nature’ and ‘reputation.’”

in the rest of the Exodus narrative. As Larsson observes, the name-proclamation here “sums up the unbroken line between what God has done and promised in the past and the prospective liberation.”

Yahweh as revealed in Exodus is none other than the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but there is also an intense newness to the revelation of Yahweh about to be enacted.

By invoking Yahweh’s relation to the three patriarchs, Exod 3:14–15 declares Yahweh’s status as the eternal God whose purview continues across generations. This emphasis on fathers and generations also reflects Yahweh’s providential multiplication of the sons of Israel in Exod 1. His identity as the God of the patriarchs accounts for Yahweh’s attentiveness to the sufferings of the sons of Israel and his recollection of his covenant in Exod 2:23–25. This also accounts for Yahweh’s strong claim upon the people in his initial words at the bush: “I have certainly seen the affliction of my people” (3:7). Patrick notes that Yahweh’s compassion for and commitment to his people in Exod 2–3 “fits” with the previous characterization of God in the patriarchal narratives, “thereby reinforcing the trustworthiness of the promises for the characters in the story and the audience’s knowledge of God’s identity.”

Also, the assertion in 3:15 that “Yahweh” will be his name and memorial across generations recalls references to Israel’s cries coming up to God in the preceding narrative (Exod 2:23–25 and Exod 3:7, 9). In other words, Exod 3:14–15 confirms the revelation of Yahweh as a God who responds when Israel cries out in need.

Even as Exod 3:14–15 captures and carries forward the previous identity and character of God, it also functions as an invitation to behold things about him which are profoundly new: “I will be who I will be.” In his study of the characterization of God, Humphreys observes that even in Genesis itself

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80 Larsson, Bound for Freedom, 32.
82 This point is developed by Saner, “‘YHWH Is a Warrior’ Reevaluated,” 42–46.
there is an openness to him as a character…. He seems more than the sum of what is narrated in the book of Genesis…. We also sense clearly that he is not complete or full or whole at the end of Genesis. He is very much God ‘in process of becoming’…. But then, Genesis is not an end in itself. It is the Book of Beginnings.83

While some commentators read Yahweh’s statement in Exod 3:14 as a cryptic non-answer or rebuff, Seitz is representative of a preferred approach: “The potentially circular ‘I am as I am’ is not a rebuttal but a clue to the meaning of the proper name YHWH. God’s name involves something that he will be or become.”84 G. Henton Davies suggests the paraphrase, “I am what you will discover me to be.”85

While there is a consistency here with the divine character revealed in Genesis, new aspects of God are about to play out in the narrative. For den Hertog, this newness is especially bound up in God sending here, for the first time, an authorized human spokesman and agent.86 More importantly, however, the name anticipates newness: the time of fulfillment for God’s covenant promises is now beginning. He has seen the affliction of his people; he has come down (3:7–8). Now the time when Yahweh will deliver his people has arrived (3:8), the time when Yahweh will be with his people (3:12). As he works out this fulfillment in his actions with Israel and other nations, he will demonstrate and display the answer to Moses’ projected question, “What is his name?” In his idem per idem reply to Moses here at the bush, then, Yahweh lays

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83 Humphreys, Character of God in the Book of Genesis, 21.
86 Cornelis den Hertog, “The Prophetic Dimension of the Divine Name: On Exodus 3:14a and Its Context,” CBQ 64 (2002): 223, notes the prevalence of the verb “send” in the context of Exod 3 and observes, “In a sense, Moses is the first prophetic figure in the history recounted by the biblical narratives. It is just this fact that requires the justification of his mission by a new divine name. By its revelatory nature … the name Ehyeh is particularly appropriate to this function.” Hans Kosmala, “The Name of God (YHWH and Hu’),” ASTI 2 (1963): 104, adopts a similar perspective, but focuses on the reality of divine presence (and thus the reality of Moses’ divine encounter and prophetic authorization) suggested by the first person language in Exod 3:14a.
claim to the power, authority, and commitment to act in redemption and self-revelation. But the content of this new self-revelation is not yet proffered; rather, it will lie in the words, actions, and interactions about to unfold in history, in the narrative. Seitz puts it well: “The name of God is related to a specific act of being or becoming, riveted to Israel’s own historical experience and memory, and that is God’s being who he would dramatically and really be, in deliverance from Egypt and revelation at Sinai.” Thus, the narrative function of Exod 3:14–15 is largely to get the divine name on the table, so to speak, to set it forth as a focal point of the ensuing narrative, as an open container which is about to be filled by coming events. This God is “Yahweh,” and the fullness of his name and character about to be revealed in this history, in this story, will be his name “forever” (לֹא־לְעָלָם) and “from generation to generation” (לְדֵר דֵּר, 3:15).

In summary, then, Exod 3:14–15 presents Yahweh as the eternal Creator God of Genesis who has established his covenant with the patriarchs, which accounts for his character and actions in Exod 1–3. His identification as “the God of your fathers” evokes his providential multiplication of the sons of Jacob in Egypt (ch. 1). His identification as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” evokes his transgenerational standing, his covenant

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87 Kürle, Appeal of Exodus, 37–38, summarizing the position of Joachim Becker, “Zur ‘Ich bin’-Formel im Alten Testament,” BN 98 (1999): 45–54, speaks of Yahweh’s name-proclamation here as an authority formula by which “the biblical authors answer a question that goes well beyond the common quest for identity (‘Who are you?’). The formula is much more an answer to the question of significance and gravity of the person. The person is expressing self-confidence in his own being or his ability and power.” So, in Exod 3:14, the idem per idem doubling of the “I will be” formula conveys “the massiveness of the authority behind the exclamation.”

88 Larsson, Bound for Freedom, 33, “‘I AM’ is not a philosophical concept, but rather a historical one. It does not deal primarily with the essence of the supreme being. It testifies of one who is active in history, constantly intervening to realize a plan with the world in general and with a particular instrument, the people of Israel.” Thomas W. Mann, The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 83, notes that Exod 3:14–15 “point away from any revelation of Yahweh’s identity in a single and private moment of unveiling, and point instead toward the progressive disclosure of Yahweh’s identity as it is rendered by the narrative that follows.” Christopher R. Seitz, Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 140, in his essay “Handing Over the Name: Christian Reflection on the Divine Name YHWH,” judges, “In the case of Exodus 3:14, we are not learning something about God’s substance or essence but something about a personal identity and history he is about to make good on at Sea and Sinai.”

89 Seitz, Figured Out, 136.

90 Kürle. Appeal of Exodus, 79, speaks of the idem per idem of Exod 3:14 as expressing a “programme” which is “linked to the tetragrammaton, and each time the name is repeated the reader will recall this notion.”
promises to the patriarchs, and his (slow but sure) faithfulness in the past. This accounts for his present claim upon the sons of Israel as “my people” (3:7). The idem per idem expression of his name asserts his authority and sufficiency to realize his plans. But this passage also frames up an intense narrative anticipation surrounding “Yahweh.” he is poised to act in decisive self-revelation. He has announced his intention to work through Moses to rescue the sons of Israel from Egypt and bring them up to the land of promise (3:7–12). To know who this God is, and who he will be forever, Moses, Israel, and the reader must now behold as Yahweh unfolds his name across the Exodus story.

8.3.2. The Divine Name in Exodus 6:2–8

This second name-passage, in many ways, reprises the same characterization of Yahweh as at the burning bush; however, both its narrative location and its fuller, repetitive expression give it a distinct weight. It thus stands as a more emphatic claim to authority and sufficiency, a more emphatic self-commitment to act now in decisive punishment, rescue, and self-revelation.

In Exod 3 God’s announcements of Moses’ commission and Israel’s rescue (vv. 7–12, 16–22) are bound tightly to the divine name Yahweh (vv. 13–15); however, this is followed in the narrative by several apparent setbacks. Moses and Aaron carry out the charge to go and speak the words of Yahweh to the elders of Israel and to Pharaoh, and the people’s initial response of faith and worship sounds a hopeful note (4:28–31). But circumstances quickly deteriorate. Pharaoh directly refuses Yahweh’s demand and challenges Yahweh’s authority: “Who is Yahweh that I should obey his voice by letting Israel go? I do not know Yahweh, and I will not let Israel go!” (5:2)

Pharaoh increases the burden of their servitude, and the Israelite foremen confront Moses and Aaron, calling down divine judgment on them for making them so odious to Pharaoh (5:21).

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91 The previous problem of a Pharaoh “who did not know Joseph” (Exod 1:8) is here compounded and deepened by a successive Pharaoh who does not know (and will not recognize) Yahweh, Joseph’s God.
And so Moses turns to Yahweh: “O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh, to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people, and you have certainly not delivered your people” (5:22–23). These words of Pharaoh, the Israelites, and Moses directly question the character of Yahweh announced in Exod 3.

In the face of these challenges, Yahweh responds to Moses’ complaint by “doubling down” on the authority and certainty expressed by the divine name:

I am Yahweh. Now I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty (אֱלֹהִים שֵׁדַי), but by my name Yahweh I did not make myself known (Niphal of יִדְעָה) to them. And, indeed, I established my covenant with them, to give to them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojournings in which they had sojourned. And, indeed, I have heard the groaning of the sons of Israel whom the Egyptians are enslaving and have remembered my covenant.

Therefore, say to the sons of Israel, “I am Yahweh. And I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will deliver you from their servitude, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. And I will take you as my people, and I will be your God, so that you will know (יִדְעָה) that I am Yahweh your God who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, and I will give it to you as a possession. I am Yahweh.” (6:2b–8)

This passage is congruent with Yahweh’s name-speech to Moses at the bush in ch. 3, yet it heightens a number of parallel elements. The repetition of “I will be” (אני איה, 3:12, 14) and the introduction of the divine name Yahweh (3:15) in Exod 3 expands to a fourfold use of the phrase “I am Yahweh” (אני יהוה, 6:2, 6, 7, 8), a repetition which gives 6:2–8 a “sublime and majestic tone.” The newness of the self-revelation of Yahweh’s character, implied by the expression “I will be who I will be” in 3:14, is now made explicit by God’s statement that he did not make the

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92 The repetitiveness of God’s claim “I am Yahweh” in this passage may be read, in part, as a deliberate response to Pharaoh’s repetitive challenge in the preceding narrative: “Who is Yahweh that I should obey his voice by letting Israel go? I do not know Yahweh, and I will not let Israel go!” (5:2)

fullness of his Yahweh-name (Yahweh-character) known to the patriarchs (6:3), but that imminent events will accomplish this radically new self-disclosure (6:5–8).\footnote{Kürle, *Appeal of Exodus*, 57, offers a helpful paraphrase of the rhetorical force of Exod 6:3 in the narrative: “Just as you now have access to my name ‘Yhwh’, you will now experience the fulfillment of my land-promise to the fathers!” He elaborates: “God appeared to the fathers (v.3a) and now reveals a new name to the oppressed people (v.3b). God established a covenant (v.4) and now remembers this covenant (v.5). The structural parallel highlights the progress God is about to initiate.” Whether Exod 6:3 is read to suggest that the vocable Yahweh is only now (or at least only since Exod 3) disclosed to the sons of Israel, or whether it is read to suggest that God is only now making the fullness of this name and character known, it is clear that an imminent self-disclosure of Yahweh’s person, to be embodied in the divine name itself, is about to unfold. For a presentation of the former view, from a canonical standpoint, see R. W. L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism*, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992). For the latter view, see Magonet, “Rhetoric of God,” 65–66; J. Alec Motyer, *The Revelation of the Divine Name* (London: Tyndale, 1959); and Seitz, “Call of Moses,” 150–60.}

The explanation in ch. 3 that Pharaoh will require compulsion “by a strong hand” and “wonders” (3:19–20) is further clarified here in ch. 6. He pledges to deliver Israel “with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment” (6:6), casting the coming wonders in terms of just coercion and punishment. Yahweh’s cognizance and concern regarding his people’s affliction at the hand of Egypt (3:7) is evident here as well: he has heard the groaning of the sons of Israel whom the Egyptians are enslaving (ממשהים, 6:5) and pledges to deliver Israel from their servitude (משהים, 6:6). Twice, Yahweh announces that he will “bring them out from under the burdens (סבלות) of the Egyptians” (6:6, 7), directly mirroring—and challenging—the double-reference to burdens by Pharaoh in the preceding chapter: “Moses and Aaron, why do you make the people neglect their work? Get back to your burdens! . . . You are making them cease from their burdens!” (5:4–5).

While pledging the same deliverance announced previously, Yahweh’s use of certain terms in Exod 6:2–8 also heightens the sense of his personal involvement in and attachment to these acts on Israel’s behalf. In 6:6 Yahweh promises to “bring you out” (יצא), “deliver you” (נצל), and “redeem you” (גאל). The first two of these echo the language of ch. 3, but the verb “redeem” (גאל) is introduced here for the first time in Exodus. Magonet reads the גאל-clause as the fulcrum of a chiastic structure within 6:2–8 and emphasizes the familial dimensions of redemption in the
OT: “God, as the redeemer of Israel, is acting, so to speak, as a member of the family, presumably because of the bond, and indeed relationship, he has to them through the covenant.”

The language of covenant also appears in this passage. Mentioned by the narrator in Exod 2:24, and implied in God’s self-introduction as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in 3:6 and 15, Yahweh himself invokes his covenant (6:4, 5) and his oath (6:8) here for the first time in Exodus. This covenant oath is tied to the gift of the land (6:4, 8), but is more fundamentally a personal bond: “I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God” (6:7). Here again, notes sounded previously in ch. 3 (“my people,” 3:7) are brought to greater crescendo in ch. 6: Yahweh is personally bound to and deeply committed to the sons of Israel, and this commitment is driving and securing the acts of deliverance about to unfold.

Yahweh’s name-speech in Exod 6:2–8 also advances the name-revelation trajectory in Exodus by introducing another new element: the “recognition formula” (“And you will know that I am Yahweh,” 6:7). Pharaoh’s negative statement that he does not know Yahweh (5:2) and Yahweh’s negative statement that he did not “make himself known (Niphal of ידע) by the name Yahweh” to the patriarchs (6:3) create the narrative vacuum which occasions such self-disclosure and recognition. The plague episodes and sea victory which follow will continue to repeat, and accomplish, this divine intention: that Pharaoh, Egypt, Israel, and future generations would come to know the incomparable Yahweh and his ways (7:5, 17; 8:6, 22; 9:29; 10:2; 11:7; 14:4, 18).

While Yahweh’s pledge to deliver the people is still notably unaccomplished in ch. 6, and circumstances have become even more dire, the air of certainty attached to Yahweh’s word of

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95 Magonet, “Rhetoric of God,” 65.
96 This theme of covenant in Exod 6 looks back to Yahweh’s covenant with the patriarchs (2:24) and also ahead to his covenant with the people at Sinai (19:5 and 24:7–8) with its “covenant words” (20:2–17; cf. 34:1, 27–28), and to his “miraculous” covenant with stiff-necked Israel after the golden calf (34:10, 27).
97 There is a tight lexical correspondence, then, between Yahweh’s self-revelation and others “knowing that I am Yahweh,” centered on the verbal root ידע. Yahweh’s self-revelation is the direct cause of the people’s recognition—A leads to B.
promise has been swelling within the narrative as the preceding events, though full of hardship and disappointment, have precisely conformed to the predictions uttered by Yahweh at the bush. As Yahweh said, and contrary to Moses’ expectation, the sons of Israel have indeed listened to Moses’ voice (3:18; 4:1; 4:30–31). And just as Yahweh said, Pharaoh has refused to let the people go (3:19–20; 4:21; 5:2). Thus, layered upon his remarkable faithfulness in the Genesis narrative, the events of Exod 4–5 shape the reader’s hearing of Yahweh’s pledges in Exod 6. As Kürle puts it: “Yhwh’s forecasts are fail-safe. . . . The ethos of Yhwh has been established and refined.”98 Thus, the fourfold assertion “I am Yahweh” sounds a clear note of certainty, functioning, in Childs’s words, “as a guarantee that the reality of God stands behind the promise and will execute its fulfillment.”99

When spoken within the narrative context of Pharaoh’s defiance, the people’s disillusionment, and Moses’ dismay, Yahweh’s firm and repeated commitments in Exod 6:2–8 testify to his enormous sufficiency to act for Israel. As Dale Patrick puts it, Exod 3 and Exod 6 “call for a kind of dialectical reading. The initial promise and commission require a leap of faith, the renewal reassures the recipients that what God is doing now is in continuity with what he has done in their history, and God will bring it off whatever the subjective condition of the people.”100 Pharaoh is not compliant, the people have mutinied, and even Moses seems to have returned to his Exod 3 skepticism. This serves to preempt any misunderstanding of the agency of Moses and Aaron, so prominent in the following verses (6:10–13, 20–30). Yahweh will employ these Levite brothers by choice, not from necessity, in bringing his people out of Egypt.

_In summary_, then, Exod 6:2–8 presents Yahweh in continuity with Exod 3:14–15, as the

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faithful God of the patriarchs, a God who claims the authority and sufficiency to act now in
decisive punishment, rescue, and self-revelation. Like Exod 3, it is more strongly anticipatory
than it is revelatory. It goes beyond Exod 3 by foregrounding the recognition language of
“knowing Yahweh” (which entered the narrative on Pharaoh’s lips in ch. 5). Yahweh speaks here
for the first time of “redemption” (רחם) and “covenant” (ברית), accenting his deeply personal
commitment and bond to the people. Regarding the sons of Israel as a whole, Yahweh pledges,
“I will take you as my people, and I will be your God” (6:7). His speech in 6:2–8 strongly asserts
his reliability and capability: in spite of the resistance of a great king, the crushed spirit of his
people, and the dismay of his commissioned agent, Yahweh’s unilateral purposes will prevail.
Exod 3 moved the divine name and character to center stage in the narrative, and Exod 6
heightens the reader’s confidence (in contrast to the people’s narrative doubt) in Yahweh and the
reader’s anticipation of Yahweh’s imminent acts.

8.3.3. The Divine Name in Exodus 15:1–18

Following the second name-speech in Exod 6, Yahweh begins to act, powerfully and
publicly, precisely as he predicted in chs. 3–6 and precisely as he continues to predict and warn
throughout chs. 7–14. He strikes ten great blows of judgment against Egypt, its king, and its
gods. In his instructions for the ongoing commemoration of these events, the sons of Israel are to
re-tell how Yahweh delivered them from Egypt “by a strong hand” (ביד חזקה, 13:3, 9, 14, 16). Yahweh then gains total victory and climactic glory over Pharaoh and the hosts of Egypt
at the sea, parting the waters for his people to pass through on dry land, but covering and
drowning the enemy.

101 Seitz, “Call of Moses,” 159, notes, “Though God tells Moses to say that this is his name (3:14), we must
wait until the second divine encounter to learn just what this name means—or will mean. In this sense, even Exod
6:2–9 does not report the revelation of God as YHWH so much as anticipate it. In the events of the exodus God will
be fully known as YHWH.”
The multiplication of blows against Egypt is necessitated by Pharaoh’s intransigence (3:19–20), yet this is also by divine design (7:3) that Yahweh might make his name known.02

The plague accounts are peppered with statements regarding the self-revelatory nature of Yahweh’s acts, beginning with the bare goal of making known “that I am Yahweh” (7:5, 17).

This rationale is rounded out by fuller articulations:

that you may know that there is no one like Yahweh, our God (8:6 [Eng 8:10])03
that you may know that I am Yahweh in the midst of the land (8:18 [Eng 8:22])04
to show you my power (נְפָךְ) and for the purpose of the recounting of my name in all the land/earth (9:16)
that you may know that there is none like me in the whole land/earth (גְּדוֹלָתָיו) (9:14)
that you may know that the land/earth (גְּדוֹלָתָיו) belongs to Yahweh (9:29)
that you (sing.) may recount in the hearing of your son and your grandson how I dealt with Egypt and my signs which I worked against them so that you (pl.) will know that I am Yahweh (10:2)05

that you may know that Yahweh makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel (11:7)

And the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen. (14:18)

By the self-revealing acts of Exod 7–14, then, Yahweh seeks to be recognized as the incomparable God, present and incontestably powerful, working wonders, the rightful possessor and lord of the whole earth, supremely glorious, Israel’s God throughout their generations who

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02 Childs, Exodus, 150, observes that the plague episodes “revolve around the revelation by God of his nature to Pharaoh, to the Egyptians, and to all men. Even more important is recognizing how this theme fits into the movement of the book as a whole. The initial revelation of God’s name is met with human resistance and disbelief which created the tension of the narrative. The plagues function as a demonstration of God’s nature which shattered the resistance.”

03 Exod 8:6 [Eng 8:10] is spoken by Moses to Pharaoh, and the descriptor “our God” following “Yahweh” likely implies that he will know that there is no other god like Yahweh,” a sense explicitly expressed in the Song of the Sea in Exod 15:11 and by Jethro’s confession in 18:11.

04 This basic rendering of Exod 8:18 [Eng 8:22] is shared by ESV and KJV. The NASB, NIV, and NRSV place the copula differently, translating, “that I, Yahweh, am in the midst of…”

05 On the generations-long goal of God’s self-revelation in the Exodus events, see also Exod 12:26–27 and 13:14.
deals distinctly with them as his own people. It follows that the Song of the Sea in Exod 15 would sound precisely these same notes, as Israel exults in what Yahweh has demonstrated about himself—and indeed it does. The Song of the Sea extols the name of Yahweh and serves as a summary of his character and ways revealed throughout the plague accounts and the victory over Egypt’s army (chs. 7–14).

The singing in Exod 15:1–18 is predicated of “Moses and the sons of Israel” (15:1). For this reason, the closing verses of ch. 14 provide a vital bridge from the prose account of events at the sea to the Song in ch. 15:

And so Yahweh saved Israel on that day from the hand of Egypt, and Israel saw Egypt dead upon the shore of the sea. And Israel saw the great hand which Yahweh wielded against Egypt, and so the people feared Yahweh and believed in Yahweh, and in Moses, his servant. (14:30–31)

This statement establishes the sons of Israel as trustworthy eyewitnesses to Yahweh’s self-revelation, and Moses’ trustworthiness is even set on level with God’s own. Therefore, when Moses and the people sing 15:1–18 in confession of Yahweh’s name, this text emerges as a central, reliable summary statement of Yahweh’s unfolding self-revelation to this point in the narrative.106 Exodus 14:30–31, by repeating the divine name four times, also prepares the reader for the centrality of the Yahweh-name in the Song in ch. 15. Yahweh’s name, character, and ways stand as the exclusive interest and concern of Exod 15:1–18. The Song provides a significant, though by no means final, response to the questions posed earlier in the narrative, “What is his name?” (3:13) and “Who is Yahweh?” (5:2) It opens with an array of divine names and titles—אלהים, אל, יהי, יהוה (vv. 1–2)—and then introduces the

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106 Kürlle, Appeal of Exodus, 78, notes the function of Exod 15 as a “summary” and anticipates that the contours of Yahweh’s character which his study has traced through chs. 1–14 should therefore “appear, in one form or another, in this poem.” In this sense, Kürlle suggests, the Song of the Sea can “function as a test case,” confirming one’s analysis of Yahweh’s character up to this point in the narrative. Blackburn, God Who Makes Himself Known, 53, makes a very similar statement: “Because the song speaks to what Israel learned of the Lord, it can therefore serve to test the inferences we have made to this point concerning what the name of the Lord was meant to communicate to Israel.”
theme of Yahweh’s name explicitly: “Yahweh is a man of war; *Yahweh is his name*” (v. 3). In all, the song mentions the name Yahweh ten times.107 The verbs here belong overwhelmingly to Yahweh. Where the actions of others are mentioned, they serve the central purpose of divine characterization and exaltation: Israel’s praising Yahweh (vv. 1–2); Egypt’s vain boasting before defeat by Yahweh (v. 9); and the nations’ dread, stillness, and dissipation because of Yahweh (vv. 14–16). Moses’ actions on behalf of Israel, a constituent part of the Exod 14 prose account (e.g., Exod 14:26–27), “have disappeared in this retelling.”108 Even the name “Israel” is absent, in Song itself—they are simply “the people you have redeemed” (v. 13), “your people, O Yahweh…, the people you have obtained” (v. 17).109 The Song is all about Yahweh.

A detailed translation and exposition of the Song is beyond the scope of this study, but its most significant characterizations of Yahweh can be summarized under a few points. Most notable at the Song’s outset is the celebration of Yahweh’s *mighty power* to deliver his people and to crush the enemy. Exod 6:2–8 stressed the enslavement and burdens imposed by Egypt. There Yahweh pledged to “redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments” (6:6). Yet in ch. 6 this remained mere promise and anticipation. By Exod 15, as Moses and the sons of Israel sing, they stand at a dramatically different point in the story. Yahweh has drawn near and acted; in the ten plagues and in his victory at the sea, he has displayed his “great hand” (7:4–5; 9:3; 13:3, 9, 14, 16; 14:31) at work.110 The contest has happened, and Yahweh has

107 BHS of Exod 15:1–18 contains ten occurrences of “Yahweh,” counting the shortened form “Yah” in v. 2, but not counting the mention of the name in the introduction to the Song in v. 1a. Some MSS and SP have 11, reading “Yahweh” instead of “Adonay” in v. 17. This may result from an intentional change in order to yield ten mentions of the full form “Yahweh,” testimony that the Song was read as an exposition of the divine name.

108 Pamela Barmash, “Through the Kaleidoscope of Literary Imagery in Exodus 15: Poetics and Historiography in Service to Religious Exuberance,” *HS* 58 (2017): 164. Barmash adds, “By eclipsing Moses, the poet does not allow any human being to have any part in the victory which in the [Exod 15] portrayal is God’s alone.”


110 Note also the exclamatory acknowledgement of the Egyptian magicians upon witnessing the third plague:
triumphed gloriously (v. 1). He has asserted his prerogatives and his power, and Israel bears witness: the God named Yahweh is “a man of war” (v. 3). The Song repeatedly extols Yahweh’s greatness, majesty, and strength. His right hand is “glorious in power” and “shatters the enemy” (v. 6). He “stretched out [his] right hand,” and the earth swallowed the foe (v. 12). The nations hear about this and are in terror because of “the greatness of your arm” (v. 16). For Israel, then, Yahweh is a strong and trustworthy refuge.111

The language employed in Exod 15 to depict Yahweh’s victory over Egypt is diverse and exuberant, picturing him hurling the enemy into the sea (vv. 1, 4), shattering the enemy (v. 6), consuming the enemy like stubble (v. 7), and causing the earth to swallow them (v. 12). Barmash suggests that the “kaleidoscope” of images here corresponds to a “typology of ways in which God destroys his enemies in biblical literature.”112 In addition to painting the Creator’s broad authority over his creation, this variety shifts the focus from Yahweh’s immediate triumph over Egypt to his prospective victories over other peoples, so that Egypt becomes “just the first of the list of enemies overthrown by divine power.”113 At the root of all this variety is the praise of Yahweh’s might: “the incompatible images of destruction in Exodus 15 of the Deity as the vanquisher of the Egyptians all derive from one metaphor, GOD IS A WARRIOR” [15:3].114

Beyond the demonstration of power, however, this prolonged contest, climaxing at the sea,

“This is the finger of God!” (Exod 8:19)

111 Saner, “‘YHWH is a Warrior’ Reevaluated,” 44–46, helpfully emphasizes that “right speech about God guides particular types of responses,” noting that Exod 15:3 encourages “trust in God to defend.” The pacifist thesis of her article, however, that a contextual reading of Exodus sets such trust over against “amassing military power” or “taking up arms,” seems somewhat overstated in light of Joshua’s military action against the Amalekites in Exod 17 and Yahweh’s exhortations in Exod 23 with respect to driving out the Canaanites.

112 Barmash, “Through the Kaleidoscope,” 149. She continues, “The poet has pushed the event of victory beyond the limits of a particular happening at the sea. The image of the Deity as vanquishing the Egyptians in the sea has been submerged. The other images converge and swell over it…. A declarative statement that God defeats the enemies of the Israelites is one-dimensional. It might fall flat. By contrast, literary images are visceral and palpable. They amplify language and heighten emotion.”


114 Barmash, “Through the Kaleidoscope,” 156.
has demonstrated the *superlative, divine uniqueness* of Yahweh—there is none like him. In many ways, this is the crucial revelation and recognition among all the characteristics of Yahweh which the Song celebrates.115 “Who is like you among the gods, O Yahweh, who is like you—glorious in holiness, awesome in praises, working wonders?” (15:11) Perhaps surprisingly, competition and polemic between Yahweh and other gods has played no explicit role in the Genesis backstory or in the opening chapters of Exodus.116 But the wondrous plagues upon Egypt and the victory over Pharaoh now demonstrate that Yahweh is the sole and supreme God—there is no one like him in all the earth (9:14), no one like Yahweh, Israel’s God (8:6 [Eng 8:10]). The plagues reach a height of severity, awe, and grief such as no generation has ever experienced since Egypt became a nation or ever would again (Exod 9:24; 10:6; 11:6). The magicians of Egypt, with their arcane knowledge and arts (and use of occult powers?) are quickly bested by Yahweh, unable to approximate his wonders (Exod 8:14–15 [Eng 8:18–19]).117 His mighty acts build in cumulative demonstration up to the tenth plague against the firstborn, in which Yahweh carries out his “judgments against all the gods of Egypt” (12:12). By historical demonstration of his incomparable power, Yahweh asserts his unrivaled Deity and from this point on will explicitly demand exclusive acknowledgement and worship.118 “Yahweh” now names him who

115 Barmash, “Through the Kaleidoscope,” 166–68, analyzes the structure of the Song around three patterning doxologies in 15:2–3, 11, and 18. She sees an intentional emphasis given to v. 11: “This doxology serves as the high point of the psalm.”

116 References to the idolatrous worship of Abraham’s kin and of the Israelites in Egypt appear elsewhere in the OT (Josh 24:2 and Ezek 20:7–8, respectively), but no mention is made of this in Genesis or Exodus. Dale Patrick, “The First Commandment in the Structure of the Pentateuch,” *VT* 45 (1995): 107–18, outlines this observation as the central thesis of his article. This is not to deny an implicit polemic against other gods in texts such as the Genesis creation account or in the scene with (menstruating) Rachel sitting on the household idols stored in her saddlebags (Gen 19:31–35).

117 While the text provides few cues regarding the nature of the “secret arts” (כְּלָלִים) of Egypt’s “magicians” (חֵרְטָם), it is reasonable to associate Yahweh’s supremacy over them and their arts with his display of supremacy over “all the gods of Egypt” (Exod 12:12), and, indeed, over all gods (15:11; 18:11). Joanne K. Kueemmerlin-McLean, “Magic: Old Testament,” *ABD* 4:468, while recognizing the challenge of defining “magic,” offers the following: “methods associated with the gaining of supra-human knowledge and power or with influencing supra-human powers.”

118 This historical demonstration of power and prerogatives occasions Yahweh’s prohibition of other gods in
alone is to be named and worshipped as God.

The Song also summarizes the stark polarity in the preceding chapters of Yahweh’s dealing with humanity. Yahweh approaches people with one of two dispositions. In his dealings with his enemies, with Pharaoh and Egypt, Yahweh is capable of great anger and corresponding acts of destruction: “you send out your fury (חרון); it consumes them like stubble” (15:7b). Yet, toward the people whom he has redeemed, God acts in lovingkindness (חסד), leading them to and planting them in the place of his holy abode (15:13, 17). The Song represents the Pentateuch’s first mention of Yahweh’s “lovingkindness” (חסד) and one of its first mentions of divine anger (under any term), so that Yahweh’s concrete, historical-narrative demonstrations of these dispositions precede and inform their conceptual summarization in the text. In the face of Yahweh’s fury, Egypt has been sunk, shattered, overthrown, consumed, and swallowed (vv. 4–13). Before this same Yahweh, the inhabitants of Canaan will soon be seized by fear and dread, stilled like stone, and melted away (vv. 14–16). But those singing 15:1–18 embody a completely different outcome: the just-narrated mighty deliverance has given them faith, strength, salvation, and rejoicing (vv. 1–2). Their Song looks forward to a securely planted future in Yahweh’s holy presence and under Yahweh’s lovingkindness, leading, and reign (vv. 13, 17–18). Thus, the Song’s polarity confesses not only Yahweh’s lovingkindness versus Yahweh’s anger, but also

Exod 20:3, his self-description as “jealous” in 20:5, his prohibition against misusing the divine name in Exod 20:7, and his demands that Canaanite idols and idolaters be driven from the land in Exod 23:23–33. Jethro’s confession models the appropriate response to Yahweh’s demonstrated, incomparable status: “Now I know that Yahweh is greater than all the gods” (18:11).

119 Kürel, Appeal of Exodus, 78, notes that in the Song, “the reader’s attention is directed to the divine level (God’s fury, Exod 15:7 versus God’s steadfast love, Exod 15:13).”

120 At the burning bush, after many iterations of Moses’ refusal to accept Yahweh’s commission, Yahweh’s “anger was kindled” (ויחר-אף יהוה) against Moses (4:14). When Pharaoh remains obstinate during the plagues, the text does not mention Yahweh’s anger, but does suggest his impatience: “How long will you refuse to be humble before me?” (10:3)

121 Barmash, “Through the Kaleidoscope,” 163, observes, “The reaction of the enemies serves as a foil to the response of the Israelites.”
how he deals with his people versus how he deals with his enemies.

While the Exodus narrative began with his promises to the patriarchs in view, Yahweh has now demonstrated publicly and decisively that he is the God of Israel, that he is the God who rescued Israel, that Israel is his firstborn son, and that he treats Israel distinctly from all other nations, though he holds lordship and dominion over all. In ch. 6, he assured Moses, “I will take you as my people, and I will be your God, so that you will know (יִדְעָה) that I am Yahweh your God who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (6:7). Here, in the Song of the Sea, for the first time in the narrative, the sons of Israel explicitly claim Yahweh—“This is my God…, the God of my father” (15:2)—as they praise him for delivering them. Henceforth, “Yahweh” names him who rescued the sons of Israel from under the power and servitude of Egypt. In a heightened and publicly demonstrated sense, he is Israel’s God, and they are his people—as Yahweh will accent in his self-introduction in Exod 20:2 and as Moses will remind him after the golden calf rebellion in Exod 32:11–12.

Finally, like the previous name-speeches in Exod 3 and 6, the Song reasserts Yahweh’s identity as the God of the patriarchs, a God of enduring, many-generations authority and plans. After the opening motif of triumph at the sea, the Song glances back to previous generations, praising Yahweh as both “my God” and “the God of my father” (אלהי אבי, 15:2; cf. 3:6; 6:3–4, 8). It closes with the prospect of an enduring, permanent place for future generations of his people:

122 The expression “my God” is so common throughout the OT that it is easy to overlook its novelty within the Pentateuchal narrative here in Exod 15:2. With the exception of Jacob’s vow in Gen 28:20–21, where he pledges that if God will provide for him and bring him safely home then “Yahweh will be my God” (but, even here, without simply attaching a pronominal suffix to “God”: ןָהֳלַיָּהֵיהֶה יִהְיֵה לְאַלְּאָרָם, Gen 46:3), the patriarchs in Genesis never refer to Yahweh as “my God” but only as “the God of my father.” Yahweh, too, describes himself to the patriarchs as “the God of your father” (Gen 46:3), and this is how he first introduces himself to Moses at the bush (Exod 3:6). The closing scene of Genesis has Joseph’s brothers humbling themselves before him, pleading, “And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father” (50:17). In Exodus, the phrase “your God” is uttered as a promise by Yahweh in 6:7 but, apart from Pharaoh’s statements during the plagues, does not occur again until Exod 15. After the decisive victory at the sea, the ascription “Yahweh your God” takes a central place in Yahweh’s speech to Israel (Exod 15:26; 16:12; 20:2, 5, 7, 10, 12; 23:19, 25; 34:24, 26). It is interesting, too, that Moses names his second son “Eliezer” (“my God has been my help”), but the narrative explains his rationale: “the God of my father has been my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh” (Exod 18:4).
he will “plant” them in his presence, on the mountain of his “inheritance,” and will reign as king “forever” (15:17–18).

In summary, then, Exod 15:1–18 builds on the presentations of Yahweh in Exod 3 and 6 as the eternal, Creator God who has made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and who has committed himself to act on their behalf. The Song now praises Yahweh who has revealed his mighty power to act in history, to strike down in fury or to deliver in lovingkindness. No other power—no army, no king, no god—can compare to him. He is exalted above all gods and is alone worthy of praise and trust. He has demonstrated that his dominion is over all the earth and will endure forever. Yet he has also revealed himself as the God of Israel, who has rescued Israel and who deals with them in a way distinct from all other nations.

8.3.4. The Divine Name in Exodus 20:2–6

In Exod 20, Yahweh has rescued his people from Egypt and brought them to himself at the holy mountain. He has commanded their consecration and has now summoned them out on the third day to meet with him. Accompanied by cloud, lightning, thunder, fire, smoke, and earthquake, Yahweh speaks his Ten Words to the sons of Israel. The opening unit of this Decalogue presents a fourth key name-text, as Yahweh makes pronouncement regarding his divine name and character:

I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of a house of slaves.

You shall not have other gods in my presence. You shall not make for yourself an idol or an image of anything in the heavens above or in the earth beneath or in the waters which are under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or become enslaved to them.

For I am Yahweh, your God, a jealous God who, with respect to those who hate me, visits-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons, even against members of the
third and fourth generations, but who, with respect to those who love me and keep my commandments, acts in lovingkindness to thousands. (Exod 20:2–6)¹²³

Like the previous texts discussed, this name-speech draws together and summarizes the character of Yahweh as revealed in the preceding narrative. In the case of 20:2–6, it stands as a summative retrospective on the divine character in the first narrative movement of the book, the deliverance narrative of chs. 1–18. At the same time, it anticipates dimensions of the divine character central to the second part of the story, and it introduces narrative tension which will fuel the ensuing chapters.

The speech in 20:2–6 begins by reprising Yahweh’s credentials as Israel’s mighty deliverer. While the people’s Song in Exod 15 elaborated this theme profusely, Yahweh’s claim here is dramatically succinct and understated: “I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of a house of slaves” (v. 2). This opening statement recalls Yahweh’s first words upon the people’s arrival at Sinai in the previous chapter: “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt and [how] I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself” (19:4). Thus, it evokes Yahweh’s mighty wonders, his acts of judgment against Egypt which won Israel’s release, and also his demonstrated power to provide and protect along their journey through the wilderness.

Yahweh’s great acts of deliverance, triumph, and provision attest not only to his power and sufficiency but also to the powerlessness of other gods before him. Currid observes, “The story is nothing so much as a contest between the powers of Yahweh and the powers of the Egyptian pantheon, including Pharaoh himself.”¹²⁴ The might, justice, and faithfulness of Yahweh demonstrated in this deliverance have called forth the recognition that there is no other god like Yahweh. This recognition, predicted during the plagues (8:6 [Eng 8:10]; 9:14), has been

¹²³ This rendering of vv. 5–6 is developed and defended at length in §4.2.12 above.
exhibited in the people’s Song (15:11) and Jethro’s confession (18:11). In ch. 20, Yahweh’s demonstrated incomparability now undergirds his prohibition against having and worshipping other gods, idols, and images (20:3–5a).

The incomparable Yahweh must not be confused with the gods of Egypt or other nations (12:12; cf. 23:24) who are worshipped under images of stellar, terrestrial, or marine creatures. The litany of heavens above, earth beneath, and waters under the earth evokes Yahweh’s unique status as Creator, distinct from every created being. It echoes the Genesis account of the God who created “the heavens and the earth,” an association strengthened by the explanation to the Sabbath command just a few verses later: “For in six days Yahweh made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all that is in them” (Exod 20:11). In the plagues (river, gnats, hail, darkened sun, etc.) and in Yahweh’s command over wind, waters, and dry land at the sea, his mighty acts of judgment and deliverance have further demonstrated that Yahweh is no creature. Yahweh alone is the Creator God, the incomparable Lord of all creatures. Thus, Israel is to worship no one and nothing else in all creation.

That rival gods are forbidden in Yahweh’s “presence” (עַל־פִּנֵי, 20:3) reflects the narrative situation in which Yahweh has literally brought Israel out from Egypt and “to himself” (אֵלָיו, 19:4; cf. 3:12). It also anticipates the intention of Yahweh to dwell in Israel’s midst, intimated

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125 While the Exodus narrative nowhere references the idols and iconography of the Egyptian gods, this would have been broadly familiar to the book’s original audience and to most people in the ANE. When Yahweh forbids making “an idol or an image of anything in the heavens above or in the earth beneath or in the waters which are under the earth,” this would have evoked ANE religion in general, and, in the context of the Egyptian deliverance narrative, portrayals of the gods of Egypt more specifically: as examples, Horus, the sky god portrayed as a falcon, or Aten, portrayed as the sun-disk (“heavens above”); Sekhmet, the lioness-headed goddess (“earth beneath”); and Hatmehit, a fish-goddess, and Heket, portrayed with the head of a frog (“waters beneath the earth”). See Richard H. Wilkinson, The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2003).

126 Wells, “Book of Exodus,” 71, reads a double meaning in Yahweh’s claim, “I have brought you to myself” in 19:4, bearing both a spatial and a personal-revelatory sense: “Literally, this may be taken as a reference to the mountain, where his presence may be encountered dramatically and intensely. It seems reasonable also to understand it in terms of Exodus 3, in which God has revealed himself to Israel in a new and more intimate way, by the name of YHWH.”
already in Israel’s Song (15:17) and explicitly detailed in the tabernacle instructions in coming chapters (Exod 25–40).

His mighty redemption of Israel has established Yahweh’s public identity as the God of Israel, the God who rescued this people, so that in the name-speech of Exod 20:2–6 he now repeatedly declares himself to be “Yahweh, your God” (20:2, 5; cf. 20:7, 10, 12). Because of his incomparable status as the Creator God and his unique standing as Israel’s God and redeemer, Yahweh is “a jealous God,” who will not share his reputation and his exclusive worship with rival gods—gods who do not compare, gods who have not rescued and who cannot rescue Israel. Therefore, Yahweh forbids the sons of Israel to “bow down to them” (נזר) and, significantly, forbids them to “become enslaved to them” (or “be enticed to serve them,” Hophal of עבד, Exod 20:5), depicting the prospect of worshipping of other gods as a renewed slavery, like that of their former bondage in Egypt, which would undo their liberation by Yahweh’s mighty hand (20:2).

The motive clauses in 20:5–6 reinforce the prohibition of other gods by expositing Yahweh’s jealousy in a two-fold account of his ways—the same polarity confessed at the sea and demonstrated in the deliverance narrative thus far. On the one hand, he visits iniquity in mighty acts of judgment across generations. Yahweh is a God “who, with respect to those who hate me, visits-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons, even against members of the third and

127 Walther Zimmerli, Old Testament Theology in Outline, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978), 116, comments thus on Exod 20:2–6: “The use of Yahweh’s two arresting descriptions of himself in verses 2 and 5b–6, which bear the burden of justifying this first commandment, fully expresses the thematic significance of the first commandment. Obedience to Yahweh, the one God, who delivered Israel out of slavery and is jealous for his own uniqueness, defines the fundamental nature of Old Testament faith.” Zimmerli’s final statement here, however, misses the provisionary and penultimate role in the Exodus characterization of Yahweh. The fundamental nature of Israel’s faith in Yahweh, finally, presses further than Yahweh’s delivering power and jealous exclusivity to include, finally, his merciful forgiveness which Israel will desperately need. That is to say, Exod 20:2–6 finally must be supplemented by a fuller divine self-revelation in 34:6–7.

128 This is Paul’s logic in Gal 4:8–9, a passage which may allude to the Exodus narrative in general, and perhaps to Exod 20:5 specifically.
fourth generations.” Read against the backdrop of preceding events, this warning recalls Yahweh’s dealings with Egypt (esp. the slaying of the firstborn sons some time after the generation which initiated the oppression) and with Amalek (“Yahweh will have war against Amalek from generation to generation,” 17:16). The language of Yahweh “visiting” (פקד) echoes the narrative’s own term for Yahweh’s intervening actions to punish Egypt and deliver Israel (see Gen 50:24–25; Exod 3:16; 4:31; 13:19). The term “those who hate me” is the language of personal enmity and recalls Yahweh’s powerful opposition to his “enemies” extolled in 15:6–10.129

On the other hand, Yahweh also shows lovingkindness. Yahweh is a God “who, with respect to those who love me and keep my commandments, acts in lovingkindness to thousands” (20:6). This is now the second occurrence of תֵּאַב in Exodus. Both here and in the Song (15:13) it summarizes the way in which Yahweh has graciously helped his people in need, fulfilling his promises to them and leading them forth from bondage. His patience with them in the wilderness and his provision of water, quail, and manna have further demonstrated his lovingkindness. Such lovingkindness is plentiful in its extent and duration—“to thousands.” This number recalls the “hosts” of Israel who recently thronged forth from Egypt “by their thousands” (12:37; 12:41, 51; 18:21, 25; cf. 1:7, 12). “Thousands,” especially as it stands in parallel with the “third and fourth generations” of 20:5, also envisions God’s lovingkindness enduring for numerous generations. In this sense it summarizes his enduring intentions for Israel expressed throughout the deliverance narrative (e.g., 3:15; 10:2; 12:14, 17, 24–27). The qualification that Yahweh acts in lovingkindness “with respect to those who love me and keep my commandments” reflects the

129 The association here with 15:6–10 is conceptual rather than strictly lexical. Exodus 20:5 uses the participle form of the verb “to hate” (שׂנאי, the ones who hate me). This form occurs frequently in the OT, including Exod 1:10 and 23:5, in the sense of “enemy.” In the Song of the Sea, two other terms for enemies are employed: יָדַע, “enemy” in 15:6, 9; and מְאַב, “one who rises up (against)” in 15:7. These terms, and especially יָדַע, are commonly paralleled with שׂנאי; an Exodus example is 23:4–5.
dominant characterization of Israel in the first narrative movement as trusting, worshipping, and obeying Yahweh, especially with respect to the Passover instructions (4:31; 12:28, 50; 14:31; 19:8).

At the same time, these motive clauses in Exod 20:5–6 sound a new note of dramatic tension within the name-revelation trajectory. Yahweh describes himself as “jealous,” his incomparable status and his public renown as Israel’s God demanding that Israel worship no other gods. The expression iniquity of fathers, in light of consistent patterns of biblical usage, calls to mind not merely the offenses of Israelites in a bare sense, but especially the iniquitous ways of fathers—that is, iniquity which will be observed, mimicked, and shared by sons. In light of Israel’s vacillation throughout the narrative (and their increasingly negative portrayal as distrusting and disobedient in chs. 16–17), Yahweh’s threat of punitive visitation against the descendants of those who hate him and his promise of lovingkindness toward to those who love and obey him catch the reader’s attention. The recipe for conflict is clear. The name and character of Yahweh—revealed in the deliverance narrative and proclaimed by Yahweh in 20:2–6—has accounted for Israel’s rescue and preservation thus far. Yet it is this very name and character which will emerge as the greatest threat to Israel—and to Yahweh’s own expressed purposes and plans for Israel—as Israel’s stiff-necked nature comes into focus in the second movement of the book.

The language of “keeping my commandments” reflects a theme which has come to narrative prominence only after the victory at the sea. “Commanding” was introduced early in the Exodus narrative as a kingly prerogative: Pharaoh commands the midwives (1:17), and later his people in general (1:22), to kill the male children born to the Hebrews. After confronted by Yahweh’s demand to release Israel, Pharaoh instead continues to hand down decrees detrimental

130 This observation is elaborated above under §4.2.6.
to them (5:6). Yahweh, too, issues commands. In Exod 1–15, Moses (after his initial hesitation), Aaron, and the sons of Israel are described as doing everything “just as Yahweh commanded” (7:6, 10, 20; 12:28, 50).

However, it is in the wilderness chapters following the sea crossing that the matter of Yahweh’s commands and Israel’s (dis)obedience becomes a central emphasis. The Song of the Sea builds in praise up to its final acclamation: “Yahweh reigns as king forever” (15:18). From this point on in the narrative, Yahweh’s kingly prerogative to command Israel comes into the foreground. The first episode on the far side of the sea (bitter water made sweet) concludes:

There [Yahweh] issued for [Israel] a statute and an ordinance, and there he tested them. And he said, ‘If you will diligently listen to the voice of Yahweh your God, and do what is upright in his eyes, and give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, then all the diseases which I put on the Egyptians—I will not put them on you, for I am Yahweh, your healer. (Exod 15:26)

In the manna episode, Yahweh’s first words declare, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather the amount of the day in its day, so that I may test them whether they will walk in my instruction (תורה) or not” (16:4). Israel largely fails this test in chs. 16–17, not only by their grumbling and their “testing Yahweh” (17:2, 7) but also by their narrated disobedience to his specific manna and Sabbath instructions (16:20, 27). This yields the first glimpse of the possibility that Israel, too, may exhaust Yahweh’s patience: “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments (מצות) and my instructions (תורות)” (16:28)

When Moses appoints judges and officials, at Jethro’s advice, he himself retains chief responsibility to make known Yahweh’s “statutes and instructions” (חקים ותורות, 18:16, 20).

When Israel arrives at Sinai, Yahweh requires Israel to “diligently obey my voice and keep my covenant” (19:5), and all the people pledge together, “Everything which Yahweh has spoken we will do” (19:8). After Yahweh thunders Ten Words of commandment from the mountain, Moses
explains: “It is in order to test you that God has come, in order that his fear should be upon your faces, so that you do not sin” (20:20).

Thus, after the sea victory, Yahweh is increasingly characterized as a great king who gives voice to commands, statutes, instructions, and covenant stipulations. He is intensely concerned that his people hearken to these commands and keep them. In Exod 20:2–6, when God pronounces weal for “those who love me and keep my commandments” and threatens woe for “those who hate me” (and thus defy his commands), this twofold dynamic is firmly attached to the name Yahweh. Yahweh is the great king who, after eliciting the people’s love by delivering them from bondage, now gives just commands and demands obedience. This characterization anticipates the extensive divine speaking and lawgiving in the remainder of the book, and it drives the narrative conflict which will come to a head when the sons of Israel reveal themselves to be “a stiff-necked people” who “turn aside hastily from the way in which I commanded them,” committing “a great sin” with the golden calf (32:8–9, 21, 30).

In summary, then, Exod 20:2–6 is primarily retrospective in terms of its revelation of Yahweh, pulling together the major facets of his character developed in Exod 1–18. The extensive argument above (§8.1) for a two-part structure in Exodus comprising Exod 1–18 and 19–40 functions to support this observation. This suggests reading the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 against the backdrop of the interventionist and transgenerational dynamics of Yahweh’s “visitation” against Egypt in the first narrative movement.

Thus, in 20:2–6 Yahweh is the Creator God who has uttered, and who has now mightily begun to fulfill, promises to the patriarchs and their progeny forever. He is the incomparable God, potent to act in furious judgment against his enemies or in lovingkindness for his people. He is therefore rightfully jealous, and prohibits the worship of other gods. He has publicly bound himself to the sons of Israel by dramatic historical acts of redemption, and has now led them to
himself, to dwell in his presence. It is his prerogative to be present and active within the creation (“in the land”) in such works of punishing and rescuing “visitation.” Exodus 20:2–6 also characterizes Yahweh as a king who issues just statutes and commands. He has shown patience and restraint, but he does threaten to punish even his own people should they forsake him for other gods and defy his commands. This creates a narrative tension which presses on the reader as the story proceeds—when encountering Yahweh’s repeated demand for obedience (23:22), Israel’s bold (but dramatically ironic) pledges of obedience (24:3, 7), and the covenant established by Yahweh “in accordance with all these words” (24:8). This tension reaches its climax when Israel acts not as Yahweh’s people but as rebels—enemies—directly defying Yahweh’s most fundamental statute by demanding and worshipping “other gods” under the image of a golden calf (32:4, 8). Yahweh’s initial reaction to Israel’s idolatrous disobedience will correspond precisely to the dynamic pronounced in 20:5–6, nearly bringing about their destruction and the forfeiture of his generations-long beneficence.131

The Exodus narrative explicitly initiated the storyline of Yahweh’s name-revelation with his words to Moses at the burning bush in ch. 3. There Yahweh spoke to Moses from the fire of the bush (סנה), an encounter upon holy (קדש) ground. The encounter between God and Israel here in ch. 20 reprises that scene, as Yahweh speaks to the people from the fire of Sinai (סני) after stressing the holiness of the place and commanding the people’s prior consecration (קדש). Thus, the name-speeches of 3:14–15 and 20:2–6 take place in paired situations.132 Each stands near the

131 Yahweh’s initial reaction to Israel’s sin with the golden calf is represented in the narrative as Yahweh’s report of the apostasy to Moses on the mountain in Exod 32:7–10, which closes with apparent finality: “So now, leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and so that I may make an end (כלה) of them, and I will make you in to a great nation.” The wording here is strongly transgenerational, the language of “making an end” of the sons of Israel and of “making a great nation” of Moses. Yahweh’s initial decree is not merely that he will destroy Israel, but that he will revoke their standing under his transgenerational purposes and blessings and transfer this standing to Moses and his descendants.

132 Michael Fishbane, “Exodus 1–4: The Prologue to the Exodus Cycle,” in Exodus, ed. Harold Bloom, MCI (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 69, notes the sound play between “the sneh bush” and Sinai, and observes
beginning of the narrative arc in which it appears: Exod 3:14–15 kicks off the name-revelation which will unfold across chs. 1–18, and Exod 20:2–6 both summarizes the name-revelation which has taken place in the first narrative arc and establishes it as the starting point for the further revelation of Yahweh in chs. 19–40.

The Exod 20:5 Visiting Phrase and the Trajectory of Yahweh’s Self-Revelation

These retrospective and prospective functions of Exod 20:2–6 in the unfolding characterization of Yahweh have direct implications for understanding the visiting-phrase in Exod 20:5. First, the threat of divine punishment impacting “sons, even to third and fourth generations” should be read against the backdrop of Yahweh’s generations-long promises to the patriarchs reiterated in Exod 1–18 and of Yahweh’s generations-long plans for the sons of Israel frequently recorded in Exod 1–18. In this context, the visiting phrase threatens the forfeiture of the generations-long divine blessings intended for this people—a forfeiture which may take place if fathers forsake the exclusive worship of Yahweh and obedience to his commands, leading their sons, also, into apostasy.

Second, read against the backdrop of Yahweh’s “visitation” against Egypt in delivering his people, the “visiting-in-punishment” threatened in Exod 20:5 should be understood as Yahweh’s extraordinary, intervening actions, as the Creator “comes down” into the creation to act in direct, demonstrative deeds of judgment and deliverance. The transgenerational dynamic threatened here is no mere self-unfolding of an idolater’s misdeeds and their consequences, but rather the threat of personal, direct, active redress, by Yahweh’s hand, against an idolater’s descendants—just as Yahweh himself went forth in Egypt and struck down the firstborn sons (11:4; 12:12–13, regarding the episodes of Exod 3 and 19–24: “The link is structural and linguistic.”

This generations theme is discussed at length in §7.1.2 above.
Third, the phrase fixes a dramatic tension within the plot of Exodus which will come to a climax in the golden calf narrative. So far, Yahweh has acted exclusively and decisively pro Israel. But this threat that Yahweh’s jealous character may be expressed in transgenerational punishment—a punishment that withdraws and reverses the distinctive, generations-long blessings intended for the sons of Israel and a punishment that resonates with the devastation just enacted against Egypt—creates an underlying tension for the reader as the story progresses. In this way, the visiting-phrase contributes directly to the paradigmatic question for the book of Exodus as a whole: Will Yahweh deal with Israel in the same way he dealt with Egypt? (See Exod 2:14 and discussion in §8.1.3. above.)

8.3.5. The Divine Name in Exodus 29:45–46

The key name-passages discussed so far—Exod 3:14–15; 6:2–8; 15:1–18; and 20:5–6—have revealed and confessed the divine name and character in a way fitted to the indirect characterization of Yahweh in their immediate narrative context. So also, Exod 29:45–46 expresses Yahweh’s character in light of the tabernacle instructions surrounding it in chs. 25–31. Already in Exod 3, the name Yahweh was associated with the promise of his personal presence to Moses: “I will be with you” (היה עמי, 3:12). In the Exod 15 and 20 passages, Yahweh’s dwelling with Israel is briefly referenced and anticipated: Yahweh will graciously lead them to the place he has made for his “abode … the sanctuary” (15:17), and so he forbids other gods “in my presence” (יшеל, 20:3). Now, having brought the people to himself at the mountain and established his covenant with them, Yahweh meets with Moses on the mountain for forty days and forty nights, commanding an offering for the construction of a tabernacle (25:1–9) and giving extensive, detailed instructions for its structure and furnishings (chs. 25–27), and for the vestments, consecration, and ministrations of its priests (chs. 28–29).
The grammar throughout is replete with actions prescribed for Moses, the people, and Aaron and his sons—Yahweh speaking in second- and third-person verbs. In the closing verses of ch. 29, however, Yahweh’s speaking shifts from detailed specifics to general statements and from second- and third-person instruction to first-person self-commitment and self-revelation. The final two verses, in particular, are summative:134

Thus I will dwell in the midst of the sons of Israel (ושׁכנתי внутри בני ישראל), and I will be their God. And they will know that I am Yahweh their God (אני יהוה אליהם) who brought them out of the land of Egypt in order that I might dwell in their midst (לשם זה עיבדו). I am Yahweh (אני יהוה). (Exod 29:45–46)

In continuity with the preceding four name-texts, Yahweh here repeatedly invokes his divine name, presenting himself distinctly as Israel’s God who rescued them from Egypt.135 The forward-looking perspective of Yahweh’s enduring, generations-long purposes, an explicit element in Exod 3, 6, 15, and especially 20 (vv. 5–6), is also present here in 29:45–46 by implied reference to the tabernacle and Yahweh’s ongoing dwelling there “in the midst of the sons of Israel.”136

This passage advances the trajectory of Yahweh’s self-revelation in Exodus by directly stating that Yahweh’s ultimate purpose in delivering Israel is that he might dwell in their midst. The logic of the recognition formula (“and they will know”) in this context suggests that the

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134 Blackburn, God Who Makes Himself Known, 147, notes that Exod 29:45–46 is “a text [that] many interpreters find the high point of the entire tabernacle material.” Carpenter, Exodus 19–40, 251–52, emphasizes the summarizing function of this passage: “If the reader has lost the major theme because of the trees, the theological summary in these verses recalls attention to the main contours of the forest of God’s goals and purposes—the restoration/creation of his people into his presence and into his glory.”

135 Geoffrey H. Parke-Taylor, Yahweh: The Divine Name in the Bible (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1975), 68–69, observes that the OT regularly ties the phrase “I am Yahweh” with the deliverance from Egypt. His listing of examples ranges through Lev 11:45; 19:36; 25:38; 26:13; Judg 6:8–10; Hos 12:10; 13:4; Ezek 20:5–7; and Ps 81:11. From Exodus he cites three passages: Exod 6:6–7; 20:2; and 29:46, three of the name-passages currently under discussion. Of course, Exod 3 and 15 also focus prominently on the divine name Yahweh, tying Yahweh to the Exodus deliverance in promise (Exod 3) and fulfillment (Exod 15).

136 Kürle, Appeal of Exodus, 53n111. The many references in the surrounding tabernacle chapters to the priesthood and various tabernacle ministrations as “perpetual statues” for Israel “throughout their generations” confirms this observation. See discussion above under §7.1.2 in the subsection “Enduring Covenant, Commands, and Priestly Status.”
tabernacle construction and Yahweh’s coming to dwell there in the midst of Israel is constituent to coming to rightly know Yahweh (29:45), and that Yahweh is thereby known not only as the God who brought them out of Egypt but also as the God who did so in order that he might dwell among them (29:46). In other words, Yahweh’s dwelling among the sons of Israel is both the means and the content of the revelation of his name-character to Israel. “Yahweh” names a God who desires to dwell in the midst of his people.

The language of Exod 29:45–46 draws together and summarizes the broader portrayal of Yahweh in the surrounding context, where Yahweh is portrayed as a God who not only resides and abides (שכן) with Israel, but who also consecrates and sanctifies (שׁקד) them and meets (יעד) with them. This broad tabernacle theology is reflected in the overlapping terms “tabernacle” (משכן), “sanctuary” (מקדש), and “tent of meeting” (אהל מועד) used throughout chs. 25–31. This three-fold conceptual array is present in the opening of Yahweh’s tabernacle instructions in ch. 25 (see 25:8–9, 22), as well as in the verses immediately preceding this name-speech (see 29:42a–44). Yahweh reveals himself to be a God who purposes to dwell and abide in the midst of his people, sanctifying the tabernacle and the people by his presence, and meeting and speaking with them there.

In particular, Yahweh’s dwelling among his people is deeply connected with his holiness (שׁד). While Yahweh’s nearness to the sons of Israel stands at the heart of their covenant calling and enduring heritage (Exod 19:5–6; 33:16)\(^\text{137}\), proximity to Yahweh’s holiness may also be dangerous, even deadly (Exod 3:5–6; 15:11–12; 19:12–13; 20:18, 21; 30:20; etc.). Because of this, the characterization of Yahweh in 29:45–46 as a God who is determined to dwell with Israel

\(^{137}\) Such earthly dwelling with men stands as unique against the backstory of Genesis, recalling the pristine days of the original creation when God went about in the garden in close fellowship with the first man and first woman. Yahweh’s tabernacle dwelling in Exodus resolves the crisis brought into the narrative with the expulsion of humanity from Eden. See Leder, “Coherence of Exodus,” 256–57, 266–69.
contributes to the narrative tension already set in place by 20:2–6—an undercurrent which will become actual, acute conflict in the golden calf apostasy. Kürle summarizes:

The conflict [of Exod 32–34] is set up for the reader in the beginning of the decalogue (Exod 20:2–6), by the prohibition of god-images (at the very beginning of the book of the covenant, 20:23), and by the expression of the divine willingness to dwell continuously among the people (29:45f).138

In Exod 20:2–6, Yahweh proclaims himself as the incomparable God of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, who commands exclusive worship and obedience. He is a jealous God who visits iniquity upon the generations of those who hate and defy him, but who shows lovingkindness to those who love and obey him. In Exodus 29:45–46, Yahweh declares that he has delivered the sons of Israel in order that he might dwell in their midst in holiness. As Israel’s full-blown disobedience, rebellion, and idolatry burst onto the stage in Exod 32, these elements of Yahweh’s character (gradually and narratively revealed in Exod 1–31, and directly expressed in 20:2–6 and 29:45–46) ring as an apparent death knell for this stiff-necked people.139

8.3.6. The Divine Name in Exodus 34:6–7

יהוה יהוה אל רחום וחנ֑ון ארך אפים ורב־חסד ואמת
נץ חסד לאלפים נשׂא עון ופשׁע וחטא֑ה
ונקה לא ינקה פקד עון אבות על־בנים ועל־בני בנים ועל־שׁלשׂים ועל־רבעים

Yahweh, Yahweh, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful lovingkindness, preserving lovingkindness for the thousands, forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin; yet he will certainly not neglect punishment, visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons and against sons of sons, against members of the third and the fourth generations. (34:6–7)140

All throughout, the Exodus narrative has dramatically illustrated the literary dictum of Henry James: “What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the

138 Kürle, Appeal of Exodus, 72.

139 In Exod 33:3–5, Yahweh twice mentions that “should I go up in your midst” (אמר אלהים בכרענו) he would destroy them, conceptually mirroring the double repetition in 29:45–46 of his intention to “dwell in their midst” (לשמךたち).

140 For a lengthy explanation and defense of this translation, see above §4.3.
This is supremely true of the golden calf account in Exod 32–34. In the people’s demand for and worship of the calf, an aspect of their character which has been regularly and increasingly glimpsed in the preceding narrative now emerges with clarity: they are a stiff-necked people. Their character determines the incident of apostasy with the calf, and their apostasy with the calf openly illustrates their character. In the first narrative movement, Yahweh confronted the people’s suffering and need: “I have surely seen the affliction of my people” (3:7). Now in the second movement, he is faced with this “second look” at the sons of Israel: “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people” (32:9; cf. 33:3, 5).

However, it is even more so the character of Yahweh which “determines incident” in the golden calf narrative and what follows—and even more so Yahweh’s character which here is revealed. In the face of Israel’s apostasy with the calf idol, it is the strong contour of Yahweh’s own character, as revealed thus far, which jeopardizes Israel’s future and heightens the tragedy of the moment. The jealous Yahweh of Exod 20:5–6 who is the holy Yahweh of 29:45–46 has no clear place for—or among—a stiff-necked people. The train wreck seems unstoppable. Saner identifies the crux: “How can God, who is holy and jealous, be present among a people prone to idolatry? As Gowan writes, ‘The choices [in Exod 32–34] seem at first to be only two: dying in their sins, if God visits them, or if God distances himself, existing in their sins, without hope for anything good to come.’”


142 On the metaphorical dynamics of the expression “stiff-necked” (קשׁה־ערף), see Jean-Marc Babut, Idiomatic Expressions of the Hebrew Bible: Their Meaning and Translation through Componential Analysis, tr. Sarah E. Lind, BIBALDS 5 (North Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL, 1999), 119–47.

143 The use of הנה (behold!) with a verb of seeing is a narrative device commonly used in Exodus to establish perceptual point of view. Here, Yahweh himself employs this device to invite Moses—and the reader—to look upon the people’s apostasy from the divine perspective, from “Yahweh’s shoes” so to speak. See also Exod 2:6, which draws the reader to see the crying infant in the basket through the eyes of Pharaoh’s daughter, and 14:10, which draws the reader to see the approaching Egyptian hosts through the eyes of the vulnerable Israelites.

144 Saner, “Too Much to Grasp,” 157, citing Donald E. Gowan, Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the
With Exod 34:6–7, however, the sixth key name-passage in the book of Exodus, the plot trajectory of Yahweh making himself known comes to its highest point and culmination. This narrative episode and its name-speech in 34:6–7 reveal a final and profound aspect Yahweh’s character which opens up a new future for stiff-necked Israel: *his mercy may extend even to sinners and rebels; he is a God who forgives.* Only at this point in the narrative, in his forgiveness after the calf rebellion, is God’s pervasive intention fully realized: you will know that I am Yahweh. With this new accent, the previous characterization of Yahweh is not denied or abandoned. Rather, by repeating yet reformulating Exod 20:5–6 in 34:7, the continuity of Yahweh’s jealous, punishing character is maintained, even as it is subordinated under the revelation of a new and more central trait: his merciful forgiveness.

After the deliverance arc focused on deliverance in Exod 1–18, the second narrative movement shifted the focus to Yahweh’s covenant and presence with Israel. Yahweh’s first words from Mount Sinai to the people were both retrospective and prospective. That is, the name-speech of Exod 20:2–6 *summarized* the character of Yahweh as he had revealed himself in the first part of the book: he had demonstrated his faithfulness and compassion in delivering his people, yet against Pharaoh and Egypt and their gods he had demonstrated his just and inescapable visitation against his enemies. At the same time, this retrospective summary of Yahweh’s character in Exod 20:2–6 also expressed the implications of Yahweh’s might and jealousy moving forward—his expectation for Israel of exclusive worship and obedience—setting up the narrative tension of the second half of the book, and especially of Exod 32–34. When the “great sin” of Israel’s outright idolatry and apostasy erupts in ch. 32, it is precisely this Exod 20:2–6 characterization of Yahweh which looms large.

A number of close verbal associations emphasize the key role of Exod 20:2–6 in the

conflict of the golden calf narrative. In 20:2, God had proclaimed: “I am Yahweh your God (אלהי) who brought you out from the land of Egypt.” In the golden calf scene, this phrase is repeated five times, often horribly parodied. The people justify their demand for “gods” by the long absence of Moses, “the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt” (32:1). They say of the newly fashioned calf idol: “These are your gods (אלוהי), O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt” (32:4). The expression “whom you brought up/out from the land of Egypt” is twice more repeated in the ensuing dialogue between God and Moses (32:7, 11), and Yahweh cites the people’s idolatrous claim verbatim: “They have said, “These are your gods (אלוהי), O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt” (32:8).

The plural “gods” referring to the single calf idol is notable. “Make for us gods (אלהים) who will go before us” (32:1). Also, when the calf idol is produced, they announce, “These are your gods (אלוהי), O Israel” (32:4, 8). The plural with possessive pronoun—“your gods (אלוהי)”—precisely echoes Yahweh’s self-description in 20:2: “I am Yahweh your God (אלהי).” The plural here also directly recalls Yahweh’s prohibition in 20:3: “You shall not have other gods (אלדים אחלים).”

A number of other verbal parallels round out the direct association of Israel’s apostasy in ch. 32 with Yahweh’s name-speech in 20:2–6. The people demand gods who will go “before us (לפני, 32:1),” and Aaron, having fashioned the calf idol, builds an altar (apparently) to Yahweh “before it” (לפני, 32:5)—violating Yahweh’s demand to have no other gods “before me” (לפני, 32:5).

145 The plural verbs (“[they] will go” in 32:1, and “[they] brought you up” in 32:4, 8) along with the plural pronouns (“These ( אלהים) are your gods, O Israel” in 32:4, 8) establish that the people do not simply have in mind “Elohim” as a singular entity in reference to Yahweh. Also notable is the close parallel in Hebrew syntax between 20:2, (“I am Yahweh your God”), and 32:4, 8 (“These are your gods, O Israel”). Not only is the latter presentation of אלהים (gods) problematic by replacing the divine speaker with the voice of “all the people,” but also the proper noun Israel (as a vocative) replaces the name Yahweh in the syntax of the first three words. It is an emphatically self-chosen, self-declared worship which has displaced Yahweh. Israel announces their gods to themselves. Aaron, in the following verse, attempts to draw the name of Yahweh back into the picture, announcing a syncretistic festival.
In 20:4 Yahweh commanded, “You shall not make for yourselves an idol.” Now the people demand of Aaron, “Arise and make for us gods” (32:1), and Yahweh relates to Moses, “They have made for themselves a calf idol” (32:8). Yahweh adds, “And they have bowed down to it,” recalling the prohibition, “You shall not bow down to them” (20:5). Yahweh’s core self-description in 20:5 as “a jealous God”—a concept often associated both with anger and with fire (see §4.2.4 above)—is reflected in Yahweh’s anger burning against the people in 32:9.

The curiously intergenerational scope of Aaron’s directive in 32:2, “Snatch the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me,” evokes the threat of visiting fathers’ iniquity against sons (20:5). The language of “visiting-in-punishment” from 20:5 reappears at the end of ch. 32: “In the day of my visiting, I will visit-in-punishment against them (their sin)” (32:34). In 20:6, Yahweh is a God who acts in lovingkindness to thousands, to those who those who love him and “keep my commandments.” But after the calf, Yahweh declares, “They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them” (32:8), and through Moses he dispatches the Levites with swords so that about “three thousand men” fall that day (32:28). Clearly, the golden calf episode in Exod 32 is related in a way which highlights the people’s direct repudiation of Yahweh’s character and commands in Exod 20:2–6, foregrounding its now-problematic trait of Yahweh as “a jealous God.”

The narrative elements which intervene between 20:2–6 and the calf idol rebellion in ch. 32

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146 The accusation that the people “made” or “made for themselves” an idol is repeated extensively: 32:1, 4, 9, 20–23, 31, 35. The expression, “They have made for themselves gods of gold” (ויעשׂו להם האלהים זהב) in 32:31 is a direct reference to the command in 20:23 (which is itself a reprise of 20:3–5): “And gods of gold you shall not make for yourselves” (ואלהי זהב לא תעשׂו لكم).

147 The associations of jealousy, anger, and fire are drawn together in any number of OT passages, e.g., Ps 79:5: “How long, O Yahweh? Will you be angry forever? Will your jealousy burn like fire?”

148 There is a tight sound play between the vocables מצותי (“my commandments”) and צויתים (“I commanded them”).

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flow as *extensions and elaborations of 20:2–6*: the commands and rules in 20:7–23:33; the covenant with its sacrifices and meal in ch. 24; and the detailed instructions for tabernacle, priesthood, and Sabbath in chs. 25–31. *All of this* expounds what it is to be the people “brought out” by Yahweh who love him, keep his commandments, and worship him alone. Thus, when the calf idol apostasy in ch. 32 is presented as a tragically ironic counterfeit of *all of this*, it further magnifies the direct conflict between ch. 32 and Exod 20:2–6.

The construction and worship of the calf idol is precisely that: a repudiation and perverse counterfeit of the people’s proper life in Yahweh’s presence glimpsed throughout chs. 20–31. Following the Decalogue, Yahweh’s further instructions in Exod 20:22–23:33 begin and end with an emphasis on worship: worship Yahweh with proper *altars*; do not make gods of silver *in Yahweh’s presence*, and do not make for yourself *gods of gold* (Exod 20:22–23). When you come into the land, *don’t bow down to* and become enslaved to the gods of the Canaanites; don’t make a covenant with them or *their gods*, lest they cause you *to sin against me* (23:24, 32–33). The thematic and verbal connections here with the golden calf episode are numerous (32:1–5, 8, 30–31).

In Exod 24:4–11, Moses gets up early (שׁכם) in the morning and builds (בנה) an altar (מזבח); they offer up (עלה) whole burnt offerings (עלות) and sacrifice (זבח) peace offerings (שׁלמים); and

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149 The prepositional phrase יָנָּה (Exod 20:23a) is translated here in its sense of “with me, beside me,” that is, “in my presence,” analogous to the meaning of יָנָה in the syntax of Isa 30:8, and influenced by the sense of תַּלֵּפָּה (“in my presence”) in Exod 20:3.

150 The verb פִּטְנָה is not used in Exod 32:1–6 in narrating the people’s actions with the golden calf, but it is used by Yahweh in 32:8, reporting their actions. Whereas Exod 24:5 says the people “offered up whole burnt offerings and sacrificed (פִּטְנָה) sacrifices, peace offerings to Yahweh,” the golden calf narrative says, “they offered up whole burnt offerings and brought near (Hiphil of פִּטְנָה) peace offerings” (32:6). While Exod 24 did not use פִּטְנָה in connection with the peace offerings, פִּטְנָה is a key word in ch. 24, further binding ch. 24 to ch. 32. Yahweh has instructed Moses and the elders to ascend the mountain, but only Moses is to draw near (פִּטְנָה; Aaron, the elders, and the people are forbidden from drawing near (פִּטְנָה). Thus, the use of פִּטְנָה in describing Aaron and/or the people’s illicit worship in 32:6 (LXX has singular form of פִּטְנָה, probably implying Aaron; MT has plural form, implying the people and perhaps also Aaron) further highlights their direct disobedience to Yahweh. Furthermore, in ch. 24, after the covenant and its meal, as Moses prepares to ascend, by himself, into the cloud at the top of the mountain, he announces to the elders that he is leaving Aaron and Hur in charge: “If anyone has a legal dispute, let
the leaders eat (אכָּל) and drink (שָׁתָה) before God. The golden calf narrative reprises each of these details and lexemes in 32:5–6. The calf idol apostasy is the first scene in the camp of Israel since that sublime covenant ceremony and meal in ch. 24—the people’s very next action—starkly coloring the golden calf as a counterfeit, perversion, and repudiation of the true worship of Yahweh depicted in ch. 24.  

The remaining chapters leading up to the golden calf (chs. 25–31) provide detailed instructions regarding tabernacle, priesthood, and Sabbath. These begin with Yahweh’s directive to take up an offering from the people of materials for the tabernacle construction (25:1–9). Mentioned first is gold (זהב, 25:3), and gold will be mentioned another 46 times in detailing the tabernacle furnishings and priestly vestments in chs. 25–31. The offering of gold solicited by Aaron and used for the calf in 32:2–4 apes this freewill offering solicited by Yahweh in 25:1–9, and profanes the holiness associated with gold within the tabernacle. In chs. 28–30, God gives instructions regarding the ordination and central role of Aaron, the high priest, in the holy

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151 The covenant worship in Exod 24 with its sacrifices comes as the fulfillment of one of Yahweh’s overarching narrative intentions (Exod 3:12). His first instruction to Moses regarding Pharaoh, is that he should demand, “Let us go three days’ journey into the wilderness in order that we may sacrifice (זבח) to Yahweh our God” (3:18). In Moses’ first appearance before Pharaoh, he declares, “Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: Let my people go, so that they may hold a feast to me (חגָּג לי) in the wilderness” (5:1; cf. 10:9), and then, “Let us go three days’ journey into the wilderness in order that we may sacrifice to Yahweh (זבח ליהוה) our God” (5:3; cf. 8:23, 25 (Eng: 8:27, 29)). The golden calf scene makes dramatic use of this precise language, making clear that Yahweh’s purposes have been hijacked and perverted. When Aaron “sees” the people’s proclamation of the calf idol as “your gods, O Israel who brought you up from the land of Egypt,” he builds an altar before the calf and declares “A feast to Yahweh (חג ליהוה) tomorrow!” (32:5; cf. 5:1) Yahweh reports their great sin to Moses: “They have made for themselves a calf idol, and they have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it (זבח ליהוה)” (32:8; cf. 5:3).

152 Johnstone, Exodus, 2:247–48: “All the structures and objects within the sanctuary are overlaid with gold or are of solid gold…. Even the immediate layers of curtains draped over the wooden framework, the internal dividing curtain, and the clothing of Aaron, the high priest who has exclusive access to the most holy place, contain gold thread. The theological point must be that only the most precious metal can worthily express the sanctity of the place of closest encounter with God and . . . of those who would approach God.”

153 These chapters also frequently speak of “Aaron and his sons,” but their central focus on Aaron is established by mentioning his sons’ names only once (28:1; elsewhere simply “and his sons” or “and Aaron’s sons”)
worship of Yahweh and in offering sacrifices of atonement for sin. In ch. 32, however, it is Aaron who allows “other gods in Yahweh’s presence” (cf. 20:3) and leads the people into “great sin” (32:21). Chapters 25–31 close with a parting exhortation regarding the Sabbath. The Decalogue described the seventh day as “a Sabbath to Yahweh (לָיְהוָה) your God” (20:10). In Exod 31:15 God declares it to be “a Sabbath of solemn rest, something holy to Yahweh” (לָיְהוָה). With this description of the holy Sabbath “to Yahweh” immediately preceding, Aaron’s proclamation in 32:5, “A feast to Yahweh (לָיְהוָה) tomorrow!” rings as hasty and desperate, and certainly not as holy (with the presence of the calf idol). Rather than sanctifying the appointed day with the appointed worship of Yahweh, Aaron, having already violated the prohibitions in Exod 20:3–5, now takes up Yahweh’s name in vain and impulsively preempts the holy seventh day with “tomorrow.” The rebellion of the sons of Israel with the calf idol in Exod 32 is thus construed as a counterfeit, perversion, and repudiation of the entire program of Yahweh and his Israel set forth in Exod 20–31, all of which itself emanates from Yahweh’s name and character as it is proclaimed in Exod 20:2–6.

Thus, the Yahweh of Exod 20:2–6 stands firmly planted within the narration of Exod 32, and in 20:2–6, Yahweh was clear: He is Yahweh their God, who brought them out of Egypt. He has gone before them and brought them to himself. As the people in his presence, they are to have no other gods, and they are to make for themselves no idol. To spurn Yahweh in such a way would be to incur the kinds of sanctions visited against Egypt and to forsake the blessings Yahweh had promised to them throughout their generations. Rather, they are to love him and keep his commandments, so that his lovingkindness might be extended to their numerous descendants. And so, when the reader reaches Exod 32, the outright apostasy of the sons of Israel

and by using simply “Aaron,” in some places, as a trope for the ongoing priestly service throughout Israel’s generations (see esp. 30:7–10).
bursts like a grenade upon the storyline.  

The stiff-necked rebellion of Israel precipitates a deadly crisis in light of the character of Yahweh summarized in 20:2–6, so that the very existence and future of the people appears doomed.

Faced with Israel’s unthinkable rebellion with the calf, the character of Yahweh previously exhibited and summarized in Exod 20:2–6 gives rise to the paradigmatic question, “Will Yahweh now slay rebellious Israel like he slayed the Egyptians?” In this respect, the intercession of Moses after the golden calf is interesting: “Why should the Egyptians say, ‘With evil intent he brought them out in order to slay (הרג) them in the mountains’” (32:12). The verb “slay” (הרג) appears again in the directive given to the Levites in 32:27 to pass through the camp and to slay (הרג), each one his brother, his fellow man, and his neighbor—a vivid and painful demonstration of the fate rightfully deserved by the people as a whole (32:1, 9)—but a fate to be mercifully avoided because of Yahweh’s forgiving nature (34:6–9).

A happy outcome for Israel comes only as Yahweh moves beyond his self-characterization of 20:2–6—or rather as he deepens it by giving a greater revelation, a fresh and fuller answer to the questions, “What is your name?” (3:13) and “Who is Yahweh?” (5:2) It is at this point that the self-proclamation of Yahweh’s character in Exod 34:6–7 is given, answering the paradigmatic question with a story-rescuing “No.” No, Yahweh will not slay Israel like he slayed the Egyptians. His faithful lovingkindness is so great that he will forgive their sin, go in their midst, and take them as his inheritance throughout their generations. They are a stiff-necked

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154 Fretheim, Exodus, 279, speaks of it as “a sudden, sharp blast of cold air,” but even this is too mild.
155 See Exod 2:14 and discussion under §8.1.3 above.
156 This answer will be accounted for only by the revelation of Yahweh’s merciful forgiveness in ch. 34, but it is already foreshadowed by the theme of Yahweh’s distinct treatment of Israel throughout the book. Moses decries the prospect that this distinct and holy standing could be at an end, for is it not Yahweh’s going with the people by which “they are distinct (פלה Niphal) … from every people on the face of the earth” (33:16)? This is spoken against the backdrop not only of Israel’s explicit designation as Yahweh’s “treasured possession out of all the nations” (19:5) but also of Yahweh’s track record throughout the plague narrative of “treating distinctly” (פלה Hiphil) the sons of Israel over against Egypt (Exod 8:18 [Eng 8:22]; 9:4; 11:7).
people; they have deserved no different fate than Pharaoh. But Yahweh is Yahweh—the Yahweh most fully proclaimed in 34:6–7. “Finally, the future of Israel is seen to rest solely in God, who is gracious, merciful, and abounding in steadfast love.”157 Yahweh is not only a God who destroys his enemies but also a God who mercifully forgives even rebel sinners.

As Moses intercedes following the people’s sin, Yahweh relents from his initial decree of destruction (32:10–14) and eventually changes from declaring the impossibility of going in Israel’s midst to committing himself to personally going up with them to the land (33:3, 14, 17). Nothing in the direct revelation of God’s name and character thus far in the narrative would have made such divine mercy in the face of sinful rebellion predictable. As Mann notes, Yahweh’s movement from punishment to mercy here discloses a dimension of his character transcending even his own standards of covenant righteousness that he has just revealed at Sinai…. It is not just that grace is not a reward for righteousness; it is that grace is offered despite unrighteousness…. In effect, the golden calf story thus represents an “identity crisis” within the heart of God. In order to be true to that self that swore the oath to Abraham, Yahweh must suppress that self that is the offended suzerain of Sinai.158

And yet, as Moberly observes, Yahweh’s concessions to this point have only kicked the can down the road, so to speak. The fundamental fact of the sinfulness of Israel, which was the cause of all the trouble, remains unchanged. The possibility is thereby raised that the renewed presence of Yahweh with his people would simply lead to his further wrath and judgment against them as the inevitable result of any future sin. The restoration of the shrine as the means of Yahweh’s presence could of itself yet lead to the destruction of Israel. Something further is needed, and this Moses seeks in [33:]18ff.; this is nothing less than a deeper and fuller revelation of the character of Yahweh as a God whose very nature is to be gracious and merciful (33:19; 34:6f.). Only on this basis can the covenant be renewed.159

157 Fretheim, Exodus, 280.
158 Mann, Book of the Torah, 109 (my emphasis).
159 Moberly, Mountain of God, 68 (my emphasis). Fretheim, Exodus, 286, makes a similar observation regarding Yahweh’s relenting in 32:14: “It is to be noted that this does not entail the removal of all forms of judgment (see vv. 33, 35) or forgiveness of the people’s sin. Moses’ continued intercession with God for their forgiveness (32:30–34 and 34:9) shows that that is yet another step for God to take.”
So Moses, acknowledging that a profound new revelation of Yahweh is here unfolding—and must unfold, if Israel is to have a future—prays to Yahweh: “Please make me to know your way that I may know you…. Please show me your glory” (Exod 33:13, 18). And Yahweh consents: “I myself will cause all my goodness to pass by in your presence, and I will proclaim the name Yahweh before you” (33:19a). God’s theophanic proclamation in 34:6–7 comes as the fulfillment of Moses’ requests and Yahweh’s concurrence. He passes by and makes known to Moses his way, glory, and goodness—that is, the fullest revelation of His name. Here the trajectory of Yahweh’s self-revelation in Exodus comes to its pinnacle:

יהוה יהוה אל רחום וחנ֑ון ארך אפים ורב־חסד ואמת
ונץ חסד לאלפים נשׂא עון ופשׁע וחטא֑ה
וְנַקָה לֹא יַנֵּקָה פְּקָד עֶבֶֽדְיוֹ אָבֵֽרְבֶּשׁ על־בֵּיתוֹ אֵלֶֽיךָ יורָשׁוֹת:

Yahweh, Yahweh, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful lovingkindness, preserving lovingkindness for the thousands, forgiving

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160 John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 80: “Moses … was asking that a stiff-necked and idolatrous nation be distinguished above all the nations as God’s own people! It was in a sense an unthinkable request in view of what God had said in 33:5…. Moses desired to know God’s way and his glory (33:13, 18). In other words the magnitude of his request drives Moses to probe into the very heart of God, as it were to assure himself that God is in his deepest nature the kind of God who could ‘pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for [his] inheritance’ (34:9).… The request to see God’s glory should be understood in this context as a desire to have God confirm his astonishing willingness to show his favor to a stiff-necked, idolatrous people (33:16f).” Mark S. Boda, *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology: Three Creedal Expressions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 35–38, draws a sharp distinction between Yahweh’s “ways” and “glory” here. Ways are the divine activities later described by verbs in Exod 34:7, while Yahweh’s glory is his core personal character later described by adjectives and nominal qualities in 34:6. There may be some validity in this, but in another sense there also seems to be cumulative unity in the terms, together with Yahweh’s “goodness” and “name.”

161 Piper, *Justification of God*, 84–89, reads “goodness” here as a moral quality rather than an aesthetic phenomenon (as in visible beauty), so that the term “goodness” in 33:19a is “virtually tantamount to Yahweh’s name in this context.” The theophanic proclamation in 34:6–7, along with its summary prelude in 33:19b, “constitute a manifestation of God’s glory (33:18), a ‘passing by’ of his goodness (33:19), and a proclamation of his name (33:19). These three realities overlap in the present context.”

162 Moberly, *Mountain of God*, 76: “The whole of 33:18–23 constitutes a rich treasury of terms for expressing the character of God. The variety of terminology—glory, goodness, name, face—represents an attempt to express the inexpressible, the experience of God.” Above, I treat the terms in this sense, as a constellation of terms collectively referring to Yahweh’s character and self-disclosure. This is not to deny that in the narrative, there is also a distinction made between Yahweh’s name and his glory: his glory is visible and limitations are placed on Moses’ seeing it; his name is audible with no such restrictions. It is also true, however, that just as Yahweh limits the visible disclosure of his glory, he likewise chooses what aspects of his name to be proclaimed. Presumably God could have declared “more of” the name of Yahweh than he does, even in Exod 34:6–7. To say that this name-speech is the fullest disclosure of the divine character in Exodus (or in the OT) does not suggest that this speech exhaustively discloses the nature of Yahweh. For a helpful discussion of the close relationship but distinction between Yahweh’s glory and his name, see Gordon J. McConville, “God’s ‘Name’ and God’s ‘Glory,’” *TynBul* 30 (1979): 149–63.
iniquity and rebellion and sin; yet he will certainly not neglect punishment, visiting-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons and against sons of sons, against members of the third and the fourth generations. (34:6–7)

As with the previous name-passages discussed above, Exod 34:6–7 likewise stands as a summative expression of God’s character as revealed in the surrounding narrative. In this supreme episode of Israel’s iniquity, rebellion, and sin, Yahweh’s anger (32:10–11), punishment (32:27–28), and visitation of sin (32:33–35) have come to the fore, and the fulfillment of God’s promises to the sons of Israel throughout their generations (32:13) has come into terrible jeopardy (32:10; 33:3–5). Yet Moses has interceded and been shown favor (חן) by Yahweh (33:12–13, 16–17; 34:9), who has heard and answered Moses’ pleas. Yahweh has restrained his anger, has relented from devastating judgment, and has agreed to go with the people.

And so, in adoration and confidence inspired by Yahweh’s words in 34:6–7, Moses bows low and worships, praying: “Please, may the Lord go in our midst, for this is a stiff-necked people, and forgive our iniquity and our sin, and take us as your inheritance” (34:8–9). Yahweh agrees, immediately announcing that he is about to do an “awesome thing” (נורא) with Israel. He is about to do and create (עשׂה, ברא) such wonders (נפלאות) as have never been done in the world (34:10)—greater, then, than all of his wonders in the narrative thus far, in Egypt (נפלאות, 3:20) and at the sea (plural, 15:11). The new and ultimate wonder is that Yahweh is making a new covenant with a stiff-necked people, a covenant made possible solely by his merciful character and his forgiveness of Israel’s iniquity, rebellion, and sin.

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163 Ruth Scoralick, “JHWH, JHWH, ein gnädiger und barmherziger Gott… (Ex 34,6): Die Gottesprädikation aus Ex 34,6f in ihrem Kontext in Kapitel 32–34,” in Gottes Volk am Sinai: Untersuchungen zu Ex 32–34 und Dtn 9–10, ed. Matthias Köckert and Erhard Blum (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 2001), 147–48, observes the way in which the interaction between Yahweh and Moses regarding anger (32:10–12) is echoed in the interactions between Moses and Aaron back in the camp (32:19, 22). This double scene of anger being restrained illustrates the conviction regarding the divine character expressed in God’s speech in 34:6–7. “Wenn ein weiteres Mal vom Zorn die Rede ist, dann in der Form von Ex 34,6: Gott ist langsam zum vernichtenden Zorn—wie die Erzählung zeigt.”
Yahweh’s forgiveness is so new and remarkable here that the great event of the Exodus deliverance, for a moment, seems almost forgotten: in his rich self-portrayal in 34:6–7, Yahweh does not mention it! In the previous passages examined, Yahweh’s name was closely bound to his identity as Israel’s deliverer from Egypt. With Exod 3:14–15 such language surrounds Yahweh’s name-speech (3:8, 16–17) and in the Song of the Sea in 15:1–18 it is developed profusely and poetically. In the three other passages it forms a central part of Yahweh’s name-invocation and self-description:

I am Yahweh, and I will bring you out from under the burden of the Egyptians.… And you will know that I am Yahweh your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. (6:6–7)

I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out from a house of slaves. You shall not have other gods in my presence. (20:2–3)

And they will know that I am Yahweh their God, who brought them out from the land of Egypt to dwell in their midst. I am Yahweh their God. (29:46)

In the cultic instructions following the name-theophany in ch. 34, Yahweh mentions the feast of unleavened bread as a continuing remembrance of the month when they “came out from Egypt” (34:18) and repeats instructions regarding Passover and the redemption of sons, which implicitly recall Israel’s redemption (34:19–20, 25). Yahweh marks the reestablishment of his covenant with the people with the inscription of the “previous words” upon stone tablets (34:1), the first statement of which would have been, “I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt” (20:2). Clearly then, Yahweh’s identity continues to be he-who-brought-Israel-out-from-Egypt. And yet this part of his identity, so central at all other points in the narrative, remains unexpressed as he passes by Moses in 34:6–7, proclaiming his name and “all his goodness.” In response to the rebellion of a people who had declared before a golden idol, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!” (32:4), for Yahweh to reassert “I am Yahweh who brought you up from the land of Egypt” may have rung out as a retort, or even as a condemnation. In any case, no reference is made in 34:6–7 to this hard-won
renown. It is not cast aside, but is here overshadowed. For moving forward, the renown of Yahweh will lie “most chiefly”\textsuperscript{164} in something else: Yahweh is the God who preserves and forgives stiff-necked Israel.

Fretheim notes the language of creation (ברא and עשה) in 34:10 and describes the \textit{newness} of this covenant:

This is a \textit{new} covenant grounded in a new act of God on behalf of Israel. God places the covenant relationship with Israel on a new footing . . . undeserved divine forgiveness of an apostate people. In contrast to chapter 24, this covenant is not characterized by any formal response from Israel. The new covenant is in place simply because God has determined that it be so. Hence the nature of God’s covenant with Israel has changed…. No conditions are attached. Entirely at the divine initiative, at a moment in Israel’s life where it is most vulnerable and can call on no goodness of its own or any other human resource, God acts on Israel’s behalf: its sins are forgiven. \textit{This is an entirely new reality for Israel, indeed for the world.}\textsuperscript{165}

It might be objected here that this characterization is not so new—that Yahweh has already been portrayed at various points in Exodus as \textit{compassionate and gracious}. At least five exhibits might be put forward. First, he hears the cries of the sons of Israel in bondage and comes to their aid (Exod 2:23–25; 3:7, 9). Second, he is praised in Exod 15:13 and confessed in 20:5 as treating people with חסד (“lovingkindess”). Third, he bears with their grumbling in the wilderness and supplies their needs (Exod 16–17).\textsuperscript{166} In each of these cases however, a distinction can be made between Yahweh’s mercy which helps those crying out in need and Yahweh’s mercy in Exod 34

\textsuperscript{164} The narrative dynamic here calls to mind the opening of an historic collect from the \textit{Book of Common Prayer}: “O God, who declarest thy almighty power most chiefly in shewing mercy and pity…."

\textsuperscript{165} Fretheim, \textit{Exodus}, 308. Fretheim’s point is not that Yahweh is a totally replacing the previous covenant, but rather that Yahweh’s (same) covenant commitments to Israel are here set on a radically new footing: divine mercy alone with its forgiveness of sins. Exod 34:1–2 and 11–28 make clear that Yahweh is renewing, not replacing, the previous covenant.

\textsuperscript{166} George W. Coats, \textit{Rebellion in the Wilderness: The Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness Traditions of the Old Testament} (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 252–53, says of the wilderness grumbling in its canonical presentation in Exod 15–17 that it is “not rebellion which threatens to reject Israel’s leaders but a test or an unjustified complaint which depicts Israel’s tragic lack of faith.” When Coats goes on to suggest that Yahweh sometimes responded to this grumbling with “forgiveness and longsuffering,” he goes beyond the Exodus text, which does not speak of forgiveness here.
which forgives the sin of those who have rebelled against him. Fourth, it might be countered that Yahweh’s self-revelation as “a merciful and gracious God” in 34:6 simply repeats Yahweh’s blunt claim in 22:26: “For I am compassionate.” In the context of 22:26, however, Yahweh being “compassionate” does not relate to forgiveness, or even merely a willingness to help those in need, but rather to punishment. His compassion compels him to hear the cries of a shivering man without a cloak, and the passage implies (especially in light of 22:22–24) that, hearing, he will punish the cloakless man’s oppressor. Fifth, Yahweh’s command in 23:4–5 to help one’s enemy in need (with his struggling or wandering donkey) may point indirectly to Yahweh’s quality of compassion, even for his enemies. This fifth point comes closest to touching on the dynamic of divine mercy in Exod 34—mercy which is extended even to enemies. Without question, all of these passages foreshadow in some way the divine compassion and clemency displayed in Exod 34. Yet it is not until the golden calf narrative that Yahweh is explicitly portrayed as a God so merciful and gracious that he forgives sin. In particular, with the sin of idolatry in Yahweh’s presence and Israel’s stubborn refusal to obey his voice, the book of Exodus foregrounds his “jealousy” and his threat to “visit the iniquity of fathers in punishment against sons” as the relevant traits—a characterization of Yahweh which brings the story to its climax of conflict.

167 Francis I. Andersen, “Yahweh, the Kind and Sensitive God,” in God Who is Rich in Mercy, ed. Peter T. O’Brien and David G. Peterson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 58, stresses that forgiveness is not yet signified when Yahweh’s חסד is extolled in the Song of the Sea: “The traditional ‘mercy’ for hesed in Exod 15:13 is not very suitable, since it has associations of forgiveness, which do not enter into the Exodus at all. Compassion for slaves, yes; and a will to justice in their release as well. But the central thought is kindness.” The distinction between Yahweh’s mercy and graciousness in helping those crying out to him in need versus forgiving the sins of those who rebel against him corresponds neatly to Yahweh’s “two looks” at Israel described above. In Exod 3:7 Yahweh “surely has seen” the afflictions of his people; yet, in Exod 32:9, he “has seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiff-necked people.” Moberly, Mountain of God, 79, notes, “The making of the calf may be described as Israel’s first sin. Hence, in 33:19 [and in 33–34 as a whole], in the context of Israel’s sin as the problem to be dealt with, Yahweh’s character is revealed entirely in moral terms, showing how he deals with sin and the need for forgiveness in the life of Israel” (emphasis mine).

168 This fourth point regarding Exod 23:4–5 is discussed at some length above under the narrative theme of Yahweh’s justice. See §7.6.3. Mercy for an Enemy: A Complement to Yahweh’s Justice.
Note then, that while the character of Yahweh constitutes a seemingly insurmountable crisis for post-calf Israel, it is at the same time precisely the character of Yahweh which accounts for the restoration of Israel and the salvaging of Yahweh’s long-term plans for them—a character only now more fully disclosed: Yahweh is a merciful and gracious God who forgives iniquity. Such language is so prevalent in the Bible as to be cliché: to err is human, to forgive, divine. But in all of Genesis and Exodus up to this point, God has not explicitly forgiven (נשׂא or סלח) anyone. Abraham bargained that God might forgive (נשׂא) Sodom for the sake of fifty righteous persons in it (Gen 18:24), and God concurred that hypothetically he might do so (v. 25). But there were not even ten righteous people, God did not forgive, and the place was destroyed. Pharaoh, temporarily humbled and confessing his sin against Yahweh and against Moses, begged Moses to forgive (נשׂא) him (Exod 10:16–17). Yet Pharaoh’s humility and the reprieve from the plagues were both short-lived, and there was no forgiveness. At Sinai, God had promised to send his angel before the sons of Israel to guard them on their way, but he also warned them not to be rebellious, because the angel bears Yahweh’s name and will therefore not forgive (נשׂא) their rebellion (פשׁע) (Exod 23:20–21). Only with the full narrative realization of Israel’s towering need for forgiveness because of their “great sin” (חטאה גדלה, Exod 32:21, 30–31) does Yahweh for the first time in Genesis–Exodus “forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin” (נשׂא עון ופשׁע וחטאה, 34:7; cf. 34:9–10). Thus, in the Exodus narrative, this crowning divine quality is not simply presumed from the outset, but rather disclosed in the events of Yahweh’s historical,

169 Genesis uses the verb נשׂא in the sense of forgiving, with God as the subject, only in the Gen 18 passage discussed above, in which he does not, in the end, forgive. The verb סלח (“forgive, pardon”) is used for the first time in Genesis and Exodus with Moses’ prayer to Yahweh in Exod 34:9, just after Yahweh’s theophanic self-description as forgiving (נשׂא) iniquity, rebellion, and sin” in 34:7.

170 The contrast between Pharaoh’s fate in Exod 1–15 and Israel’s fate here in Exod 34 is stark. It seems perfectly appropriate that no forgiveness is granted to Pharaoh, who repeatedly relapses into hardness of heart. Yet with Israel after the golden calf, Moses pleads for forgiveness for the people in the face of repeated acknowledgement that they have been, and remain, a stiff-necked people. And Yahweh grants it. This is the forgiveness—in all its surprising inappropriateness—that is proclaimed by Yahweh in 34:6–7 (and 33:19b).
narrative interaction with the sons of Israel after the golden calf—and then directly declared by Yahweh himself in theophanic appearance before Moses in 34:6–7. This is perhaps the highest instance of Sternberg’s observation: “The complex of features making up God’s portrait emerges only by degrees and only through the action itself.”

As the disclosure of Yahweh’s character runs its narrative course, it may seem premature that its apogee would come already in ch. 34. There is no question, however, that 34:6–7 is the high mark of Yahweh’s self-revelation. The culminating characterization of Yahweh in the name-speech of 34:6–7 is not surpassed by his further speech or actions in Exodus, but rather explains them and is confirmed by them. The closing material of Exod 34:10–40:38 contains only three instances of divine speech or action. First, Yahweh announces the “wonder” of his renewed covenant with stiff-necked Israel, reiterating a summary of its stipulations (34:10–28). Second, after the people and craftsmen prepare the tabernacle, Yahweh gives step-by-step instructions for setting it up (40:1–8), consecrating its furnishings (40:9–11), and anointing and vesting Aaron and his sons (40:12–15a). These instructions, Yahweh’s final words in the Exodus narrative, close with the statement, “And their anointing will be for them unto a perpetual priesthood (לכהנת עולם) throughout their generations (לדרתם)” (40:15b). And third, Yahweh

171 Sternberg, Poetics of Biblical Narrative, 322.

172 These closing chapters of the book mainly narrate the people’s construction of the tabernacle and preparation of the priestly garments. Throughout, Moses and the narrator frequently make reference to all being done “as Yahweh had commanded (צוה).” This expression occurs 33x in chs. 35–40, and 27x in the final two chapters alone. Such commands are not new actions of Yahweh, however, but refer back to his instructions to Moses on the mountain in chs. 25–31, often explicitly so (“as Yahweh had commanded Moses,” 39:1; etc.; see also 25:40). “In chs. 35–36, reference is made to Yahweh having called craftsmen by name and filled them with his Spirit, skill, and knowledge; but again, this refers back to accomplished acts of Yahweh already pertaining in 31:1–6. Thus, no new actions or words of Yahweh are recounted in Exod 35:1–40:1.

173 The transgenerational emphasis throughout the book of Exodus is, thus, also reflected in the first and last utterance of Yahweh within the narrative. He first introduces himself to Moses at the bush, saying, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (3:6). His final word in the narrative here in 40:15 is לדרתם, “throughout their generations.” The Hebrew syntax at the beginning of Exod 40:15b is challenging, with its enigmatic combination of two forms of הוהי. On the suggestion that MT may conflate two variants here, see Propp, Exodus 19–40, 657.
descends in cloud and glory to fill the tabernacle, and, manifested in cloud and fire over the tabernacle, leads the people “in all their journeys” (40:34–38).

Thus, the words and actions of Yahweh subsequent to 34:6–7 do not reveal anything fundamentally new about his character, but rather relate to the restoration and implementation of his previous plans, commitments, and self-revelations. Yahweh’s covenant proclamation in 34:10–28—with its stipulations, references to the Exodus deliverance, stone tablets, and even its reminder that Yahweh’s name is “Jealous”—affirms the continuing truth and relevance of Yahweh’s previous self-characterization in 20:2–6. Yahweh’s instructions to erect the tabernacle (40:2–15), along with his descent and habitation there in glory, cloud, and fire (40:34–38), affirm and implement the intention of Yahweh articulated in 29:45–46: “I will dwell in the midst of the sons of Israel, and I will be their God. And they will know that I am Yahweh their God who brought them out from the land of Egypt in order to dwell in their midst.” In these ways, Yahweh’s subsequent words and actions display the restoration of that which was interrupted and nearly wrecked by the golden calf apostasy,174 and at the crux between near-ruin and restoration lies the merciful forgiveness of Yahweh, revealed on the heels of the people’s rebellion and proclaimed as his “full name” in 34:6–7.175 In other words, this restoration and

174 The same can be said of Moses’ subsequent actions, that they manifest the restoration of that which was nearly ruined by apostasy. Of particular note is Moses’ first act following the reestablishment of the covenant: in 35:1, Moses “assembles (הֹלֵךְ Hiphil) the whole congregation of the sons of Israel” to convey Yahweh’s instructions regarding Sabbath, tabernacle offering, and tabernacle construction. This functions as an overt parallel to the people’s apostate offering, calf construction, and festival in ch. 32, which begins with them “assembling themselves” (הָנַפֵל Niphal) against Aaron in 32:1, and so Moses’ parallel action at the opening of ch. 35 represents a dramatic “course correction.” These are the only two occurrences of הֹלֵךְ as a verb in Exodus.

175 The theme of the near-ruin and restoration of Yahweh’s good plans for Israel is also highlighted by the motif of the stone tablets. In addition to answering Moses’ plea to see Yahweh’s glory, 34:6–7 is set within the restoration episode of 34:1–28 which begins with the command to hew out new tablets (34:1) and ends with reference to these tablets of testimony, now inscribed with the words of the covenant (34:28–29). On the tablet motif uniting chs. 32–34 with the preceding Exodus narrative (24:12; 31:18; 32:16; 34:1, 28), see Tsai-Yun Lin, “The Golden Calf, God’s Nature, and True Worship in Exodus 32–34” (PhD diss., Trinity International University, 2010), 121. It is the merciful forgiveness of Yahweh which restores the covenant—with its tablets. Childs, Exodus, 557–58, speaks of three motifs unifying Exod 32–34: the tablets, Moses’ intercession, and Yahweh’s presence with Israel. Viewed from the standpoint of each of these, the speech in 34:6–7 stands as the essential turning point.
fulfillment in chs. 34–40 flow directly from the divine forgiveness proclaimed in 34:6–7.

The theophanic name-speech in Exod 34 stands, then, as the culmination of a trajectory which began in Exod 3:14–15. The opening phrase of the name-speech in 34:6–7, "a compassionate and gracious God") mirrors God’s declaration accompanying his promise of theophany in 33:19b: “I will be gracious (חנון) to whom I will be gracious, and I will be merciful (רחם) to whom I will be merciful.” While the substance of this self-revelation in Exod 33–34 is new, the *idem per idem* formulation of 33:19b recalls the איה אشرح אתיה (“I will be who I will be”) of the first name-speech in Exod 3:14. This reinforces the sense that the self-disclosure promised in Exod 3 has now run its course and reached its pinnacle. Brisman describes the passages in Exod 3 and Exod 33–34 as standing like “a pair of cherubim” on either side of Yahweh’s intervening self-revelation.

Yahweh’s characteristics declared in 34:6–7 also stand in significant relation to the Song of the Sea in 15:1–18. The Song lauds the two-fold nature of Yahweh’s dealings with men. He devastes his enemies with his anger (חרון, 15:7) and blasting nostrils (אפים, 15:8), but he leads his redeemed people in faithful lovingkindness (חסד, 15:13). In his theophany to Moses in 34:6–7, Yahweh again describes himself in a two-fold manner, invoking these same traits of anger and lovingkindness. This indicates continuity of identity and character. Yet in each case, Exod 34:6–7 significantly qualifies these traits. Yahweh can and does meet his foes in destroying anger, but here he proclaims himself slow to anger (ארך אפים, 34:6). And it is especially his quality of lovingkindness (חסד) that receives amplification and extension after the golden calf. Only here

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178 Yahweh’s proclamation that he is “slow to anger” also recalls Moses’ intercession immediately after the golden calf incident in ch. 32. There he prayed, “Why, O Yahweh, should your anger burn (חרון אפת) against your people?” (32:11) and petitioned, “Turn from your burning anger (חרון אפת)” (32:12).
does God reveal how abundant his lovingkindness is to Israel (robe hashem). It is abundant in this sense: He himself carefully preserves this lovingkindness (nazar hashem) toward his people, and this lovingkindness is so vast that it can even reach to the iniquitous, the rebellious, and the sinful and draw them near through forgiveness (nesham sha’er utashshur hashem). With these similarities and differences, Exod 34:6–7 maintains the continuity of Yahweh’s character celebrated at the sea, while at the same time revealing new dimensions not yet apparent in ch. 15.

Above all, however, it is in direct and conscious interplay with his previous self-proclamation in Exod 20:2–6 that Yahweh now speaks here in Exod 34:6–7. Fokkelman points out that when there is a notable repetition of a speech, place, or event in a narrative, the similarity will usually serve to highlight differences. He calls this “the dialectics of similarity and difference.” The reformulations of the Exod 20 speech in Exod 34:6–7 also open up a new dimension of Yahweh’s character: the profundity of his mercy in forgiving sin. It is especially the final two verses of 20:2–6 that come into play here, and it will be helpful to set these two texts side by side.

Exod 20:5b–6: For I am Yahweh, your God, a jealous God who, with respect to those who hate me, visits-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons, even against members of the third and fourth generations, but who, with respect to those who love me and keep my commandments, acts in lovingkindness to thousands.

Exod 34:6–7: Yahweh, Yahweh, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful lovingkindness, preserving lovingkindness for the thousands, forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin; yet he will certainly not neglect punishment, visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons and against sons of sons, against members of the third and the fourth generations.

A detailed analysis of the rhetorical reformulation of 20:5–6 in 34:6–7 will be a major topic in the next chapter. Here it is sufficient to highlight (1) the fact of the conscious repetition of the ch. 20 language in 34:6–7, (2) the shift in sequence, balance, and tone, placing greater emphasis on

179 Fokkleman, Reading Biblical Narrative, 104.
Yahweh’s lovingkindness, especially the newly revealed quality of “forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin,” and yet (3) the retention and repetition of punishment language, including the transgenerational punishment language from 20:5. As mentioned above, it is in these ways, by repeating yet reformulating 20:5–6 in 34:7, that the continuity of Yahweh’s jealous, punishing character is maintained even as it is subordinated under the revelation of a new and more central trait: his merciful forgiveness.

The Exod 34:7 Visiting Phrase and the Trajectory of Yahweh’s Self-Revelation

As the revelation of Yahweh’s name in Exodus reaches its fullest point and highest expression in 34:6–7, it employs again the language of transgenerational punishment: “visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons and against sons of sons, against members of the third and the fourth generations.” While subordinated here to Yahweh’s mercy, this language maintains a notable prominence through its repetition and final placement. It closely echoes Yahweh’s previous self-expression in 20:2–6, a text which forms a primary backdrop for the golden calf crisis in general and for Yahweh’s name-proclamation in 34:6–7 in particular. It also stands as the final, “closing word” of Yahweh’s name-speech here: though piled up with mercy language, 34:6–7 closes with the emphatic construction וָנַקַּח לֹא יָנֻקַּח (“yet he will certainly not neglect punishment”) amplified by the final phrase about visiting iniquity in punishment against descendants. It is perhaps surprising that, in such a context of divine forgiveness, this language would be included and even emphasized here. How does this language of transgenerational visitation of iniquity fit within the trajectory of Yahweh’s self-revelation, as it comes to its Exodus culmination in this passage?

First, as mentioned above, by echoing the key name-passage from Exod 20:5–6, this affirms the legitimacy of Yahweh’s previous, accumulating self-revelation in Exodus and therefore the unity and continuity of his character. The retention of the visiting phrase in 34:7
clarifies, then, that the traits of mercy, patience, and forgiveness, though profoundly re-characterizing Yahweh, do not nullify the previous revelations of his enduring jurisdiction, incomparable strength, justice, holiness, and jealousy. It is still “Yahweh” whom Yahweh is proclaiming as he passes by Moses. And though characterized here with enormous mercy and forgiveness, if he is to remain Yahweh, if his previous words and actions are to stand as a reliable “filling up” of the Yahweh-name and reputation—including his transgenerational visitation against Egypt, his transgenerational pronouncement against Amalek, and his transgenerational warning against Israel—then this profoundly new forgiveness must stand alongside these previous characterizations. Because he is Yahweh, idolatrous iniquity provokes him to anger, and the reuse here of the expression “iniquity of fathers” again implies the cumulative, transgenerational progression of offensive ways among the people. In Exod 20:5, this long-term threat to the people’s well-being before Yahweh was a possibility, perhaps a likelihood. By Exod 34:7, however, it has emerged as a central narrative reality: this is a stiff-necked people. Now it is clear that “the iniquity of fathers”—those offensive ways of fathers which are witnessed and adopted by sons—will continue to endanger the people throughout their history, necessitating their ongoing reliance on the patience and forgiveness of Yahweh.

Second, the transgenerational visiting phrase at the end of 34:7 clarifies, and is clarified by, aspects of the proclamation of Yahweh’s mercy in the preceding verse, particularly the phrase “slow to anger.” In ch. 20 the visiting phrase gave concrete expression to “Yahweh your God, a jealous God,” but in ch. 34 the phrase stands under Yahweh’s self-proclamation as “Yahweh, Yahweh, a merciful and gracious God” with its attendant descriptions. Thus, the language of transgenerational punishment in 34:7b serves to shape the hearing of elements which precede it

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180 The affirmation of Yahweh’s abiding “jealousy” is implied by the citation of the visiting phrase from Exod 20:5 in 34:7, and it is made explicit in Yahweh’s double-reference to his own jealousy in 34:14.

181 This implication of the phrase “iniquity of fathers” is elaborated above under §4.2.6.
in 34:6–7a, and its interpretation, in turn, is shaped by these preceding elements. In particular, it clarifies Yahweh’s slowness to anger, maintaining the possibility that, while Yahweh is patient, his punishing visitation may eventually be aroused. In this sense, the visiting phrase affirms and further explain both parts of the phrase: “slow” and “anger.” His provocation to act in devastating anger may play out very slowly, accumulating over a long period of time—generations, even. In this sense “slow to anger” and the visiting phrase are mutually clarifying. The language of visitation in punishment also echoes and affirms the theme of divine anger. Though Yahweh may be slow to act upon it, stubborn iniquity and idolatry do provoke him to (jealous) anger, as the phrase “visiting iniquity in punishment against sons” indicates. In other words, the phrase makes clear that “slow to anger” does not mean “never provoked to anger.”

Third, as in Exod 20:5, the explicit language of transgenerational punishment in 34:7 shapes the polarity of the passage in terms of the enjoyment of or the forsiaking of Yahweh’s intended many-generations blessings for the people. This recalls the “disaster” pronounced by Yahweh after the golden calf, that he would “make an end” of the sons of Israel and instead make Moses into a “great nation” (32:10). In doing so, the visiting phrase in 34:7 shapes the interpretation of other elements in 34:6–7a, especially the statements of Yahweh’s lovingkindness (חסד), giving them a long-term, transgenerational sense. The threatening language “against sons and against sons of sons, against members of the third and the fourth generations” stands juxtaposed with the beneficial phrases “abounding in lovingkindness (רב חסד),” “preserving lovingkindness (נצר חסד),” and “for the thousands.” The abundance of Yahweh’s חסד, a quantitative image, is now heard as, in part at least, abounding through (much) time. “Preserving חסד” (rather than merely “performing חסד,” as in 20:6) also takes on a temporal nuance, indicating not only Yahweh’s guarding of his lovingkindess against all which would threaten it (iniquity and rebellion, his anger), but also Yahweh’s prolonging of his
lovingkindness toward the people throughout their generations. In this context, preserving lovingkindness “for the thousands” implies not merely his present forgiveness for “the thousands” of Israel who had made for themselves a god of gold, but also “the thousands of generations” envisioned in Yahweh’s covenant with (and restored covenant with) Israel.182

Fourth, while the name-speech of 34:6–7 resolves the narrative impasse created by Israel’s rebellion, its closing visiting phrase expresses a paradox between Yahweh’s forgiveness and punishment, the tension of which is never completely resolved in the book. This tension is expressed by the strikingly parallel syntax of the visiting phrase with the preceding expression of forgiveness, both structured as Qal masculine singular participles with “iniquity” as the direct object: נָשָׁא עון (“forgiving/lifting/removing iniquity”) and פָּקַד עון (“visiting-in-punishment iniquity”).183 What will Yahweh do with iniquity—forgive it or punish it against sons? He has demonstrated the latter in the preceding narrative with his judgments against Egypt, against Amalek, and even—in limited measures—against the sons of Israel after their idolatry with the calf.184 After his speech in 34:6–7, however, he speaks and acts only according to the former—forgiving iniquity. Still, the visiting phrase, as the last word in the 34:6–7 name speech and as a conspicuous parallel to the forgiveness phrase, affirms that the Yahweh who forgives and restores stiff-necked Israel is the same Yahweh who visits iniquity in punishment. This is a paradox which the Exodus narrative never eliminates.

Still, in spite of the stark statement of transgenerational judgment at the end of 34:6–7, it is

182 For a more extensive discussion of these meanings for “preserving lovingkindness” and “for the thousands,” see §4.2.10 and §4.3.2 above.

183 The sense of visiting-in-punishment here is established not by the participle פָּקַד alone but by its collocation with the preposition על which follows, in the expression פָּקַד עון על בָּנֵי אבות (“visiting-in-punishment iniquity of fathers against sons”). On this, see §5.2.1 above.

184 On punishment “against sons” within the golden calf episode, I have in mind the divinely mandated slaughter carried out by the Levites, where their obedience is described as “each one at the cost of his son and at the cost of his brother,” indicating that “sons” were among the 3000 slain (Exod 32:27–29).
clear that Yahweh’s mercy and forgiveness, not his jealous anger and punishment, will determine the remainder of the Exodus story. This is intimated in the priority and preponderance of mercy, lovingkindness, and forgiveness language in 34:6–7 itself. It is also reflected by the prayer of Moses which follows in v. 9 (appealing for Yahweh’s grace and forgiveness for this “stiff-necked people”) and by the subsequent acts and words of Yahweh—reestablishing a new covenant with Israel, directing the erection of the tabernacle and the consecration of the priests, and coming to dwell in glory-cloud and fire in this tabernacle in the midst of the people. As Yahweh’s visiting-phrase closes his self-proclamation in 34:6–7, then, the prospect of transgenerational punishment stands in a markedly subordinate role.

This gives rise to a fifth observation regarding the visiting phrase in Exod 34. As the story progresses on a grace-and-forgiveness footing, the visiting phrase in 34:7b also points forward, in a subtle way, to the abiding, long-term, generations-spanning plans of Yahweh for Israel which are about to be renewed. Immediately after, Moses prays that Yahweh would go with the stiff-necked people, pardon their iniquity and their sin, and inherit them (34:9), this final request accenting the enduring bond between Yahweh and the generations of Israel. Yahweh will go in their midst to the land of promise (34:9, 12), a land which Yahweh had sworn to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that he would give it to their seed and so they would inherit it forever (32:13; 33:1). Yahweh cautions them regarding the allure of idolatry in the land, in particular the transgenerational risk that the inhabitants there could “cause your sons to whor after their gods” (34:16). The closing long-view, transgenerational language of 34:6–7 will also be reflected in Yahweh’s final statement and final act in Exodus. His last word is the command to anoint the sons of Aaron with an anointing “unto a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations” (Exod 40:15b). His last action is the manifestation of his glory-cloud over the tabernacle, in leading the house of Israel “throughout all their journeys.”
8.4. Summary of the Narrative Structure and Plot Trajectory Discussion

Building on the previous chapter regarding narrative themes related to the visiting phrase, this chapter has analyzed the structure and plot trajectory of the narrative with particular attention to situating the visiting phrase of Exod 20:5 and 34:7 within its narrative context. I have argued for a two-part structure: Yahweh faces external threats to Israel in 1–18 but faces Israel’s own sin and rebellion in 19–40. This situates Exod 20:2–6 (with its visiting phrase in v. 5) near the beginning of the second narrative arc, so that Yahweh’s self-description there functions as a retrospective summation of his characterization in chs. 1–18, and also functions prospectively as a characterization which will create the tension and narrative crisis of the second movement in 19–40. I also suggested that Exod 2:11–14—Moses’ initial entrance into the narrative as an adult—offers a proleptic paradigm for the book. On day one the Egyptian oppressor is struck down, but on day two an Israelite is revealed to be Egypt-like (guilty of the same offense). The question is uttered: “Are you planning to slay me like you slayed the Egyptian?” This proleptic utterance supports the twofold division of the narrative and provides an additional frame of interpretive reflection with regard to the visiting phrase. (Will Yahweh visit stiff-necked Israel in punishment in the same way that he visited-in-punishment against hard-hearted Pharaoh and the firstborn sons of Egypt?)

In the second section, I argued for the identification of Yahweh as the protagonist of the book of Exodus and then discussed the plot of Exodus in terms of what Yahweh is seeking to accomplish—what is the hero’s quest? Five closely related and overlapping motives of Yahweh were identified and demonstrated from the Exodus text: (1) to fulfill his promise to the fathers by bringing Israel out of Egypt and giving them good life in a good land; (2) to obtain a people for himself, a holy, priestly people who worship him alone throughout their generations; (3) to dwell in the midst of his people; (4) to establish justice; and (5) to make his name known. Discerning
and articulating these goals from the narrative was necessary as groundwork for the rhetorical analysis which will be laid out in the next chapter. In examining why Yahweh says what he says, in particular the visiting phrase as a constituent part of his utterances in 20:2–6 and 34:6–7, it will be necessary to consider what it is that the protagonist Yahweh is seeking to accomplish within the narrative in a broad sense, and then within the specific narrative situation of these speeches.

The third and most substantial part of this chapter then took up a more extensive analysis of the fifth of these motives of Yahweh: the making known of his divine name and character, considered by many to be the central goal of the book. I suggested that the plot trajectory of Yahweh accomplishing this goal can be effectively traced by attending to six key name-passages along the way (five of them utterances of Yahweh) which serve to summarize and emphasize the qualities of Yahweh’s character revealed up to that point and especially in the immediate context. These passages included Exod 3:14–15; 6:2–8; 15:1–18; 20:2–6; 29:45–46; and 34:6–7. Because both occurrences of the visiting phrase in Exodus are in key name-passages, and because the second occurrence is in the culminating name-passage of 34:6–7, the fullest description of Yahweh toward which the entire narrative has been pressing, it was interpretively significant to reflect on their place within the flow and dynamics of these name-passages.

The narrative analysis in this chapter (and in the previous) has been developed at length—perhaps in the reader’s mind at too much length. There are two closely related reasons for such a detailed and comprehensive presentation. First, as demonstrated in Part One of this study, the history of scholarship on the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 has examined the phrase against a number of backdrops but has almost entirely ignored the canonical Exodus narrative as relevant context for interpretation. This neglect has been astoundingly total, and so the present study aims to compensate. Second, by laying out the extensive and multi-layered
interrelationships between these verses and the surrounding narrative, this analysis aims to justify itself, offering a persuasive presentation of these narrative relationships which show them to be legitimate and worthy of interpretive reflection.
CHAPTER NINE
RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF EXODUS 20:5–6 AND 34:6–7

9.1. Recap and Summary Methodology for Rhetorical Analysis

Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation argued for the literary and theological significance of the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 and documented a mixture of neglect and interpretive discord in the scholarship surrounding it. Chapters 4 and 5 undertook a lexical-syntactical analysis of the constituent elements of these passages, with particular attention to the collocation פקד על (to visit-in-punishment against). Chapter 6 argued for the value of reading these phrases as utterances of a character within a narrative, laying out a broad methodology for narrative and rhetorical analysis. Chapters 7 and 8 then presented extensive narrative reflections. At times, within these chapters, the specific topic at hand—the meaning and function of the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 and 34:7—may have appeared swept aside in favor of a narrative analysis of the entire book of Exodus. This was necessary, however, or at least fruitful, toward rightly situating and understanding a phrase which recurs at two key moments within that narrative. It was also important for highlighting the role of major related narrative themes in shaping the reader’s understanding of the visiting phrase within the Exodus story.

Chapter 9 now examines the visiting phrase from the perspective of its rhetorical use. One function of Yahweh’s speeches in Exod 20:2–6 and 34:6–7 is informative—by speaking he is revealing, or confirming the prior revelation of, aspects of his essence and character. His speech here serves the expressed goal within the narrative “that you may know that I am Yahweh.” These informative-revelatory aspects of Yahweh’s rhetoric have largely been explored in the previous chapter (see §8.3), as the plot trajectory of the revelation of Yahweh’s name was traced

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across the Exodus narrative, focusing on six key summary speeches including 20:2–6 and 34:6–7. Yahweh’s rhetoric in these passages is not merely informative, however; it is also persuasive and pragmatic: through words he seeks to move his hearers to respond in certain ways and thereby to re-shape the situation moving forward.¹ This chapter will focus on these rhetorical-persuasive dimensions of Yahweh’s speech, to round out the informative-revelatory aspects laid out above.

This division between the revelatory and persuasive aspects of 20:2–6 and 34:6–7 is ultimately artificial: Yahweh’s persuasive appeal to the sons of Israel is intricately bound to the content of the revelation of his name and character.² However, for heuristic reasons within this study, the informative-revelatory dimensions of these speeches have been pursued separately in order to demonstrate the participation of these two name-passages within the overarching trajectory of the revelation of Yahweh’s name across the Exodus narrative. The present analysis will therefore largely assume the above discussion of 20:2–6 (under §8.3.4) and 34:6–7 (under §8.3.6) and will focus on additional observations regarding their rhetorical structure, style, strategy, and narrative outcome.

The ends toward which Yahweh is seeking to persuade and motivate his hearers will be considered in light of the words which he speaks and the immediate situation in which they are spoken, but particular attention must also be given to the relationship between Yahweh’s specific rhetoric in each speech and the broader, overarching goals of Yahweh within the Exodus story. In the narrative analysis above, five such goals were identified as motivating Yahweh’s actions

¹ John L. Austin, How to Do Things with Words (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 2, summarizes a pragmatic approach to speech: “It has come to be commonly held that many utterances which look like statements are either not intended at all, or only intended in part, to record or impart straightforward information about the facts.” Throughout his book, Austin maintains room for utterances to behave both as statements/assertives and as acts/performatives at the same time.

² Jim A. Kuypers and Andrew King, “What is Rhetoric?” in Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives in Action, ed. Jim A. Kuypers, LSPC (Lanham, MD.: Lexington Books, 2009), 4, “Rhetoric has both an informative and persuasive element…. In order to effectively persuade, you must first provide information.”
and words within Exodus:

(1) Yahweh seeks to fulfill his promise to the fathers: rescue their descendants from Egypt and give them long life in the good land.

(2) Yahweh seeks to obtain a people—a holy, priestly people who worship Him alone throughout their generations.

(3) Yahweh seeks to dwell in the midst of his people.

(4) Yahweh seeks to establish justice.

(5) In all of this, and toward all of this, Yahweh seeks to make his name known—to Israel and to all, through all generations.

In what way do Yahweh’s speeches in Exod 20:2–6 and 34:6–7 reflect his pursuit of these goals, that is, how do his speeches serve one or more of these goals? And, in particular, what is the contribution of the visiting phrase, within its particular speeches, to these larger goals?

The following analysis will not focus on the rhetorical-persuasive transaction between the author of Exodus and his original audience, or between the text of Exodus and various historical or hypothetical sets of readers. Rather, the analysis in this chapter will limit itself to one dimension of the rhetorical function of these utterances: their function within the narrative. The object of study will be the rhetorical transaction between the speaker as a character within the narrative (the textual speaker) and the intended audience in the narrative (the textual audience), as this speech takes place within a concrete situation within the narrative in service of the speaker’s goals within the narrative. Toward this end, the lexical-syntactical and narrative-contextual investigations of the previous chapters provide an essential foundation.

George Kennedy’s method for rhetorical analysis will provide the basic pattern for my own approach:

First, a determination of the rhetorical unit to be studied; and second, a determination of the rhetorical situation, that is, the condition or situation that invited this utterance,

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Footnote 3: For a justification and elaboration of this approach, see discussion of methodology above (§6.2).
with the particular problem that the author is seeking to overcome. Next comes the study of the material’s arrangement and its stylistic devices, and finally, a review of the unit’s success in addressing the rhetorical problem. Sensitivity is shown to the text’s strategies of argumentation (including stylistic devices) and to the ways in which the author, through the text, posits, persuades, and even rhetorically manipulates the intended audience.4

Regarding the first point, determining the rhetorical unit, I have made the case above that Exod 20:2–6 and 34:6–7 stand as discrete textual units, each a “speech” of Yahweh in its own right (see §4.4.1–2). Therefore, the rhetorical analysis conducted here will address Kennedy’s final three categories. First, I will describe the rhetorical situation, which includes the speaker’s character and goals, the audience’s character, the narrative situation, the particular need within that situation which compels the oration (Bitzer’s “exigency”),5 and the rhetorical intention. Second, I will analyze the speech itself, including its structure, stylistic devices, and strategies of persuasion, with particular attention to the visiting phrase. Here, to use Dale Patrick’s language, I will explore “what is happening” in the speech between Yahweh, as textual speaker, and his textual audience: “the transaction the text [speech] is designed to engender and the community it is designed to create or shape.”6 Particular attention will be given to the role of the visiting phrase within the persuasive strategy and logic of the speech. Third, I will describe the impact or outcome of the speech upon its narrative hearers and the narrative situation.


5 See §6.2.2 above.

9.2. Rhetorical Analysis of Exodus 20:2–6

9.2.1. The Rhetorical Situation of Exodus 20:2–6

9.2.1.a. The Character of the Speaker and the General Narrative Situation

Yahweh speaks to the sons of Israel gathered at Mount Sinai. The eternal God who made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob regarding their descendants has come down to fulfill these promises. In compassion, he has heard the cries of the sons of Israel in their hard labor and bitter bondage. He has displayed his might and his justice by bringing devastating judgments upon Egypt, the nation enslaving, striking, and killing the sons of Israel. He has revealed his authority, prerogative, and reign—in all the earth and throughout all generations. He has revealed his reliability and sufficiency by announcing his actions in advance and then fulfilling his word. No king or god can contest his supreme dominion. He has performed these mighty acts in order to make himself known to Egypt, to all nations, and especially to the sons of Israel and to their children’s children throughout their generations. He has brought them out from Egypt, delivered them from the armies of Egypt at the sea and from the armies of Amalek at Rephidim, and patiently responded to their grumbling with life-sustaining manna and water in the wilderness. He has brought them out so that they may worship him, and he has confirmed his commissioning of Moses by bringing them now to Sinai, to his holy mountain, to himself.

Through Moses, he has spoken an initial word to the sons of Israel, exhorting them to recall what they have witnessed—the mighty judgments of Yahweh against Egypt and the tender care of Yahweh for Israel (19:4). He announces his particular claim upon Israel as “his treasured possession” from among all the nations, yet couples this with his demand for absolute obedience to his voice and his covenant (19:5–6). Without pause, all the people answer together, pledging to do everything which Yahweh speaks (19:8). After this, Yahweh does not immediately begin to address Israel, but rather announces his intention to meet and speak with them. As with Moses at
the burning bush, Yahweh underscores the holiness and seriousness of this encounter. They must not yet touch the mountain of God. They must wait until Yahweh’s appointed time. Moses must consecrate (sanctify) the people for this holy encounter, having them wash their clothes and abstain from sexual intercourse.

9.2.1.b. The Character of the Audience

Yahweh’s words at the opening of the Decalogue are often approached as timeless truths, and certainly they do have enduring significance as their narrative inscripturation on stone tablets and the history of their reception in Judaism and Christianity attest. In the Exodus story, however, Yahweh’s speech in 20:2–6 is uttered in a particular situation and to a particular audience. That audience is the sons of Israel, the people whom God has rescued from Egypt, and his words in 20:2–6 should, first of all, be heard as words spoken to them.

And who are these sons of Israel standing at the mountain? The Exodus narrative constructs the identity of the sons of Israel as rooted in the past—they are, quite literally, the sons descended from Israel (Jacob) and the beneficiaries of Yahweh’s promises to their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. At the same time, the narrative portrays the sons of Israel with a view toward their future in the land, with many references to “throughout your generations,” “in time to come, when your son says to you,” and so forth. Throughout the story, the sons of Israel are a single, corporate character, acting and speaking as one. They are those whom Yahweh has laid claim to as his “firstborn son” (4:22), treated in a distinct way from Egypt (11:7), redeemed from bondage (15:13), brought to himself (19:4), and honored as his

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7 This transgenerational portrayal of the people in Exodus is demonstrated at length above under §7.1.2. Umberto Cassuto, Commentary on Exodus, trans. I. Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 243, speaks of Yahweh’s address here in Exod 20 as “directed to the entire nation as a single entity in time throughout its generations” (my emphasis).

8 The exceptions to this are few. For a thorough discussion of the corporate characterization of the sons of Israel in Exodus, see §7.5.
“treasured possession” (19:5).

Yet the sons of Israel constantly vacillate between quiet faith, worship, and obedience, on the one hand (Exod 4:31; 12:28; 12:50; 14:31; 16:24; note also 1:17) and brash grumblings, despair, panic, accusations, disobedience, and disputings, on the other hand (5:21; 6:9; 14:11–12; 16:2–3, 23–24; 17:2–3, 7; 18:13–16). Their fickleness and unbelief are revealed most vividly when they speak, as they repeatedly accuse Moses (and thus Yahweh) of trying to kill them. This litany of accusation is foreshadowed from the outset, when the Hebrew man who was striking his fellow Hebrew blurts out: “Who appointed you as a judge over us? Are you planning to slay me like you slayed the Egyptian?” (2:14) Because of their portrayal as fickle—often unbelieving and disobedient—a certain irony hangs over their ready pledge to Yahweh in Exod 19: “Everything which Yahweh has spoken we will do.”

9.1.2.c. The Specific Narrative Situation, Its Exigency, and the Rhetorical Aim

As Yahweh meets with the sons of Israel at Sinai and begins to speak to them in 20:2–6, the eternal, divine King is taking up his reign in the midst of his claimed and redeemed people. He has established and demonstrated this authority through his mighty deeds, and he is now preparing to proclaim and exercise it in a series of commandments. He is preparing to give them just statutes prescribing their holy worship of Yahweh, their just dealings with one another in the community of those who bear Yahweh’s name, and their priestly vocation vis-à-vis the nations. He is preparing to direct the construction of a sanctuary tent and to dwell there in their midst. He is preparing to lead them to the land of promise and to give them long life there throughout their generations. He is preparing for the ongoing revelation of his name to the nations and to coming generations through this people.

The meeting at Sinai is an in-between time, a liminal moment. The people have been brought out from the tyranny of Pharaoh and have been brought thus far through the hostilities of the wilderness. Though the glory of Yahweh has accompanied them, in an important sense it is here that they “come to God” and prepare to enter into their new life as the people near to Yahweh, the people in whose midst Yahweh will dwell. Yahweh has specific intentions for this new reality, for this priestly vocation of Israel among the nations. Yet the inconstancy of the sons of Israel thus far in the narrative already stands as an implicit obstacle these intentions.

The rhetorical exigency at Sinai in ch. 20, then, arises from this situation. Yahweh’s speaking arises from *the need to persuade and motivate Israel to exhibit the holiness and justice proper to the people called by Yahweh’s name, in whose midst Yahweh will dwell*. They are to act in holiness by worshipping no other gods, by hallowing the divine name, by sanctifying Yahweh’s Sabbath, and by honoring their fathers and mothers, especially in their testimony and worship of Yahweh. They are to act in justice within the community, safeguarding the life, marriage and family, property, and reputation and legal standing of their neighbor. As the holy people of Yahweh, the worship and conduct of the sons of Israel must be holy—for the sake of making Yahweh known among the nations and for the sake of preserving the life and long-term blessings of the people. For what the ch. 19 situation of Israel at the holy mountain is in microcosm, the people’s life in the land will be as well—holiness and consecration is necessary before Yahweh, *lest they experience death rather than life*. Yahweh’s speech in Exod 20:2–6, aims to clarify for the people the most fundamental concrete aspect of their holiness—loving obedience to Yahweh and the forsaking of all other gods—and to persuade the people to conform themselves to this demand. As Moses will explain to the people when Yahweh pauses in ch. 20, “It is in order to test you that God has come, in order that the fear of him may be upon your face, so that you do not sin” (20:20). Similarly, in his first words after the Decalogue, Yahweh
instructs Moses to declare to the sons of Israel: “You yourselves have seen that I have spoken with you from heaven: you shall not make in my presence gods of silver, nor gods of gold shall you make for yourselves” (20:22–23). In spite of all of the challenges which lie ahead in bringing this people to and into the land of promise, the most pressing need driving the rhetoric of Exod 20:2–6 is theological and cultic: to deter the sons of Israel from idolatry.

9.2.1.d. The Setting and Attendant Circumstances

The chosen setting or circumstances in which to deliver an oration, and even the garb in which the speaker chooses to appear, contribute to the intended persuasive force of the words spoken. This is explicitly the case with Yahweh’s address to the sons of Israel in Exod 20.10 The details of this encounter are well-known and can be quickly summarized. The people, after journeying through wilderness, arrive at Sinai and camp in front of the mountain. Spatially, Yahweh descends to the top of the mountain and speaks from the mountain, while the people take their stand at the foot of the mountain, magnifying the authority of Yahweh and the humility of the people before him.11

Yahweh chooses the time of the speech, asking the people to prepare themselves and to wait until the third day. He commands Moses to “set limits” for the people all around the mountain lest they venture too near (19:12).12 Again and again, he warns the people of the deadly

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10 In Exod 19:9 Yahweh ties the manner of his “coming in a thick cloud” to the desired response from the people (credence placed in Moses), and in Exod 20:20 Moses seems to tie another of Yahweh’s desired responses from the people (fear of God to prevent sinning) to the manner of Yahweh’s coming as well, as he echoes the verb בהז last heard in Yahweh’s statement in 19:9.


12 William H. C. Propp, Exodus 19–40, AB 2A (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 161, suggests, “Presumably a physical barrier is established, if only a cord laid on the ground. The whole mountain becomes a sort of temple.” On the broad Exodus theme of the danger to sinners of coming near to Yahweh, the holy God, see above §7.2.1.
consequence of drawing too near his holy mountain before the proper time or without being properly consecrated: violators shall “be put to death” and “not live” (19:13), will “perish” (19:21), and Yahweh may “break out” even against priests if not properly consecrated (19:22, 24). These warnings may contribute to the people’s later anxiety that they hear no more, “lest we die” (20:19). The preceding narrative has made the people keenly aware of Yahweh’s power to act in deadly judgment—they have seen it (12:23–27; 14:30), and in preparation for this meeting at Sinai Yahweh commands Moses to remind them that they have seen it (19:4).

On the morning of the third day, Yahweh the speaker descends upon the mountain, accompanied by overwhelming visual and aural phenomena: thunder and lightning, thick cloud, fire and smoke, and the sound of a blaring trumpet. The whole mountain is wrapped in smoke, which ascends like the smoke of a furnace, and the very loud trumpet just grows louder and louder (19:9, 16, 18–19; 20:18). The mountain trembles greatly, and along with it, “all the people”—in fear (19:16, 18; 20:18). While Yahweh’s theophany among his people has been the goal of the preceding narrative and is, in some sense, an expression of his grace, the manner of his “coming” is intentionally daunting.\textsuperscript{13} The comments of Niehaus regarding OT theophany and fear are probably helpful here: “It is neither mystery nor power alone that frightens mortals—it is God’s holiness. Mortals can only respond in fear and awe (not because they are human but because they are fallen) even in the presence of the God who saves them.”\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} Dale Patrick, \textit{The Rendering of God in the Old Testament}, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 97, speaks of the Sinai theophany as “a supreme act of grace” since it “allows the people to meet their God.” It is true that this theophanic meeting with Israel is purely the doing of Yahweh, as indicated by the twofold use of בָאֵל in Exod 19–20. Yahweh has brought (Hiphil of בָאֵל) the people to himself (19:4), and now he comes (בָאֵל) to them (19:9; 20:20). In this sense, this extended theophanic encounter, especially as it reaches the sublime fellowship of Exod 24:9–11, can be characterized as supremely gracious. In his discussion, however, Patrick approaches Exod 19–24 and Exod 33–34 as parallel, almost synoptic accounts. Such an approach obscures the narrative and rhetorical progression, in which the warning and fear of Exod 19–20 occasions the revelation of Yahweh’s gracious forgiveness in Exod 33–34. Thus, while it is true that Yahweh bringing the people to himself is an act of divine grace, the manner of his coming to them in Exod 19–20 (in cloud and other other phenomena) is not chosen in order to instill calm assurance of his grace but rather trembling fear.

\textsuperscript{14} Jeffrey J. Niehaus, \textit{God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and the Ancient Near East}, Studies
After three days’ wait, from this burning, quaking mountain, after warnings of death at his hand, Yahweh, draped in smoke and fire and cloud, speaks in a voice like thunder to the quaking sons of Israel, who are assembled at the foot of the mountain, yet backing as far off as possible (20:18, 21). He begins with the famous name-speech of Exod 20:2–6.

9.2.2. The Arrangement, Style, and Strategy of Exodus 20:2–6

The mountain setting, preparatory delay, and accompanying theophanic phenomena combine to instill a proper fear in the people, in order to dissuade them from turning away from Yahweh in idolatry or defying his commandments. The speech in 20:2–6 is marshalled toward this same end, grounding the prohibition of idolatry in the name and character of Yahweh himself, and utilizing rhetorical structure, style, and evocative appeals to shape the people’s response.

Yahweh’s address to the sons of Israel in 20:2–6 falls into three sections: a brief self-proclamation as their deliverer (20:2), apodictic prohibitions of idolatry (20:3–5a), and a second self-proclamation as their jealous God, visiting iniquity for those who oppose him and showing lovingkindness for those who love and obey him (20:5b–6). There is a concentric relation between the first and third sections which both begin with “I am Yahweh your God,” and also, within the second section, between its first and third lines with their corresponding plural nouns (“other gods”) and plural pronoun suffixes (“to them … them”). At the center of this concentric structure is the prohibition against making an idol, a likeness of anything in heaven, earth, or sea. This structure compellingly grounds its central prohibitions upon the name and ways of Yahweh

in OT Biblical Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 27.

15 Throughout this dissertation, Exod 20:5 has been spoken of in two parts. The prohibitions against idolatry have been designated 20:5a. For simplicity’s sake, the remainder of the verse, with its motive clause pronouncing Yahweh’s name, jealousy, and transgenerational visitation have been designated 20:5b. This has been a loose and non-technical designation. The reader should note that in this chapter on rhetorical analysis, with its heightened attention to the precise structure of 20:2–6, three lines have been identified within v. 5 so that the line with the visiting phrase (which in previous chapters was referred to as v. 5b) is now v. 5c.
and combines the four prohibitions in vv. 3–5a into a single “cardinal commandment”—do not exchange the blessed freedom of Yahweh and his presence for a new slavery of idolatry.

(20:2) tekst יָהָֽהּ יִשְׂרָאֵלָֽהּ הָאָרֶץ מֵאָרֶץ לְאָרֶץ יָךְ אֶלָּהִי יָהָֽהּ (20:2a) I am Yahweh, your God,
(20:2b) who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
(20:2c) out of a house of slaves.

(20:3) tekst אֲשֶׁר הָיָתָּם אֵין חֲמוֹרָה לִפְנֵי פָּנֵי יָהָעָה (20:3) You shall not have other gods in my presence.

(20:4) tekst אֲשֶׁר נְעָשֵׂה אֵלָהִי אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ מֵאָרֶץ לְאָרֶץ יָךְ אֶלָּהִי (20:4) You shall not make for yourself an idol or an image of anything in the heavens above or in the earth beneath or in the waters which are under the earth.

(20:5a) tekst אֵין לָךְ אֱלֹהִים אֵלָהִי אֲשֶׁר נְעָשֵׂה (20:5a) You shall not bow down to them or become enslaved to them.

(20:5b) tekst בְּאֶדֶם בַּנֵּי יָהָעָה בַּנֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּנֵּי יָהָעָה (20:5b) For I am Yahweh, your God, a jealous God

(20:5c) tekst בְּאֶדֶּמָּה בְּאֶדֶּמָּה בְּאֶדֶּמָּה בְּאֶדֶם בְּאֶדוֹּמָה בְּאֶדוֹּמָה בְּאֶדוֹּמָה בְּאֶדוֹּמָה בְּאֶדוֹּמָה בְּאֶדוֹּמָה בְּאֶדוֹּמָה בְּאֶדוֹּמָה בְּאֶדוֹּמָה בְּאֶדוֹּמָה בְּאֶדוֹּמָה (20:5c) who, with respect to those who hate me, visits-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons, even against the third and fourth generations

(20:6) tekst בְּאֶדֶם בַּנֵּי יָהָעָה בַּנֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּנֵּי יָהָעָה בַּנֵּי יָהָעָה בַּנֵּי יָהָעָה בַּנֵּי יָהָעָה בַּנֵּי יָהָעָה בַּנֵּי יָהָעָה בַּנֵּי יָהָעָה בַּנֵּי יָהָעָה בַּנֵּי יָהָעָה בַּנֵּי יָהָעָה בַּנֵּי יָהָעָה בַּנֵּי יָהָעָה (20:6) but who, with respect to those who love me and keep my commandments, acts in lovingkindness to thousands (of descendants).

A key element in the rhetorical strategy of 20:2–6 is its highly personal focus and construction. Ashby puts it well: here at Sinai “the sheer personality of Yahweh burst forth upon the Hebrews.” Not only is the speech framed by the double self-proclamation “I am Yahweh your God,” but also the first person pronoun used in this expression in both v. 2a and v. 5b is

16 Pier Cesare Bori, The Golden Calf and the Origins of the Anti-Jewish Controversy, trans. D. Ward, SFSHJ 16 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 10, notes that the prohibitions of 20:3–5a are “inseparable” and that these opening words of the Decalogue become an “originary confession” according to which all further developments in biblical monotheism stand and fall, establishing that “idolatry—associating other gods with God, creating an image of God—is the sin par excellence: once this sin is committed the cardinal commandment is jettisoned and with it the whole covenant.”

17 This rendering of vv. 5–6 is developed and defended at length in §4.2.12 above.

18 Godfrey W. Ashby, Go Out and Meet God: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus, ITC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 80, 84. He elaborates further: “He told them in no uncertain terms who he was, who they were, and what their relationship with him was to be….Yahweh constitutes the event by his appearance. Yahweh makes a holy mountain, a holy people, and a holy Torah. Sinai is an explosion of God.”
 fuller in both vowels and consonants than the alternative אֲנִי. Of the 19 Exodus occurrences of the expression “I am Yahweh,” all use אֲנִי except for the two uses in this speech. Not only does this exceptional usage befit the unique occasion of God’s meeting with his people at Sinai, but it also rhetorically heightens the deeply personal “I” of the address here. Six first person singular suffixes continue to reinforce the centrality of Yahweh’s person in the speech’s appeal.

Yahweh’s self-description as jealous and the closing expressions “those who hate me” and “those who love me” also serve to construct this intensely personal appeal. While the terminology of love and hate may indeed carry overtones of political loyalty, the primary metaphor here, especially in a context of jealousy, is that of marriage. By choosing such language, Yahweh is committing himself to Israel with the totality and permanence of a husband giving himself in marriage to his bride. And, conversely, he is demanding similarly total and permanent devotion in return. Just as v. 5a rhetorically characterizes idolatry as a new slavery, so vv. 5b–6 characterize idolatry and disobedience as rank adultery.

In this sense, Yahweh’s rhetoric in 20:2–6 is not only personal but highly interpersonal. Its repeated second person singular address also gives it an intensely interpersonal cast. Second person singular forms abound: five such suffixes and three second person singular prohibitions. In particular, the repetition of the relational title “your (ms) God” conveys the interpersonal nature of Yahweh’s appeal. This direct I and Thou address powerfully summons Israel as a collective whole, while also rhetorically addressing each individual Israelite. On the collective level, this makes the scene of the Decalogue in Exod 20 into a “duologue,” to borrow a term from Bar-Efrat.

Since there are rarely more than two active characters in any one scene, virtually all conversations are duologues. Although in some conversations one of the participants is not an individual but a group, as in the case of Lot and the men of Sodom, for
example (Gen 19:4–9), these should be regarded as duologues, because the group of people is in fact a collective figure. 19

As an assembled people, Yahweh here speaks to all Israel, to those he has “brought out of the land of Egypt, out of a house of slaves.” To those he has repeatedly owned as “my people,” he now proclaims himself as “your God.”

On the individual level, it has often been observed, the implied addressee of the Decalogue is a middle-aged, married male, a father with children, the head of a household with servants and livestock, a son of aging parents, at risk of coveting his neighbor’s wife, and so forth. 20 Yahweh’s speech in 20:2–6 constructs the identity of this addressee with particular emphasis on his implied duty to model and teach the worship of Yahweh. 21 Yahweh’s warnings in v. 5b regarding sanctions against sons for fathers’ iniquity resonate with previous instructions for fathers modeling proper worship and teaching sons in connection with Yahweh’s Passover, Unleavened Bread, and the redemption of firstborn (Exod 12:25–27; 13:5–8, 11–15). Yahweh’s warning takes at face value the people’s professed concern for the welfare of their children when faced with thirst in the wilderness (17:3). The warning here—which invokes fathers and sons in a context of right worship of Yahweh—anticipates the statute that every male Israelite shall observe the three appointed feasts to Yahweh each year (23:17; 34:23). More significantly, the language of fathers and sons in the visiting phrase resonates with the other Exodus passage which speaks of Yahweh’s jealousy:

For you shall not bow down to another god, for Yahweh’s name is Jealous; he is a jealous God—lest you should make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and

19 Shimon Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, trans. Dorothea Shefer-Vanson, JSOTSup 70 (Sheffield: Almond, 1989), 96.


21 William Johnstone, Exodus, 2 vols., SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2014), 2:26: “This privileged householder is responsible for maintaining the exclusive worship of YHWH within his household, for honoring YHWH in all activities, and thus for ensuring for generations to come the welfare of the community.”
they should whor after their gods and offer sacrifice to their gods, and they should invite you and you should eat of their sacrifice, and lest you should take their daughters for your sons, and their daughters should whor after their gods and entice your sons to whor after their gods. (34:14–16)

In such a personal context, his self-descriptions as “visiting iniquity of fathers in punishment against sons” and “acting in lovingkindness to thousands” are not merely informative but also performative. In speaking in such a way, Yahweh is committing himself to such a dynamic of just visitation of iniquity and merciful care for those who love and obey him, a commissive sense which will play out in his initial response to, and the narrative tension surrounding, the golden calf. At the same time the profound self-involvement of Yahweh in this speech also forbids any sense that these dynamics are absolute, automatic, or impersonal, as if Yahweh were simply reporting how things are and must be. Rather, Yahweh’s acts of punishment and blessing are portrayed as thoroughly personal, volitional, and relational, and so his actions remain free, bound only by his own character as Yahweh. When such freedom becomes pronounced and explicit in Exod 33–34 (32:34; 33:19; 34:6–7), and when he elects there not to act in jealous transgenerational punishment against the sons of Israel, this will come as a further revelation—not as a contradiction—of his self-commitment here in 20:2–6.

The intensely personal focus of Exod 20:2–6 serves in constructing the public authority of Yahweh. If the people are to take his commands seriously, in particular his demand of exclusive devotion and worship, he must convince them of his authority to command and his authority and capacity to carry out his threats and promises. This rhetorical ethos has been established by convincing miracles against Egypt and convincing miracles for Israel in the wilderness.²²

²² George A. Kennedy, Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times, rev. and enl. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 138: “The fundamental rhetorical technique of the Old Testament is assertion of authority. God has given his law to his people. They are convinced because of who he is, what he has done for them, how he will punish them if they transgress, and how his word is revealed to them…. Authority is a nonartistic analogy to ethos in classical rhetoric. It is confirmed by miracles and bolstered by pathos in remembrance of the past suffering of the people and by their fears of future punishment or hopes of future reward.”
Kennedy observes that, in Exodus, “authority is confirmed by miracles, and this, rather than logical argument, will be the primary mode of persuasion.” After witnessing nine plagues, the people willingly obeyed Yahweh’s instructions regarding the Passover and the departure (12:28, 35, 50). After witnessing his mighty triumph at the sea, the people “feared Yahweh and believed in Yahweh” (14:31), and in their Song they acclaimed him as “king forever” (15:18).

In the speech in Exod 20:2–6, Yahweh invokes this established reputation, even as his rhetoric here asserts, heightens, and contributes to this public authority. The opening statement in v. 2 does more than merely recall the past events of deliverance, it binds these events directly to the person and name of Yahweh. He who speaks is the Yahweh of compassionate, faithful rescue, the mighty conqueror of his enemies, incomparable to all other kings and gods.

The apodictic commands in the second part (vv. 3–5a) not only inform the people of the specific content of Yahweh’s demands, they also performatively convey his authority to command and clarify the identity of Israel as the community subject to Yahweh’s rule. Patrick emphasizes:

Israel becomes the community under Yahweh’s authority by being addressed in commandments and positive law…. The commandments … shape the relationship by bringing human interaction under divine authority and enforcement. Yahweh’s exercise of authority also establishes his judicial position in the community. He is the supreme judge…. He is the guarantor of the justice, righteousness, and peace of the community under his law.

The commands in vv. 3–5a, then, are themselves rhetorical acts which carry the force of asserting and establishing authority. The elaboration of the second prohibition (against making idols) in v. 4 mentions the heavens, the earth, and the sea—implicitly invoking Yahweh’s unique status as Creator and further constructing his authority here to give and enforce commands.

In the third part of the speech (vv. 5b–6), Yahweh’s self-description as “jealous” touches

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23 Kennedy, Classical Rhetoric, 139.

24 Patrick, Rendering of God, 98 (my emphasis).
not so much upon his authority or power but rather his *interest, willingness, and self-commitment* to enforcing his demand of exclusive worship and obedience. His threat of visiting-in-punishment against sons then returns to the matter of authority, specifically his capacity to enforce his commands.\(^\text{25}\) Here, with the visiting phrase, Yahweh recalls his prior visitation against Egypt (and its sons) and his pronouncement against Amalek; he recalls his protection and preservation of Israel in continuing to multiply their generations in the face of Pharaoh’s genocidal designs; and, especially, he asserts his identity as the eternal, undying king whose punishment cannot be eluded. He holds enduring prerogatives of judgment which may play out over long spans but which will, in the end, uphold justice and punish rebels and sinners. He is also, however, Yahweh their enduring God who “acts in lovingkindness to thousands,” again recalling his past multiplication of Israel and his acts of deliverance from Egypt. The closing statement of v. 6 functions as an especially effective assertion of authority within this rhetorical setting: for each son of Israel could look around and behold, at the foot of the mountain, the sea of fellow descendants of Jacob gathered there—the concrete manifestation of Yahweh’s authority and capacity to carry out his promises of lovingkindness to “thousands.”

Yahweh’s address to the sons of Israel here speaks of *both punishment and blessing*, and the rhetorical interrelation of these deserves some comment. The first thing to note is that both are given strong, emphatic expression—a strength and emphasis undergirded by the authority and “Exodus track record” of Yahweh himself, as just outlined. The reality of *both* deliverance and destruction by Yahweh’s hand is implied by the reference to past events in v. 2 (“from the land of Egypt, from a house of slaves;” cf. 19:4) and is explicitly described in vv. 5c–6.

\(^\text{25}\) John Calvin, *Sermons on the Ten Commandments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 69: “[Yahweh] stresses that he is equally powerful enough to execute his zeal, that he is not at all like mortal men who are offended and angry when anyone dishonors them, or causes them an injury, but who do not have the means to act as they would like. God is not like that, for he is armed with the ability to confound his enemies.”
Yahweh’s “lovingkindness to thousands” is given significant prominence, rhetorically, by the enormous numerical supremacy over “third and fourth” in the previous phrase, by its placement in the speech’s closing line, and by its congruence with the present reality of Israel’s situation, gathered in their “thousands” at the mountain of God. McConville speaks of the numerical imbalance here as a “striking affirmation that mercy finally outweighs judgment.” Patrick Miller, similarly, accents the emphasis in the speech on Yahweh’s grace and desire to deal lovingly with his people:

There is a clear statute of limitations on judgment upon those who reject the Lord and disobey the commandment. Punishment will go no further than the third or fourth generation…. The implication of these expressions for understanding God’s expectation and God’s nature is clear. Neither disobedience nor judgment is assumed to be the trend. The scales are tipped; the divine character is weighted toward mercy. Love and mercy are the dominant characteristics of the covenant relationship.26

Both McConville and Miller’s comments carry a certain truth, and without question Exod 20:5–6 hint at a definite “tilt toward mercy” within Yahweh’s character—an essential orientation which will be dramatically revealed as the Exodus narrative progresses. However, to regard Exod 20:2–6 as fundamentally designed to convince Israel that the divine character is weighted toward mercy fails to recognize key rhetorical elements within the speech and its surrounding narrative situation. The overriding purpose of these verses is to warn Israel against idolatry under threat of impassioned and severe punishment. As the Exodus story unfolds, Yahweh’s wrath and judgment become expected and overwhelmingly justified, both according to Yahweh’s past record (Exod 1–15), according to Yahweh’s justice and covenant stipulations (in particular, those here in 20:3–5a), and according to the enormity and inconceivability of Israel’s sin. Without a clear revelation of the reality and appropriateness of Yahweh’s jealous wrath and judgment, such as he declares here in 20:5–6, the full goodness and magnanimity of his later forgiveness will be

missed. For this reason, it is important to attend to the specific rhetorical purpose and emphasis of Exod 20:2–6 within its specific place in the narrative.

In Exod 20:2–6, Yahweh addresses Israel to elicit fear and obedience. God does not intend Israel to experience an aimless, abject terror, but rather that “the fear of him may be upon your faces so that you will not sin” (20:20). Thus, his speech begins and ends with self-reference: “I am Yahweh your God.” The four prohibitions in vv. 3–5a, all elaborating the one central idea—do not worship idols in place of Yahweh—accumulate, one on top of the next, to convey something more than mere information or instruction. The repetition here conveys Yahweh’s utter seriousness about prohibiting idolatry. The rhetorical mood is already weighty with the bare simplicity and directness of the first prohibition: “You shall have no other gods in my presence.” The mood becomes weightier and weightier with each of the next three iterations: “You shall not make for yourself an idol.… You shall now bow down to them, and you shall not become enslaved to them/be enticed to serve them (Hophal of עבד”). There is also a progression here in agency: not “make” or “bow down” seeks an obvious response of compliance—the hearer ideally responds, “I will certainly not do that.” But with its passive-causative Hophal verb, the final prohibition strikes a more complex note: you shall not become enslaved to them (or, you shall not be enticed to serve them). Here the prospect is subtly raised that Israel may, by forces beyond their capacity to resist, be led into most grievous transgression—and judgment. Here any confident reflex of self-commitment and self-assurance must make room for a certain humility, and even fear.

The third part of the speech (vv. 5b–6) returns to a focus on Yahweh’s name and character, uttered as a persuasive grounds for the people’s compliance with the preceding prohibitions. They should diligently attend to the proper and exclusive worship of Yahweh because (י”כ) “I am Yahweh your God, a jealous God.” The fiery power and intensity of the adjective “jealous”
requires little explanation. It resonates with the overpowering phenomena accompanying Yahweh’s theophany on the mountain, reinforces the central theme of exclusive worship and the underlying covenant-as-marriage metaphor, and heightens the seriousness of the subsequent language of punishing visitation across generations. Brueggemann has noted the power in the mere grammar of such an adjectival characterization of God: here God speaks not merely with incidental verbs to enumerate things he has done in the past (as in v. 2) or will do in the future, or even in the more essentially characterizing manner of participles (as in vv. 5c, 6) depicting how he typically acts, but rather with an attributive adjective, attaching a quality most directly to Yahweh’s own person and essence.²⁷ In an important sense, then, the phrase אֱלֹהִים קֶנָּא (“a jealous God”) sounds forth as central quality of Yahweh’s self-proclamation in this speech.

By invoking the marital metaphor of jealousy against the backdrop of idolatry in the previous verses, a clear note of warning is sounded, even before the visiting-in-punishment language which follows. As Tigay suggests:

God’s kin’ah explains why He forbids worship of other gods. References to His kin’ah are usually accompanied by a description of His punitive action or power, as in the remainder of this verse. The very mention of God’s jealousy is therefore a warning against provoking it.²⁸

Yahweh’s repetition of the title “your God” here in v. 5b establishes the ground for his jealousy, implying that Israel is Yahweh’s people. At the same time, this strongly interpersonal designation “your God,” alongside Yahweh’s jealousy, bears a note of danger—a jealous husband portends little danger for someone else’s wife.

This bare adjectival self-proclamation—אֱלֹהִים קֶנָּא, “a jealous God”—now governs the remainder of the third part of the speech, as the jealous God is further announced under two


participle clauses. While his action of showing lovingkindness also springs from this jealous zeal, the immediate and most closely connected outworking of Yahweh’s jealousy is his “visiting-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons, even against the third and fourth generation.” Addressed to Israel in this setting, this generational sequence can hardly be heard as a comforting “statute of limitations.” Rather, the assertion of his divine power and prerogative to punish iniquity of fathers against sons pricks at their natural paternal affection and protection, the very paternal concern voiced by the sons of Israel when thirsting in the wilderness (Exod 17:3). The mention of sons is jarring enough, but the additional language of “even against the third and fourth generation” could only have increased the sense of seriousness, authority, and fear. This multi-generational scope implies God’s long awareness and memory of iniquity and therefore the eventual inescapability of divine punishment for iniquity. It is often noted that this span reflects the range of descendants known and cared for by an aging father, perhaps even residents in his own extended household. There is no definition here of a particular timing or a detailed punitive dynamic behind this visitation, other than the sense implied by the use of פקד על that it will come as the direct action of Yahweh after a period of perceived absence, inaction, or indifference. Clearly the assertion here is that Yahweh is not a God who is indifferent to idolatry or iniquity.

29 Matthias Franz, *Der barmherzige und gnädige Gott: Die Gnadenrede vom Sinai (Ex 34, 6–7) und ihre Parallelen im Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt*, BWANT 160 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003), 21, comparing OT tendencies of divine description in Exod 34:6–7 and in several passages from the Psalms, observes that an adjectival description of God often precedes participles because the characteristic described by the adjective is the precondition for the result described by the participle. This is certainly the case here between Yahweh as jealous (adjective) and his action of visiting iniquity (participle).

30 The sequence “third and fourth” here (x and x+1) would likely have been heard as a Hebrew idiom indicating a small but general number, rather than a numerically precise designation (see discussion of this idiom under §4.2.8 above). In other words, the threat is not that Yahweh visits fathers’ iniquity in punishment upon descendants exactly to the fourth generation, but rather against some generations even beyond first-generation sons. This contributes to a reading of this language which accents the freedom and prerogative of Yahweh in the precise timing and dynamic of redressing iniquity.

31 See discussion above under §4.2.8.
Visiting iniquity in punishment is an action which Yahweh threatens with respect to those who hate him. The substantive participle שׂנאי ("those who hate me") conveys a strong sense of personal enmity and, in its Exodus context, evokes a number of connections. The participle "those who hate me” recalls the prior role and fate of Egypt (Exod 1:10; 15:6–7, 9; 19:4; 20:2). “Hate me” is also heard here under the marriage metaphor (established in the immediate context by “your God” and “jealous”) as a despising and spurning so severe that it may lead to abandonment or the taking of a rival spouse or lover. The closing words of v. 6 which associate “love me” with “keep my commandments” provide additional context, suggesting that “hatred/enmity” toward God comprises not only idolatry but also disobedience to Yahweh’s commands more generally.

One interpretive crux for this visiting phrase in Exod 20:5 has been debate over the referent of “those who hate me.” Is divine visitation of fathers’ iniquity upon sons threatened with respect to fathers who hate Yahweh, with respect to sons who hate Yahweh, or with respect to fathers-and-sons who hate Yahweh? Yahweh’s concern for justice and for not condemning the innocent has been shown to be a significant theme in Exodus (see §7.6 and especially §7.6.4 above). Therefore, in the sense of the narrative presentation of Yahweh’s character and theological reflection, Yahweh’s threat “with respect to those who hate me” pertains to both—to fathers-and-sons at enmity with Yahweh through idolatry and disobedience. However, in terms of the rhetorical function of the passage as persuasive address to the gathered hosts of Israel at Sinai, “those who hate me” sounds as a warning to fathers, looking forward to the well-being of their children and descendants. The message is plain: do not be those who hate Yahweh. And a secondary message to fathers is implied as well: see to it that your children are not those who hate Yahweh.

The polarity created by the rhetoric of “hate me” and “love me” is stark. It is a clear but
severe assertion: there is no middle ground. There is no room here for vacillation. The hearers are drawn to cling to Yahweh, or the hearers are forced to steel themselves against Yahweh’s demands in hostile resistance.

His pledge is that those who cleave to him in exclusive worship, obedience, and love will experience his enduring lovingkindness—a lovingkindness “to thousands” attested by the present encampment of thousands of sons of Israel before God on their way to the land of promise. The prospect of his enduring lovingkindness to thousands more—perhaps even thousands of generations more—of these offspring, in the land of their inheritance, is indeed a gigantic good. Yahweh’s speech leaves little question which of these paths and outcomes the hearers should pursue, or, indeed, which of these outcomes Yahweh himself desires. He is thundering from Sinai toward the goal of realizing the second of these two outcomes for Israel. Yet, he champions this goal and this outcome by giving rhetorical prominence to his jealous nature and to the severe necessity of avoiding idolatry. In order to secure loyalty and to bestow blessing, Yahweh here foregrounds his jealousy and his punishment of iniquity in order to instill fear.

9.2.3. The Function of the Visiting Phrase within the Rhetoric of Exodus 20:2–6

Having reflected on the rhetorical features and function of Yahweh’s name-speech in Exod 20:2–6, several observations regarding the specific functions of the transgenerational visiting phrase (v. 5c) can now be gathered and elaborated. To deter the people from the cardinal sin of idolatry, Yahweh might merely have asserted his jealousy and threatened to punish idolatry and iniquity. But to the dismay of many he goes beyond this and declares that he is a jealous God who, with respect to those who hate me, visits-in-punishment the iniquity of fathers against sons, even against the third and fourth generations. What function does such transgenerational language serve within Yahweh’s persuasive appeal and logic? In light of the foregoing discussion, five observations suggest themselves.
First, the transgenerational language here addresses the hearers as fathers and functions as a *deterrent* against idolatry, apostasy, and religious indifference on the part of fathers. It does so by assuming the closely bound identity between father and son (on both ontological and theological grounds) and by *appealing to a father’s natural affection and concern for his children*. Such is a universal, shared human experience stemming from the way in which God designed the promulgation of the race. No one is a wholly detached, free-floating independent who, from the beginning, freely chooses his identity and associations in the world. Rather, every human being is an offspring, a “seed” (זרע) sprung from the “seed” of a father and the womb of a mother. Thus, a son is organically and ontologically bound to his father, and father to his son. And because this is much more than a biochemical unfolding, but also the work of Yahweh who himself opens the womb to conceive and knits a child together, this bond of father-son identity is also theological. Among the sons of Israel, the theological bond between father and son extends to the role of fathers in modeling for sons the exclusive worship of Yahweh and in teaching them the commands, promises, and deeds of Yahweh. This theme of the organic and theological bond between fathers and sons within the Genesis and Exodus narratives has been outlined in depth above (§7.1).

A father’s piercing concern\(^\text{32}\) for the welfare of a son is a truism which requires no demonstration. Within the Exodus narrative it becomes a part of the groaning and outcry of Israel in chs. 1–2 after the Pharaoh decrees death for their infant boys. It is dramatized further in the story of Moses’ birth and desperate preservation in a floating basket (here the concern is maternal). It is voiced in the wilderness when thirst threatens the people *and their children* (17:3). But it is captured most poignantly in the plague against the firstborn sons of Egypt.

\(^{32}\) Of course, a mother’s natural affection and concern for her children is no less, as demonstrated in the birth-and-hiding-of-Moses narrative in Exod 2:1–10, and as indicated in the NT prophecy to Mary, holding the infant Jesus: “and a sword shall pierce through your own soul also” (ESV).
Beforehand, Yahweh warns: “And there will be a great outcry in all the land of Egypt, the like of which has never been and the like of which will never be again” (11:6). When the event itself is narrated, the poignancy is conveyed not so much in the description of the outcry, but in the understated, pathetic moment of Pharaoh and his people getting out of bed to encounter such grief: “And Pharaoh arose during the night, he and all Egypt, and there was a great outcry in Egypt” (12:30). Fathers and sons are bound together, and so the visiting phrase here appeals to fathers to shun any enticement to idolatry—not only for their own well-being but also for that of their progeny.

Second, as just intimated, the transgenerational language recalls the dramatic visitation of Yahweh against Pharaoh and Egypt in the preceding narrative, and in this way vividly warns the sons of Israel: do not be like Pharaoh and Egypt, idolatrous and stubborn, provoking and defying Yahweh. All ten of the plagues come as “transgenerational punishment,” calling Egypt to a reckoning after a generations-long period of ongoing oppression of Israel and offense against Israel’s God. The Pharaoh and the Egyptian generation which began the oppression have died (4:19); a new Pharaoh reigns, and his firstborn son, along with all the firstborn sons of Egypt, is struck down by Yahweh. Thus, the tenth plague in particular vividly displays the consequences for sons of iniquitous lineage.

Almost every element within the rhetoric of vv. 5c–6 is cast in terms corresponding to the judgment-and-deliverance narrative just accomplished. In particular, Yahweh has indeed visited (פקד) Israel and what had been done to them by Egypt (Exod 3:16; cf. Gen 50:24–25; Exod 4:31; 13:19). Egypt has received transgenerational blows from Yahweh as his enemies: “those who hate me” (1:10; 15:6–7, 9). Yahweh has led forth the “thousands” of the sons of Israel (12:37; 18:21), dealing with his redeemed people in his “lovingkindness” (חסד, 15:13). While during the Passover and departure, Israel is portrayed as doing “just as Yahweh had commanded (טעם)
Moses” (12:28, 50), the wilderness trek has raised the awareness that Israel’s devotion to Yahweh cannot be taken for granted (“How long will you refuse to keep my commandments (מצותי) and my instructions?” 16:28), an awareness which impels Yahweh’s rhetoric here in 20:2–6. As Yahweh declares his incomparable, holy, jealous nature to Israel at Sinai, then, he seeks to elicit their loyal obedience by casting his threat of punishment in transgenerational language which recalls the devastating judgments against Egypt which they have just witnessed (see also 10:1–2; 13:14–15; 14:30–31; 19:4; 20:2).

Third, the transgenerational language asserts the long-term jurisdiction of Yahweh which stands as an impressive deterrent. “Even against the third and fourth generations” is designed to humble and quash any arrogant sense that Yahweh’s justice might be eluded and outlasted. Pharaoh and Egypt boldly and defiantly exalted themselves against Yahweh and his people, and seemed to do so with impunity for a long time. But long time though it was, it was still only for a time, and eventually, after (three or four?) generations, Yahweh acted in decisive, devastating fashion. Any perception of Yahweh as impotent or indifferent, brought on by time and by the apparent impunity of his enemies, is a misperception. His judgment upon idolatry and iniquity—that is, upon those who despise and disregard him—is ultimately inescapable. His reign and jurisdiction is “forever” (15:18). In this sense, to read “even against the third and fourth generations” here in Exod 20:5 as a somewhat-comforting “statute of limitations” upon Yahweh’s prerogative to punish seems to ignore the rhetorical force of the speech. In contrast to human powers who eventually die, ending their power to threaten (e.g. Exod 4:19; cf. Matt 2:20), the reach of Yahweh to punish injustice and defiance is subject to no such limitations.

Fourth, the transgenerational language resonates with the many-generations blessings promised and intended by Yahweh for Israel, and portrays idolatry and disobedience as a tragic squandering of these benefits for future generations. While the dominant note in Yahweh’s
speech is one of exhortation against idolatry and warning of impassioned punishment, the language of his great lovingkindness is, as mentioned above, given its own prominence. Rhetorically, the transgenerational punishment language in v. 5c stands in an interesting reciprocal relationship with the lovingkindness to thousands language in v. 6. Read forward, the language of v. 5c bleeds its transgenerational coloring into v. 6, so that the promise of Yahweh’s lovingkindness “to thousands” is heard in reference not merely to the thongs of people standing at the mountain, but to the thousands-more descendants (perhaps even thousands of generations) who will enjoy Yahweh’s goodness in the land. In turn, the language of divine care and blessing in v. 6, in recalling both the track record of Yahweh’s dealings with Israel in the preceding narrative and the frequently repeated promises and intentions of Yahweh for the sons of Israel throughout their generations looking forward, strengthens and colors the preceding threat. It heightens the sense of the tragic loss it would be for fathers to forsake Yahweh, and thus his long-enduring, many-generations blessings for their descendants. In other words, the transgenerational warning stands as an exhortation to avoid idolatry so as not to forfeit the holy vocation, treasured regard, and beneficent care from Yahweh which his promises to the patriarchs and his mighty acts of deliverance from Egypt have intended to secure for them. In this way, it also urges them to recognize, remember, and hold dear the good, long plans which Yahweh has for his people.

Fifth, the transgenerational language urges fathers to pious parenting: teaching their sons to know and worship Yahweh alone. The rhetoric of v. 5c binds fathers, sons, and subsequent generations closely together coram deo with a concern for avoiding idolatry. In the Exodus context, with its numerous explicit directions for fathers in this regard, the persuasive intention of invoking Yahweh’s transgenerational punishment is not merely that a father will avoid idolatry, but also that he will be conscientious and deliberate in imparting this practice to his
sons, his grandsons, and his great-grandsons.\(^{33}\) This implication is strengthened by the rhetorical interplay between the no other gods commandment here and the honoring parents commandment later in the Decalogue (20:12). In 20:2–6, the rhetoric addresses the hearers as fathers with an implied religious duty with respect to sons, and links this with the long-term fulfillment of Yahweh’s purposes for Israel (across generations). The commandment in 20:12 likewise implies a religious duty, rhetorically addressing the hearers as sons owing honor to parents, including the implied honor of following their worship and way of life under Yahweh. And 20:12 likewise ties this to the long-term well-being of the generations of Israel: “that your days may lengthen upon the land that Yahweh your God is giving to you.”\(^{34}\)

The broad rhetorical intention of Exod 20:2–6, as well as these persuasive dynamics of the visiting phrase in 20:5c, are integrally related to the five overarching goals of Yahweh’s character within the Exodus narrative.

(1) Yahweh seeks to fulfill his promise to the fathers: rescue their descendants from Egypt and give them long life in the good land—\textit{and so} he addresses his increasingly fickle people here in 20:2–6 to dissuade them from idolatry and disobedience which would disastrously squander these long-promised and long-lasting blessings.

\(^{33}\) Pinchas H. Peli, \textit{Torah Today: A Renewed Encounter with Scripture} (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 51–52, in a short essay titled “Grandchildren and Jews,” offers some self-evident yet profound reflections on this dynamic, which I will reproduce here in some fullness. In a commentary on Jacob blessing his grandsons Manasseh and Ephraim and claiming them as his own sons, Peli writes, “Preceding this message are the words (Gen 48:15) ‘and he blessed Joseph and said.’ The blessing is directed to Joseph’s children, not to Joseph. It seems however that sometimes the best blessing a father could wish for himself is the blessing conferred on his children. Jacob is not concerned about his own children, the first generation of immigrants, who still remember the ‘old country’ and the traditional home of Jacob in which they grew up. To make sure that the chain of tradition continues, he tries to communicate with the third generation, his grandchildren. While there are animals and birds who relate to their offspring, only humans, I believe, relate to grandchildren.” Peli then cites philosopher Emil Fackenheim, from his renowned work on the Holocaust: “The one million Jewish children murdered in the Nazi Holocaust died neither because of their faith, nor in spite of their faith. They were murdered because of the faith of their great-grandparents. Had these great-grandparents abandoned their Jewish faith, and failed to bring up Jewish children, then their fourth-generation descendants might have been among the Nazi executioners, not among their Jewish victims.” Peli himself then observes: “Who is a Jew? Not one who can boast about his Jewish grandparents (and who among us cannot boast about at least one great rabbi in the family?), but one who can speak with confidence about his Jewish grandchildren. This one can do when following in the footsteps of Jacob, who said to Joseph (Gen 48:9): ‘Bring them, I pray thee, unto me.’”

\(^{34}\) For an elaboration of the parallel relationship between the idolatry commandment (20:2–6) and the parent commandment (20:12), see above §7.1.2.f. Fathers and Sons in the Decalogue.
(2) Yahweh seeks to obtain a people—a holy, priestly people who worship him alone throughout their generations—and so he speaks to them as “your God” and exhorts them toward such exclusive worship, and toward teaching it to their sons, grandsons, and great-grandsons.

(3) Yahweh seeks to dwell in the midst of his people—and so he speaks here to prevent them from setting up other gods “in my presence” (עַל־פָּנַי, 20:3). The threat of divine “visitation-in-punishment” (יִתְנַשֵּׁם) itself accents the reality—and the danger—of Yahweh’s advent and presence.

(4) Yahweh seeks to establish justice—and so his words here to Israel make a deep impression on them that he will pursue an impassioned redress against those who refuse to walk in his ways. Yahweh warns that he visits-in-punishment fathers’ iniquity against sons, a claim which—especially in its evocation of his “acts of judgment” against Egypt—announces his intention that iniquity not remain unpunished (not his intention that the innocent be treated as the wicked).

(5) In all of this, and toward all of this, Yahweh seeks to make his name known—to Israel and to all, through all generations—and so, Yahweh twice declares “I am Yahweh, your God,” focusing his self-disclosure here around his “jealous” nature and the concomitant demands of exclusive worship and obedient devotion. The transgenerational punishment language heightens the revelation of Yahweh as the incomparable God who reigns forever and who has the power and prerogative to redress injustice and rebellion in a generations-long time frame. The implicit exhortation of the transgenerational language that fathers be diligent in passing on the knowledge and worship of Yahweh serves Yahweh’s overarching aim in the book that he be known throughout all generations.

These associations indicate that Yahweh’s words in Exod 20:2–6 aim not merely at incidental or episode-specific ends, but at his core quests within the story. This attests to the narrative importance of this speech, confirming the key role of this name-speech within the narrative trajectory of the book as described above (§8.3.4).
9.2.4. The Narrative Outcome\textsuperscript{35} of Yahweh’s Speech in Exodus 20:2–6

The final part of rhetorical analysis is the consideration of the speech’s outcome in relation to its rhetorical aims. When approaching speech as a pragmatic-persuasive transaction, it is significant to note how the audience responds on their end of the transaction. The speaker hopes to move the audience, to change the audience and to thereby change the situation in which the speaker and audience find themselves. So how does the audience, in fact, respond?

This description of a speech’s outcome in terms of the audience’s response is sometimes posed as an \textit{evaluation} of the rhetoric. However, not every well-designed speech will meet with an appropriate response—and this is most certainly the case with an audience whose most apt single descriptor is “stiff-necked.” Aristotle suggests that a speech should be judged by the quality of its construction and appeal:

\begin{quote}
It is not the function of rhetoric to persuade but to observe the available means of persuasion for situations like this one, just as in all the other arts. For example, the function of medicine is not to make healthy, but to bring the patient as far toward health as the case permits. For sometimes it is impossible to bring health, but one must give sound treatment.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

In this spirit, then, the following description of the rhetorical outcome of Exod 20:2–6, in terms of the response of the sons of Israel within the narrative, is presented—as part of a complete account of this rhetorical transaction but not as an evaluation of Yahweh’s rhetoric.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{35} In descriptions of performative language using speech act theory, the outcome intended or resulting from a speech, in terms of the audience’s response which results in a changed situation, is referred to as the perlocutionary force of the speech. However, different authors use the term perlocutionary force in different ways, some using it to describe the audience response which the speaker (or speech) \textit{intends to elicit}, and others to describe the audience response \textit{which actually results} from the the force of the rhetoric. Some authors use the term in both senses: compare, for example, Patrick, \textit{Rhetoric of Revelation}, 55 and 196. Because of this ambiguity, it seems more useful to simply speak in terms of \textit{rhetorical aim} (or \textit{intention}) on the one hand, and the \textit{outcome of the rhetoric} on the other. The previous section addressed the issue of Yahweh’s rhetorical aim in connection with the specific narrative situation and exigency giving rise to his speech (§9.2.1.c). The present section analyzes the outcome of Yahweh’s speech, in terms of the actual response of the sons of Israel within the narrative.


\textsuperscript{37} The perspective of the Exodus narrative, in the voice of its most reliable character, is that Yahweh’s Sinai speech to the people is of such a unique magnitude and clear significance that there should be no question of the
The response of the sons of Israel to Yahweh’s speech in Exod 20:2–6 is narrated in three distinct episodes: the immediate reaction at the foot of Sinai (Exod 20:18–21); their response in the blood covenant scene (Exod 24:1–11); and their diametrically different response in the golden calf rebellion (Exod 32:1–8). Each of these passages will be briefly considered.

After Yahweh proclaims the name-speech of 20:2–6 and the ensuing commandments of 20:7–17, the narrator recounts a brief dialogue between “all the people” and Moses at the foot of the mountain. The people had been trembling even before Yahweh spoke because of the awesome accoutrements of his theophany (19:16), and now, having been addressed by Yahweh their fear is compounded (20:18). They request that Moses speak to them, rather than Yahweh, lest they die (20:19). They promise to heed Moses’ words—effectively promising obedience to Yahweh and his commandments spoken through Moses. All the people stand “at a distance” (20:18, 21), a detail which evidences both their fear and also Moses’ mediation: Moses, in contrast, “drew near to the deep darkness where God was” (20:21). In the episode immediately following Yahweh’s speech, then, the response of his hearers is exactly what his rhetoric intended: they are intensely conscious of his personal presence and address, they exhibit a fear which befits his divine jealousy and the prospect of visitation-in-punishment, and they are moved to pledge their obedience to Yahweh (even as they appeal that Moses mediate Yahweh’s further people’s compliant response (Exod 20:22–23; cf. Deut 4:33–40).

38 Joe M. Sprinkle, Biblical Law and Its Relevance: A Christian Understanding and Ethical Application for Today of the Mosaic Regulations (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005), 57, outlines Exod 19–24 chiastically, as (A) Narrative: The covenant offered (19:3–25); (B) Laws (general): The Decalogue (20:1–17); (C) Narrative: The people’s fear (20:18–21); (B’) Laws (specific): The Book of the Covenant (20:22–23:33); and (A’) Narrative: The covenant accepted (24:1–11). This places the fear of the people in 20:18–21 as the centerpiece of the Sinai encounter with Yahweh in 19–24.

39 With this request, the people are not appealing for a new arrangement but rather for a return to Yahweh’s previous way of communicating with them. Moses has been mediating Yahweh’s words and commands to the people, from the time of his return to Egypt in ch. 4 up through his multiple mediated messages between God and the people in ch. 19.
In the next episode involving the sons of Israel, they continue to be properly responsive to the rhetorical appeal of Yahweh in 20:2–6. After Moses receives further just decrees from Yahweh (20:22–23:33), he returns to the people. He recounts to them “all the words of Yahweh and all the just decrees,” writes them in “the Book of the Covenant,” and the next day reads them aloud to the people again. On both occasions, all the people answer in unison, “All the words which Yahweh has spoken, we will do” (20:3, 7). On the latter occasion, the people are pictured as gathered around the altar of Yahweh which Moses has built at the foot of the mountain, participating in offering up whole burnt offerings and peace offerings “to Yahweh.” (The sacrifices are performed by נערי בני ישראל “young men from among the sons of Israel” (24:5), at Moses’ direction.) In this scene, too, the people are intensely conscious of Yahweh’s person and his personal presence. Though the people do not go up on the mountain, and though Aaron, his sons, and the seventy elders go up but worship Yahweh “at a distance” (24:1–2), the scene in the episode becomes sublime, brimming with the sense of Yahweh’s presence and splendor. Moses, Aaron and sons, and the elders “saw the God of Israel…. Yet he did not stretch out his hand against the leading men of the sons of Israel; they saw God, and they ate and drank” (20:10–11). Thus, in Exod 24 as in 20:18–21, the sons of Israel act in the precise manner toward which Yahweh’s rhetoric in 20:2–6 sought to move them.

This changes dramatically—diametrically—with the golden calf episode, the next appearance of the sons of Israel in the narrative. After the blood covenant and sublime communion with Yahweh in 24:1–11, Moses once again ascends and enters the glory cloud to

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40 Even the people’s request for Moses’ mediation fulfills part of Yahweh’s overall rhetorical intention for the Sinai encounter: “I am coming to you in a thick cloud so that the people will hear when I speak with you [Moses] and will believe in you forever” (19:9). This is not a specific rhetorical aim of Yahweh in 20:2–6, however.
receive more of Yahweh’s words (24:12, 18)—for forty days. I have argued extensively above (§8.3.6.) that Israel’s calf apostasy is intentionally narrated to highlight its direct rejection of Yahweh’s words in Exod 20:2–6 and also as a counterfeit, perversion, and repudiation of the true worship of Yahweh depicted in ch. 24:1–11. Thus, the outcome of Yahweh’s rhetorical-pragmatic appeal to the sons of Israel in 20:2–6 can be characterized as successful in the short time, but unsuccessful in the long-term. Eventually, the fickle disposition of the sons of Israel resurfaces, and they lurch wildly from an intense consciousness of Yahweh’s presence, holy fear, loyal pledges of obedience, and worship of Yahweh to consummate rebellion and uninhibited idolatrous revelry. In Exod 20, Yahweh had declared to the sons of Israel that their weal or woe, generation after generation, would spring either from his lovingkindness or, if they returned to the slavery of idolatry, from his punishing visitation. But now, instead of devoting themselves to the exclusive worship of Yahweh and recounting to their sons how Yahweh rescued them from the slavery of Egypt, the fathers of Israel collaborate with Aaron to pull out the gold rings “from the ears of your wives, and your sons, and your daughters” and make for themselves a gold idol, bowing down before it, sacrificing to it, and proclaiming, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.” This precipitates a crisis in the story, a crisis which becomes the occasion for Yahweh’s proclamation in Exod 34:6–7.

41 In narrated time (story time), Moses is with Yahweh on the mountain for forty days and forty nights (24:18). In time of narration (discourse time), Moses is on the mountain with Yahweh for more than seven chapters (24:18–32:14). Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art, 141: “A narrative cannot exist without time, to which it has a twofold relationship: it unfolds within time, and time passes within it. The narrative needs the time which is outside it in order to unravel itself by stages before the reader…. The narrative also requires internal time, because the characters and the incidents in the text exist within time.” The long time of narration, basically chs. 25–31, in addition to providing time to detail Yahweh’s instructions for freewill offering, tabernacle, priesthood, and Sabbath, also allows the story’s hearer/reader to taste the wait which the sons of Israel are experiencing in the camp down below. Nevertheless, the diatomic change after a mere forty days from pledged obedience (24:2, 7) to idolatry and apostasy in ch. 32 still stands as a shocking indictment upon the sons of Israel. Their swiftness to apostasy contrasts markedly with Yahweh’s slowness to anger, even for generations, revealed in 34:6–7.
9.3. Rhetorical Analysis of Exodus 34:6–7

9.3.1. The Rhetorical Situation of Exodus 34:6–7

9.3.1.a. The Narrative Situation, Its Exigency, and the Rhetorical Aim

The sons of Israel, it turns out, are an incorrigibly stiff-necked people. And so after their sin with the calf idol, the sons of Israel are stuck, and the story is stuck. At Moses’ intercession, Yahweh has relented from the disaster he initially declared, a disaster which would have cut off the sons of Israel and their descendants from the gracious future and inheritance promised by Yahweh. At Moses’ intercession, Yahweh has even agreed to go up with the people to the land, shortly after declaring that if he were to go in their midst for even a moment, he would surely consume them. Yet even as Yahweh accedes to Moses’ requests, big questions increasingly arise. Why? How? What kind of future can there really be for a stiff-necked people if Yahweh remains the jealous God who he declared himself to be in his great theophany in ch. 20, visiting-in-punishment against the generations of those who defy him. How can this Yahweh be the God of this people?

It is to this situation that Yahweh’s self-proclamation in 34:6–7 is addressed, with its overwhelming focus on divine mercy and forgiveness. Israel is stuck, and the story is stuck, but this fuller revelation of God’s essential character opens up a future for stiff-necked Israel before Yahweh. With words of comforting new self-disclosure paired with words of warning, Yahweh addresses Moses and the people so that they might know him as their gracious God, be sure about the abundance of his forgiveness—as well as their need for it—and move forward into the inheritance he intends for them, throughout their generations.

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42 The broader narrative situation of the golden calf apostasy, giving rise to climactic self-proclamation in 34:6–7, has been described above under §8.3.6. Here this preceding discussion is assumed, and a more precise question is considered: how does the situation narrated in Exod 32–34 move Yahweh to speak to Moses in 34:6–7 and toward what end?
Yahweh’s rhetoric of 34:6–7 carries some persuasive-pragmatic implications for his hearers, but its highest aim is informative-revelatory. Yahweh addresses his hearers in order to move the narrative situation forward by making himself more fully known. The preceding scene establishes this expectation, as Moses entreats, “And now, if I have found favor in your eyes, make known (Hiphil of ידוע) to me your ways, that I may know (ידע) you” (33:13), and thereafter, “Show (Hiphil of ראה) me your glory” (33:18). Yahweh’s response includes the promise to pass by Moses and “proclaim my name” (33:19a), a proclamatory revelation which, he indicates already here, will announce his graciousness, his mercy, and his freedom (33:19b).

The prominent focus on “two stone tablets like the first” (34:1, 4) leading up to Yahweh’s speech firmly anchors the speech within Yahweh’s reestablishment of his covenant with the sons of Israel, which they had broken. In the proclamation of 34:6–7 Yahweh discloses his character more fully in order to open the way for this “wonder,” but also in order that the unprecedented mercy manifested here might not be misinterpreted or misused. His reestablishment of the previous covenant in 34:10–28—and, his summary repetition of its stipulations—make clear that his enormous mercy and forgiveness do not annul his previous covenant intentions: that justice be upheld and established; that he have for himself a holy, priestly people who worship him alone; and that he dwell in their midst throughout their generations. Since events have shown Israel to be a stiff-necked people, Yahweh’s speech will accent not only the magnitude of his merciful forgiveness but also its urgency for the people, in light of the continuing reality of divine punishment. The rhetorical urgency of forgiveness will further confirm the vital role of Moses’ mediation, which has been highlighted in the golden calf narrative (32:11–14, 30; 33:12–16) and which will be visibly attested by his shining face (34:29–35). The rhetorical urgency of forgiveness will also spur the people on to construct the tabernacle with its altar and priesthood for making sacrificial atonement for sin (chs. 35–40; esp. 29:35–42).
9.3.1.b. The Character of the Audience(s)

In reflecting on the rhetorical strategy in Exod 34:6–7, both Moses and the sons of Israel are legitimately considered the audience addressed by these words. While 20:2–6 was thundered to the thousands of Israel, Yahweh’s gracious name-proclamation in 34:6–7 is witnessed directly only by Moses. Moses has requested this revelation, and Yahweh invites Moses alone to the top of the mountain to hear it. At the same time, this future-opening proclamation of Yahweh’s name is a proclamation for all the sons of Israel. Spoken to Moses, it is thereby spoken to Israel.

This is so because Moses is, in every sense, the mediator between Yahweh and the people. He is the mediator of Yahweh’s words to the people, so the proclamation here to Moses is intended to be passed on to the people. Following this encounter on the mountain, the story relates the scene of “all the people drawing near” to Moses to hear the words which Yahweh had spoken to him on the mountain (34:31–32). Only here, on the heels of 34:6–7, Yahweh’s fullest self-revelation, does the narrative report the face of Moses shining “because he had been speaking with God” (34:29). Yet Moses has been mediating Yahweh’s words to the people since ch. 4, and Yahweh has been acting in ways designed to secure Moses’ credibility as his mouthpiece (14:31; 19:9).

In the wake of the golden calf apostasy, it is highly significant that the people ultimately retreat from the stage, and Yahweh and Moses alone remain. Yahweh’s fullest revelation of his name and nature are, initially at least, proclaimed to this single mediator, and Yahweh’s renewal of his covenant is declared and enacted in the presence of Moses alone, and in some sense with

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43 It is interesting that, unlike so many of Yahweh’s words to Moses, Exod 34:6–7 lacks any prefatory “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel” or the like (3:14–15; 6:6; 12:3; 14:1; 16:9, 12; 19:3, 6; 20:22; 21:1; 25:1; 27:20; 31:12; 33:5). Perhaps this is because, just as the covenant is being restored solely on the basis of Yahweh’s merciful nature and due to nothing on the part of the people, so Yahweh’s words here leave behind the strong “I and Thou” language of 20:2–6 and speak overwhelmingly and solely in terms of “Yahweh.” He and he alone, now self-referenced in third person language, is the subject of the proclamation.
Moses and through Moses (34:10, 27). Here, two things are true. First, Yahweh’s lovingkindness and covenant with Israel are preserved purely because of the merciful and gracious character of Yahweh himself. The renewed covenant will be the embodiment of divine grace and monergism. At the same time, Yahweh’s invitation to Moses to come before him in Exod 34 involves more than simply conveying Yahweh’s words (and nature) to Israel. Mann remarks:

In comparison with the previous covenant process (chs. 19–24), the renewal of the covenant occurs with a significant omission: Israel plays no role whatsoever (34:27). Now the covenant is made through the agency of the mediator alone, without any consultation of the third party. In a sense, Moses not only ‘represents’ Israel; he now is Israel, the faithful servant by whom alone Yahweh can reestablish his Kingdom.

This paradox is reflected in the usage of “grace/favor” terminology (the Hebrew root חנן) in these chapters. On the one hand, it is clear that Yahweh relents from the disaster he declares, forgives Israel’s sin, and renews his covenant promises with them simply because he is, in his essential nature, gracious (33:19; חנן, 34:6). Yet it is also true that Yahweh does these things in response to the intercession of Moses, who has found “favor” (חן) in Yahweh’s eyes. This dialectic is especially apparent in 34:9, in which Moses both prays for the people on the basis of Yahweh’s favor for him, and also prays (on the basis of Yahweh’s character just proclaimed) that Yahweh would “forgive our iniquity and our sin.”

Mediated through Moses, Yahweh’s proclamation in 34:6–7 is addressed ultimately to the stiff-necked sons of Israel, presently and throughout their generations. Clearly the dominant

44 In Exod 24, Yahweh makes his covenant with all the people, using second person plural language (ךְִ֓לּסֵנִים, with you all, 24:8). In contrast, the renewal of the covenant in Exod 34 is a “wonder” which he performs “with you [Moses]” (ךְִ֓לַּס, 34:10). In 34:27, Yahweh stresses the mediating role of Moses even more clearly: “I have made with you [Moses] a covenant, and with Israel.”


46 As the fullest expression of the Yahweh-name within the Exodus narrative, Exod 34:6–7 lays hold of the original declaration of Yahweh in Exod 3:15: “Yahweh … has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and this is my memorial from generation to generation.”
trait of the people throughout this episode is that they are “stiff of neck” (ךֵשׁה ערף), a designation which likens the people to Pharaoh himself in his “hardness” (ךֵשׁה, Exod 7:3; 13:15). Three times “stiff-necked” is Yahweh’s own assertion about them (32:9; 33:3, 5). This characterization continues through and beyond Yahweh’s determination to spare, forgive, and restore them (34:9). And in 32:22 Aaron says—as an excuse but also as a generalization which seems to ring true to Moses, “You yourself know the people, that they are ‘in evil’” (ברע, “set on evil” [ESV], “in the grip of evil” [Houtman]).

In my judgment, it is a misreading of Exod 32–33 to perceive a fundamental change in the character of the sons of Israel which accounts for Yahweh’s change of disposition toward them, and which therefore contributes to the re-opening of their future. Jože Krašovec, for example, in his tome Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness, repeatedly stresses the penitence of the sons of Israel post-golden calf and pre-covenant renewal. He writes, “The people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments [33:6]… The people no longer wore any ornaments at all. Thus, it becomes obvious that their mourning, penitence, and desire to return to God are sincere; this opens up fresh possibilities for God to reflect on how to deal with the chosen people.” Nothing else in the context, however, supports this interpretation that the sons of Israel are portrayed as penitent, sincere, changed, and reformed. Their role in the narrative between the golden calf sin and Yahweh’s renewing of the covenant and proclamation of his name is emphatically passive.


48 Jože Krašovec, Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness: The Thinking and Beliefs of Ancient Israel in the Light of Greek and Modern Views, VTSup 78 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 96. Here, he makes too much of the people stripping their ornaments. This is not a spontaneous act of repentance on the part of the people. It is demanded by Yahweh, at His initiative (33:5). Also, the verb used for “stripped themselves” (Hithpael ofנצל) echoes the Piel ofנצל used for the plundering of the Egyptians in Exodus 3:22 and 12:36. The image is that the Exodus deliverance has been undone, and that the sons of Israel have placed themselves in the same category as “Egyptians” by their idolatry. Krašovec’s emphasis on this change/improvement in the people leads him to significant (and, in my view, erroneous) theological conclusions: “Only one reliable conclusion can be reached: God guarantees full benevolence, mercy, and forgiveness to those who have truly undergone reform” (99). “Naturally, it is understandable that God should show forgiveness only to those who acknowledge their own iniquity and who are willing to turn again and be reformed. Mercy will be valid only while human fidelity endures” (101).
Both Yahweh and Moses work with the assumption that they are dealing with a people which is and remains stiff-necked, and there is no indication that the reader should glimpse “early signs of penitence” among the people which would change the nature of the rhetorical situation.

However, alongside the narrative’s thoroughgoing emphasis on the people’s stiff-necked nature, another aspect of their character is also repeatedly mentioned: their identity as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to whom God has made sworn promises.

Immediately after the golden calf sin, Yahweh raises the specter of Israel’s annihilation and the prospect that he will instead “make [Moses] into a great nation” (32:10). The interpretive tradition summarized by Childs for this verse is compelling and highly relevant:

Nevertheless, the classic Jewish interpreters have correctly sensed a profound paradox in Yahweh’s response which runs through the Bible (cf. Exodus Rabbah or Rashi). God vows the severest punishment imaginable, but then suddenly he conditions it, as it were, on Moses’ agreement. “Let me alone that I may consume them.” The effect is that God himself leaves the door open for intercession. He allows himself to be persuaded…. Moreover, the personal promise to Moses to make him into a great nation picked up the identical words of the prior promise to Abraham (Gen 12:2), giving Moses his strongest argument by which to counter the threat.50

Indeed, Moses takes up this line of appeal, pleading with Yahweh, “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, to whom you swore—by yourself—and said to them, ‘I will multiply your offspring like the stars of the heavens, and this whole land which I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they will inherit it forever’” (32:13). Assenting (in part) to Moses’ supplications, Yahweh himself echoes this portrait of the people as heirs of the patriarchal promises: “Go up from this place, you and the people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land about which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, ‘To your offspring I will give

49 Krašovec, 97: “Early signs of penitence made it possible [for God to] acknowledge the people again in the proximity of the tent [of meeting], thereby offering them a fresh opportunity for penitence and purification.” He fails to mention, however, that the tent of meeting was outside the camp, rather than in its midst, as God had intended the tabernacle to be.

it” (33:1). Still here, however, Yahweh refrains from full assent. Moses had pleaded that Yahweh’s anger not burn against “your people whom you brought out from the land of Egypt” (32:11), but here Yahweh repeats his distancing language (cf. 32:7), referring to Israel as Moses’ people and announcing that an angel would go in their midst, rather than he himself, lest he consume them (33:2–3). But Moses knows that God’s covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob included more than population and territory: Yahweh had promised the patriarchs regarding their offspring that he would be their God (and thus, they his people) and that he himself would go with them (Gen 17:7–8; 46:3–4; Exod 6:7). So Moses presses the point: “See that this nation is your people…. How else will it be known that I have found favor in your eyes, I and your people—is it not by your going with us that we will be distinct, I and your people, from among all the people upon the face of the earth?” (33:13, 16) Yahweh responds that his personal presence (’朋) will indeed go with them (33:14). And his restoration of the sons of Israel as his people comes with the renewal of the covenant, with its words and its tablets, in 34:1–28.

The crisis of chs. 32–34 arises from the apparent irreconcilability of these two chief characterizations of Israel: their trait as stiff-necked and their identity as patriarchal offspring, the distinct people belonging to Yahweh. In fact, in impressive ways the narrative intentionally juxtaposes these two characterizations. Yahweh’s initial response to the golden calf condemns them as “a stiff-necked people” (32:8) and then subtly evokes the patriarchal promise of a “great nation” (32:9). When Moses pleads, “See (יהוה) that this nation is your people!” (33:13), the imperative יהוה directly recalls Yahweh’s earlier statement, “I have seen (יהוה) this people, and, behold, it is a stiff-necked people” (32:8). Climactically, Moses’ prayer after Yahweh’s theophany in 34:6–7 juxtaposes Israel’s stiff-necked nature with their covenant identity: “May the Lord go in our midst—for it is a stiff-necked people—and may you forgive our iniquity and our sin and take us as your inheritance” (34:9).
If there is going to be a future for this people as the people of Yahweh, the new possibilities will not emerge from the character of the people. Instead, their future can be secured only through the fidelity and forgiveness of Yahweh, the God of Israel. Yahweh’s rhetoric in 34:6–7 will declare this fidelity and forgiveness, performatively reopening and restoring Israel’s future.

9.3.1.c. The Setting and Attendant Circumstances

Yahweh’s speech in 34:6–7 is attended by elements corresponding to his theophany in chs. 19–24, so that the scene here has a definite sense of recapitulation. Again, the meeting is at Sinai, the stone tablets for the covenant words are present (34:1, 4; cf. 24:12), Yahweh descends in a cloud (בענן, 34:5; cf. 19:9), and his words evoke elements from his previous speech (20:5–6). He is (re)establishing his covenant with Israel.

These similarities, however, serve to highlight a number of key differences. While Yahweh’s speech in 20:2–6 is bellowed to all the sons of Israel, here Yahweh is insistent that Moses alone shall come up the mountain, and no man or beast with him. While 20:2–6 was a forcefully interpersonal address with its repeated second person singular forms, here in 34:6–7 there is a different interpersonal dynamic. There is no second person language in Yahweh’s words, yet the encounter springs from Yahweh’s relationship with Moses. Yahweh personally invites Moses to ascend and will personally shield and protect him during the encounter, placing him in a cleft in the rock and covering Moses with the palm of his hand. The theophanic proclamation is gracious gift, provided because Moses has found favor in Yahweh’s eyes and, in its initial purpose, in order that Moses may know Yahweh and his ways (33:12–13).

In Exod 20, the scene was of an overwhelming encounter between God and the people: the people were brought out to meet (קרא) God, and took take their place (יצב) at the foot of the mountain. The encounter was colored by dramatic sensory phenomena: great sights of cloud,
lightning, fire, and smoke, and great sounds of thunder and trumpets. In Exod 34, the fireworks are absent; Yahweh comes in the glory-cloud, but all focus is on his presence itself and the words by which he manifests and reveals the fullness of his name. As Exod 19–20 narrates Yahweh’s theophany from the point of view of the people, so Exod 34 narrates his theophany from the point of view of Moses, shielded in the cleft. And here, the bare hearing, and the certainty of Yahweh’s presence, are all. As Moberly observes, “In Exod 34, although the cloud is mentioned, no stress is laid upon it. The emphasis is on the close, even intimate presence of Yahweh.” Moses is invited to ascend and take his place (נצב) before Yahweh at the top of the mountain (34:2), echoing the earlier instruction: “Behold, there is a place in my presence (אתי), and you shall take your place (נצב) there at the rock” (33:21). More significantly, the advent of Yahweh is described in equally concrete, proximate terms: “Yahweh descended in a cloud and took his place (יצב) with him (עמו) there (שם)” (34:5). Yahweh’s goodness, Yahweh’s glory—Yahweh himself—then “passes by” (עבר, 33:19, 22; 34:6), a verb used of Yahweh elsewhere in Exodus only to describe his personal and manifest procession through Egypt at midnight to strike down the firstborn (12:12, 23). These circumstances support Yahweh’s rhetorical purpose in 34:6–7 of placing all emphasis on his own person (name and character) while doing so in close relation to Moses, and through him, to Israel.

9.3.2. The Arrangement, Style, and Strategy of Exodus 34:6–7

Yahweh’s speech in Exod 34:6–7 addresses the exigency of Israel’s seemingly inescapable doom, or at minimum the forfeit of their many-generations blessings intended by Yahweh.

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51 Moberly, Mountain of God, 85.

52 The similarities and contrasts between the scene of Yahweh “passing through” (pasto) in Exod 12 and his “passing by” (pasto) in Exod 34 are dramatic. In particular, the shielding of the Israelites within their blood-marked houses is mirrored by the shielding of Moses in the cleft by the palm of Yahweh’s own hand. Yahweh “passing through” in Exod 12 in order to strike/plague recalcitrant Pharaoh and his people is contrasted sharply in Exod 34, as Yahweh “passes by” in order to proclaim his heretofore-unimagined mercy and forgiveness.
Israel’s idolatry and iniquity stand squarely in the crosshairs of Yahweh’s commitment to punish iniquity declared in his foundational words to the people in 20:2–6, more specifically in the closing motive clause of that speech in 20:5–6. His rhetoric as he passes by Moses therefore intentionally invokes and reformulates this prior speech.

The structure of Yahweh’s rhetoric here has been (and can fruitfully be) construed in a number of ways. The verse division in the MT supports Brueggemann’s observation that the speech begins with a unique and powerful “credo of adjectives” (v. 6), which are then followed by a sequence of three participle clauses, interrupted and divided by an emphatic infinitive absolute plus imperfect expression (v. 7). Viewed in this way, the speech might be laid out as follows (with the four adjectives shaded and the three participles underlined):

This analysis highlights the strength and primacy of the opening adjectival descriptions. Heard as a redevelopment of 20:5b–6, the entire collage of adjectival mercy terms modifying emphatically qualifies Yahweh’s previous self-proclamation as “a jealous God.” In foregrounding the parallel syntax of the participle clauses, this construal draws attention to this speech’s reversal of the statements from 20:5c–6 regarding Yahweh’s punishing visitation (פקד) and his acting in lovingkindness, here expressed with the participle (נצר). It also accents the close relation and parallelism between the two mercy clauses

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(“preserving lovingkindness for the thousands” and “forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin”),
the latter, longer clause expressing both the means and the manifestation of the former: Yahweh
preserves lovingkindness for the thousands by forgiving their sins and so that he continues to
forgive them. This structure also accents the mysterious contrast between the second and the
third participle clauses, which proclaim a Yahweh who forgives iniquity (נשָׂא עון) and who
punishes iniquity (פקד עון). Finally, in this structure, the repetition of the word חסד acts as a
Stichwort, binding the two parts of the speech together by its use in the closing phrase of the first
and the opening phrase of the second.54

An alternative construal of the structure takes the two-fold “Yahweh” as introductory,
followed by a (correspondingly) two-fold proclamation of his nature:

יהוה יהוה
לא רחום ונתן
אך אפים ורב חסד ואמת
נשא עון ופשע וחטאה
נקרטל ופקד לא ינקה
עון אבות פקד על בני בנם על שלושים ועל רבעים

Here, the two main themes of the speech are developed in stanzas of equal length: fifteen words
each.55 The structure printed above distinguishes the participle phrases in the middle of the
speech (again underlined) in order to highlight their rhetorical interplay. The strength of this
construal is its clear exhibition of the way in which 34:6–7 reprises and answers to 20:5c–6 in
terms of its bi-polar structure, and, directly related to this, the way in which it highlights the

54 Ruth Scoralick, “‘JHWH, JHWH, ein gnädiger und barmherziger Gott...’ (Ex 34,6): Die Gottesprädikation
aus Ex 34,6f in ihrem Kontext in Kapitel 32–34,” in Gottes Volk am Sinai: Untersuchungen zu Ex 32–34 und Dtn 9–
10, ed. Matthias Köckert and Erhard Blum (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 2001), 146. Scoralick proposes a chiastic structure to
34:6–7 with the חסד expressions at the crux.

55 The perfection of balance in word count may be somewhat misleading, since in the MT the first section has
fourteen stresses and the second has eleven. Even on the basis of stress-counts, however, a general balance remains.
strong rhetorical turn, certainly experienced by the hearer, in the infinitive absolute construction "ונקה לא ינקה (yet he certainly will not neglect punishment") which begins the second part. By highlighting this juncture, it also draws attention to the function of the phrase “forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin” as the crescendo and culmination of the first part. This itself is significant for the understanding of the second part: it is in the context of this climactic statement of forgiveness that Yahweh goes on to declare himself as one who visits iniquity in punishment.56

In terms of its style, the rhetoric in 34:6–7 is highly pleonastic, beginning with its doubling of the divine name: Yahweh, Yahweh. He is not merely אלה חנון or אלה רחום but אלה רחום וחנן. The redundant descriptions abound. Most notable in this regard is the triple description of sin עון ופשע וחטא, which serves to magnify the action of the preceding verb: “forgiving” (נשָׂא). The descendants language from 20:5 is also expanded here: “against sons and against sons of sons, against members of the third and fourth generations.” Johnstone discusses the structure of 34:6–7 with a bullet-point description of the ways in which the passage “builds up cumulatively in phrases of gradually increasing length.”57

It is particularly the phrases of gracious description which are multiplied. The rhetorical impact of this piling up of language is to make Yahweh’s divine compassion, care, and forgiveness overwhelmingly clear, emphatic, and convincing. Brueggemann notes:

The declaration employs seven terms to make this assertion…. The use of the seven terms has cumulative effect…. The effect of the whole is to assure Moses (and Israel) that God is deeply committed to sustaining covenant with Israel, even when the other party is careless and unresponsive, as Israel has been in chap. 32.58

Yet the longest, fullest phrase in the speech is the drawn-out listing of descendants

56 Peter Hicks, The Message of Evil and Suffering, TBST (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 37, writes, “Here, then, is the climax of God’s list of attributes in his self-description. His compassion, grace, longsuffering, love and faithfulness come together in the element of his nature that carries away our sin, that forgives and cleanses and justifies. This is our God; it is in this context that he calls himself the God who punishes.”

57 Johnstone, Exodus, 2:406.

susceptible to Yahweh’s visiting punishment. Even here, however, the expansive listing serves a double purpose. On the one hand, it strengthens the implied warning of the second part of the speech. However, this same transgenerational language, in this narrative moment, also evokes the promise of Yahweh’s enduring blessing. Just two chapters earlier, there was no hope for Israel’s sons, sons of sons, third, or fourth generations. But now Yahweh’s forgiving mercy has reopened their future, and the generational language at the close of the speech, even as it warns about the prospect of punishment, also participates in Yahweh’s revival of the prospect that their generations may go on and on—and on and on.

Sound play within lines tends to reinforce this sense of redundant fullness. The term חַנון echoes the vowels of the word it seconds: רַחֲמֵי. So also with the assonance in חֶסֶד וֶאֱמֶת. The extension of the preserving lovingkindness phrase by a second participle clause pairs נֹצֵר with נֹשֵׂא. The amplification of לא ינקה uses the precisely resonant infinitive absolute וְנַקֵה. And it is hard not to notice the length of the descendants listing, in part because of the many conspicuous repetitions of words and sounds, especially the preposition על leading into each element and the plural־ים ending on each element. This listing also includes a triple repetition of “sons” and the morphologically similar pairing שִׁלֵשִים and רִבֵעִים

The rhetorical sense of the “bigness” of Yahweh’s mercy is accomplished not only through pleonastic expression and sound play, but also by employing terms that suggest quantity. The rendering “slow to anger,” while capturing the basic sense of the Hebrew, misses the “sizeable” aspect of the expression ארך אפים, which woodenly means “long of nose/anger.” In terms of his faithful lovingkindness, Yahweh is רב, the common adjective meaning “much, many.” When predicated of a subject and bound to another noun (as a genitive of specification), רב indicates that they “abound in” that noun: a bird having a lot of feathers (Ezek 17:17), Babylonians having a lot of treasures (Jer 51:13), and Yahweh having a lot of faithful lovingkindness—and even
with this great quantity he actively watches over and preserves it (נַצָּר). This he does for “the thousands,” adding to the sense of quantity, the profusion of his mercy. In the first section of the speech, only the first and final phrases lack a word of magnitude or multitude, and the final phrase contributes to this overall sense with its repetition of three sin words, suggesting that Yahweh forgives all kinds of sin and, rhetorically, lots of sin.

Yahweh’s rhetoric in 34:6–7 is also designed to convey the experience of Yahweh’s personal identity, personal presence, self-involvement, and gracious personal communion—with Moses and, through Moses, with the sons of Israel. The narration which has set the stage for this speech (Exod 33:12–34:5) has emphasized this, and the rhetoric of 34:6–7 builds this sense as well. The double use of the personal name Yahweh sets the course for this tone. While third person language might seem more interpersonally distancing than first person speech, and often is, the effect here is the opposite. Within a narrative scene which has constructed an overwhelming sense of the presence of Yahweh before Moses (see above §9.3.1.c), the proclaimed name יְהֹוָה יְהֹוָה comes as, itself, a theophany. Yahweh himself is present in and with this proclaimed name, and the third person voice announces the name as a manifestation, not merely predication or description. Of course, it is also predication and description, and in this

59 Calum M. Carmichael, The Origins of Biblical Law: The Decalogues and the Book of the Covenant (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 52: “This concern with the name is much emphasized … [and] is to be related back to the distorted understanding of the name Yahweh when Aaron associated it with the calf.” For the possibility that this repetition gives a tone of “endearment,” such as “I am your dear Yahweh,” see Douglas Stuart, Exodus, NAC 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 715. Stuart himself finally argues against this, noting that “in all other contexts of [this] phenomenon, the repetition occurs with direct address, so someone is calling the name of another twice—and not his own name.” Nevertheless, in this context, such a deeply personal, even affectionate verbal approach seems apt, and Stuart’s point that such double-naming is usually in context of address to another, rather than self-reference, does not seem to exclude this possibility. See also footnote 64 below.

60 The dynamics here in Exod 34 are different than in the Decalogue. In Exod 20, the rhetoric begins with first person language and second person address (20:2–6), only to shift away from this to third person language about Yahweh in the continued second person address (20:7–17). Thus, in ch. 20 the first person language in vv. 2–6 carries a heightened sense of Yahweh’s personal presence and direct address to the audience, compared to the third person language in the remainder of the Decalogue.

61 This claim is made on the basis of Exod 33:19, where Yahweh parallels “I myself will cause all my goodness to pass by in your presence” with “I will proclaim my name, Yahweh, before you.” A few verses later, God equates this with “my glory passing by” (33:22).
regard the third person voice adds to a sense of intimacy, as Yahweh comes rhetorically alongside Moses to behold his own divine nature. In this rhetoric, both Yahweh and the audience fix their gaze upon the plenitude of divine mercy, and the third person language about Yahweh is directly transferable to the later voice of the people. The rhetoric, in this sense, serves to give specific verbal shape to Moses’ (and the people’s) knowledge of Yahweh, trust in Yahweh, confession of Yahweh, and prayer to Yahweh.\(^62\)

The body of the speech then continues this highly personalized rhetoric. The leading descriptors חֵן and והם are intensely personal in meaning and connotation. The adjective חֵן ("compassionate") is used almost exclusively of Yahweh in the OT, indicating a deep-seated pity and compassion for those in need.\(^63\) It is the kind of quality that it can be compared with the concern of a father for his child (Ps 103:13) or a mother for her son (Isa 49:15). The term והם ("gracious") resonates with the personal favor, benevolence, and approbation Yahweh grants to Moses in the surrounding context (וֶהֶם, 33:12–13, 16–17; 34:9),\(^64\) and it suggests here in 34:6 that “not only has Moses found favour in the eyes of YHWH, but so too will the people.”\(^65\) The action of “forgiving” is strongly interpersonal, especially with the middle of the three sin-words—

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\(^{62}\) Michael Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, FAT 2/8 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 175, 202, following Rashi, Jacob, and Luther, describes God’s role here as a *Vorbeter*, teaching Moses how to pray by modeling the words himself: “Yahweh passes before Moses, proclaiming His name and thereby revealing His nature and implicitly teaching him how to pray.” This is a key insight for Widmer’s study which then proceeds to Num 13–14, connecting the dots and noting how Moses’ intercessory prayer in Num 14 adopts, almost verbatim, the language which Yahweh proclaims in Exod 34:6–7.

\(^{63}\) Horacio Simian-Yofre, “רחם rḥm,” *TDOT* 13:451, notes that OT usage ties this pity to needs such as “suffering, affliction, guilt, danger, [and] weakness.”

\(^{64}\) Especially intimate, in this regard, is the pairing “I know you by name, and you have found favor (חֵן) in my eyes” (31:13). This expression of Yahweh’s close knowledge and affection for Moses is repeated a few verses later, in reverse order: “And Yahweh said to Moses, ‘Even this thing which you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor (חֵן) in my eyes, and I know you by name.’” The marvellous symmetry should not be missed here that Yahweh is agreeing to come and make himself known to Moses “by name.” In view of this, perhaps it is even significant that the God who called out (קרא) “Moses, Moses” from the bush (3:4) will now pass by Moses on this same mountain calling out (קרא) “Yahweh, Yahweh.”

with its connotation of rebellion and fracturing of trust. Yahweh also seeks to convince hearers of his resolute commitment to this gracious disposition through language connoting conscientious personal faithfulness: חסד (tenacious lovingkindness, faithfulness), אמת (trustworthiness, constancy), and the verb נצר (preserving, guarding)—this final term paired with a second occurrence of חסד.

The most significant rhetorical strategy in Yahweh’s speech after the golden calf, however, is the way in which he employs and redepleys the language of 20:2–6. Yahweh’s truthful self-revelation from the fire and thunder of Sinai, now, in the face of the people’s idolatry, places the people and their progeny in true jeopardy. And so Yahweh, persuaded by Moses to act in accord with his own oath and his own depth of mercy, descends to speak once more in manifest self-revelation. And he designs this speech to take up the divine speech from Exod 20:2–6, recasting it to grant a fuller and more ultimate publication of the divine name.

The first rhetorical decision in reformulating 20:2–6 is to skip over and omit the language of 20:2–5a. Yahweh’s delivering wonders against Egypt (20:2) will be recounted forever, but at the moment they must give way to the new wonder about to be accomplished: Yahweh is about to reestablish his covenant with a stiff-necked people (34:10). More significant is the omission of all the second person language and the multiple prohibitions of other gods and idolatry from 20:3–5b. All the weight now rests upon Yahweh himself. (The only remaining references to the people are the four words for sin and the line-up of iniquitous fathers, sons, and generations.) It is squarely the character of Yahweh proclaimed in Exod 20:5b–6 which portends disaster for Israel, and so it is this which Yahweh now rhetorically takes in hand.

In the rhetoric in Exod 34:6–7, Yahweh unmistakably echoes this previous utterance in

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66 Eugene Carpenter, “פֶשַׁע,” TDOTTE 3:707, notes that the word “serves as an overarching concept for various offenses that were especially irritating and offensive…. Beyond that, it represents a willful breach of trust…. To commit peša’ is to disrupt a relationship of some kind.”
20:5b–6 but with a number of striking revisions. First, in place of the I-and-you language of אֲנִיָּהָ אֱלֹהִיִּךָ (20:5), Yahweh begins with the double proclamation of his name, in third person, with significant rhetorical effect as discussed above. Second, Yahweh makes a change in the opening predication אל קנא (“a jealous God”), which in 20:5 established the fundamental portrait of Yahweh’s character from which the two participles in 20:5c–6 would descend. In its place, here in 34:6–7, the entire speech unfolds under the new opening descriptors: אֱלֹהִיָּהָ אֱלֹהִיִּךָ (“a compassionate and gracious God”). Third, the sequence of punishment and lovingkindness (the two main participle clauses in 20:5c–6) is now reversed, so that in 34:6–7 extensive reference to Yahweh’s lovingkindness precedes any reference to his visiting iniquity in punishment (פקד על). Fourth, the single phrase in 20:6 referring to Yahweh acting in lovingkindness is enormously expanded in 34:6–7a, with a flourish of mercy descriptions (seven terms in five phrases). Within this expansion, Yahweh now refers to his חסד twice rather than once. Fifth, the language from 20:6 of Yahweh “acting in lovingkindness” now becomes Yahweh “preserving lovingkindness” (נצר חסד), a highly significant shift which both proclaims, in the face of Israel’s sin, Yahweh’s commitment to watchfully preserve His favorable disposition toward his people, and which also intimates Yahweh’s gracious dealings with Israel into the distant future.

The final pair of alterations are closely related and are the most significant. The sixth change comes in the omission of the specifying phrases from 20:5b–6 which indicate with respect to whom Yahweh will visit-in-punishment (לשׂנאי, to those who hate me) and with respect to whom Yahweh will act in lovingkindness (“to those who love me and keep my commandments”). Israel has acted in rebellion and opposition to Yahweh; they have not

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67 The connection and contrast between the speeches on this point is further highlighted by the phonetic proximity of אל קנא (“a jealous God,” 34:6) and אל קנא (“a jealous God,” 20:5), as previously discussed.

68 For a defense of this reading, see the lexical-semantic analysis of the expression נצר חסד in §4.3.2 above.
shown themselves to be those who love him and keep his commandments. As with the omission of the prohibitions of 20:3–5a, these omissions make room for a way of Yahweh relating to his people which rests solely upon his own depth of love and personal commitment, and not upon the people’s. This new speech no longer mentions the love and obedience of the people, but waxes eloquent with fresh language about the love and faithfulness of Yahweh.

In particular, it is the omission of these phrases from the section regarding mercy which is crucial since this opens the possibility that חסד (now connected to forgiveness) might be extended to any to whom Yahweh wills to extend it, and not only to “those who love me and keep my commandments.” Piper notes that this creates a sense of “indefiniteness” corresponding precisely to Yahweh’s statement in Exod 33:19b anticipating this speech: “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will be merciful to whom I will be merciful.” The corresponding phrase חסידי (“with respect to those who hate me”) is also omitted, but this is of less semantic or rhetorical importance, since the rationale for Yahweh’s visiting punishment is sufficiently apparent in the term “iniquity.” That is to say, even without the specification חסידי, the language of “visiting iniquity” in Exod 34:7 still indicates that Yahweh’s visitation-in-punishment is still clearly against those who hate and disobey him.

Seventh, and finally, the rhetoric of 34:6–7 modifies the language of 20:5b–6 by explicitly proclaiming Yahweh as the God who forgives iniquity, rebellion, and sin (נשה עון ופשע וחטאה). Neither this phrase nor any equivalent occurs in 20:2–6. It stands as the most crucial addition in 34:6–7, flowing as the culmination and climax of the mercy and חסד language of the first part. In this sense, it is related to Yahweh’s חסד proclaimed in 20:6, yet at the same time represents a

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new depth and outworking of Yahweh’s  חסד. Along with the verb  נושא (“forgiving”), three words for sin, as its direct objects, are also introduced into the first part of the speech which treats Yahweh’s mercy. In this way, the word  עון is now placed in relation to both aspects of Yahweh’s name, his unfathomable mercy springing solely from his own essence which may lead him to forgive iniquity, and his impassioned commitment not to neglect punishment but to visit iniquity, even across generations. Clearly this reformulation has opened up new possibilities for Israel’s future before Yahweh. It also introduces a significant rhetorical, logical, and theological tension.

Thus, Yahweh’s fuller self-disclosure in 34:6–7 rekindles hope for the stiff-necked sons of Israel yet leaves in place a significant tension. The tension is created primarily by two rhetorical features. First, following the impressive barrage of mercy assurances in the first part, the stark infinitive absolute expression ("yet he will certainly not neglect punishment")—breaking the sequence of participles and expressing, by its natural syntax, emphasis—comes as a very sharp turn. This sense is only furthered by the transgenerational visitation language which follows and closes the speech. Secondly, the three participles in the passage resonate with one another and invite the hearers to associate them. The forgiving ( נושא) clause builds upon the

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70 For a defense of the meaning “forgiving” for נושא in this passage, see §4.3.3 above.

71 Here I am assuming that the rhetoric intends to accent for the hearer a sharp turn by means of the syntax of the infinitive absolute phrase יהוה לא ינקה, both because the infinitive breaks the sequence of participles and because of its initial ו, which the two participle clauses preceding and the participle clause following it lack. However, another possible construal of the rhetorical strategy here is that the infinitive absolute form יהוה would lure the hearer into an initial assumption that the mercy language is continuing, by the phonetic continuity from נֹצֵר to נֹשֵׂא and now to נַקֵה—all are two-syllable verbal forms of I-nun roots, with a sere as the final vowel. (As ancillary testimony to this hearing of the word נַקֵה, in some Jewish liturgical traditions the Thirteen Attributes of God are recited from Exod 34:6–7 up to and including this infinitive absolute form, but cutting off prior to the לא, so that this term (נקה) becomes one last term for mercy: “leaving unpunished.”) Under this construal, the rhetoric would still present the hearer with a powerfully sharp turn, but only when coming to the negative particle לא. In fact, it might be even more surprising or shocking to hear the abrupt shift to Yahweh-as-punisher when this realization comes “mid-phrase” in the expression יהוה לא ינקה. The initial (unnegated) infinitive absolute—coming after the piled-up series of mercy phrases—rhetorically “tricks” the audience into the briefly misheard assurance that Yahweh does not punish, but then dramatically corrects this temporary misunderstanding with the remainder of the verse.

72 Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament, 270, rightly describes this phrase as “an about face … [which] seems to break the cadence of the speech.”
preserving (נצר) lovingkindness clause which precedes it, with close phonetic association as well.

A stark contrast and tension is created however, when the forgiving participle (נשׂא) is brought into direct rhetorical association with the visiting-in-punishment participle (פקד), their two clauses standing astraddle the “sharp turn” phrase ונקה לא נקה.

Here both participles govern the direct object “iniquity” (עון), so that Yahweh proclaims himself, with rhetorical prominence, first as the Yahweh who forgives iniquity, rebellion, and sin but then also as the Yahweh who visits iniquity of fathers against sons.73 Thus, while the speech proclaims an unmistakable imbalance between its two parts, on the one hand—including the simple but significant numerical contrast between “thousands” and “third and fourth”—this preponderance of Yahweh’s mercy does not eliminate all question or concern of Yahweh’s punishing visitation. In fact, in these other respects, the rhetoric actually foregrounds the tension between the two, lest the awareness of Yahweh’s concern for holiness and justice be swallowed up by the oceanic portrayal of his mercy which precedes.

Here are deep waters, and any complete theological exposition of this tension is beyond the scope of this dissertation. One of the chief arguments of the present study has been that this tension intentionally maintains a sense of mystery and divine freedom, a theme which has been present throughout Exodus but which comes to its climax here in these chapters (32:34; 33:19b; 34:6–7). Yahweh likely intends the stark rhetorical tension here to serve his persuasive appeal to Israel to find and cling to his forgiveness (most urgently), rather than to instigate theologians to

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73 A number of interpreters seek to re-explain the meaning of נשׂא, פקד, or both, in ways which diminish or remove the strong sense of contrast and paradox between these two participle phrases. For example, Widmer, Moses, God, and the Dynamics, 191, sees little contrast between these two phrases, seeing both as expressing a gracious deferral and delay of punishment brought about by Yahweh’s patience and mercy: “Sin is not necessarily eradicated [by Yahweh’s action of פקד], but temporarily put off by a patient God.” Similar readings are suggested by Scharbert, Muffs, and Tigay. I have critiqued and rejected these approaches above, especially under §4.3.3.
develop a comprehensive logical synthesis of his ways of mercy and punishment, or, in the case of his ways of transgenerational punishment, to determine a single precise transgenerational dynamic to which Yahweh binds himself with these words.

The rhetorical tension here should be not be overstated or absolutized, but rather understood within the framework of the narrative in which the speech appears. With this in mind, the narrative scenes preceding and following the speech are especially significant. In the episode which precedes and prepares for this speech, Yahweh tells Moses that he will “proclaim my name before you” and “cause all my goodness to pass by in your presence” (33:19a). Childs notes that “usually in the Old Testament the goodness of God signifies his benefits which are experienced by Israel,” so here in ch. 34 the notions of testing and fear from the speech in ch. 20 give way to a proclamation of divine beneficence. In the same verse, Yahweh also establishes the expectation that he is coming to speak of his freely bestowed mercy and grace (33:19b). Thus, in some important sense, the revelation to and impression upon Moses (and the people) of Yahweh’s forgiving mercy is not merely the dominant theme but also the unifying conception and purpose of his rhetoric in 34:6–7.

Thus, while Brueggemann is correct that this key OT passage “yields a Character who has a profound disjunction at the core,” these two true and important aspects of Yahweh’s character are presented here as ultimately serving his merciful will that his people find forgiveness and life before him. Yahweh proclaims his forgiving mercy to the people and also warns of his punishment, not because he has equal interest in and commitment to each of these contradictory courses of action, but rather to persuade his people to turn to and cling to his forgiving mercy, and not to stubbornly turn away and risk forfeiting such mercy for their many generations. Both

74 Childs, Exodus, 596, citing as examples Hos 3:5; Jer 31:12, 14; Ps 27:13, etc.
75 Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament, 268.
halves of the passage, then, must ultimately participate in Yahweh’s broader purpose that the people find forgiveness before him and cling to him because he is a forgiving God.76

With this as the speech’s central aim, we find an interesting inverse parallel in Moses’ response77 in 34:9: he prays that Yahweh go with, forgive, and inherit them because (יְהֹוָה) it is stiff-necked people. Moses prays on the basis of Yahweh’s self-revelation in 34:6–7, yet he invokes only the prospect of Yahweh’s forgiveness and not his punishing visitation. With such a “one-sided” petition and confident appeal to Yahweh that he act in accord with the first part of his self-proclamation, Moses is not “in denial” about the second part of the speech or just conveniently ignoring it. Rather, Moses’ reverent prayer recognizes that Yahweh’s entire speech has aimed to drive him—and stiff-necked Israel—to Yahweh’s mercy. With this awareness, Moses, in praying that Yahweh would inherit the people (and him!) actually takes up the transgenerational theme of the second half of Yahweh’s speech, transferring it to the domain of Yahweh’s gracious lovingkindness. He makes this request while bowed low to the ground in reverent address, because Yahweh remains the jealous God who visits iniquity and extends his mercy purely out of divine freedom and beneficence (33:19). Yet, in accord with Yahweh’s self-revelation and intention, he can boldly pray that Yahweh go with, forgive, and inherit the sons of Israel “because they are a stiff-necked people”—he can pray this because Yahweh is “a compassionate and gracious God … forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin.”

76 The rhetoric aims to impart relief and hope to the people, but also continued reverent fear, for Yahweh’s forgiveness is plentiful and here proclaimed, but it is also urgently needed and given purely out of his good pleasure. Here, the somewhat surprising words of Ps 130:4 come to mind: “If you should mark iniquities, O Yahweh, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, so that you are feared.”

77 This paragraph jumps the gun a bit in looking ahead to the speech’s outcome. However, the perception of the rhetorical aim of a speech within a narrative often requires some circularity. Meir Sternberg, The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 112, notes that the response of characters within a narrative to an event or a speech is often significant for our own interpretation of that event or speech: “The audience’s reaction, right or wrong, also does duty for exegesis that shapes our own.”
9.3.3. The Function of the Visiting Phrase within the Rhetoric of Exodus 34:6–7

The function of the transgenerational punishment language at the end of Yahweh’s name-speech in 34:6–7 has been discussed, in terms of its informative-revelatory value, in §8.3.6, and various aspects of its pragmatic-persuasive force have been touched on in the foregoing discussion. Here I will draw together and delineate these rhetorical functions.

Yahweh passes by Moses proclaiming his name in 34:6–7 as the fullest disclosure of his person and ways, the culmination of his self-revelation which has been unfolding throughout the Exodus narrative. The visiting-in-punishment phrase, specifically, makes the following contributions to this self-revelation.

First, by repeating language from the name-speech in 20:2–6 (language which the present theophany may have called into question) the visiting phrase in 34:6–7 affirms the continuity, unity, and reliability of Yahweh’s character. Alongside the profoundly new disclosure of his forgiveness, it makes clear that this deep mercy does not displace everything they have come to know based on preceding events and statements. He remains the Yahweh of enduring jurisdiction, incomparable strength, justice, holiness, and jealousy.

Second, the transgenerational language stands in rhetorical relationship with the preceding descriptor “slow to anger.” In merciful “slowness,” Yahweh may delay for generations before visiting in devastating punishment. But though he may be slow to anger, Yahweh does not simply leave (unforgiven) sin unpunished, but sooner or later—apparently when sufficiently, cumulatively provoked—visits in punishment.

Third, again in rhetorical mutuality, the transgenerational language lends a long-term, many-generations sense to the preceding wording “abounding in lovingkindness,” “preserving lovingkindness,” “to thousands,” and even “forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin.” Yahweh is the God whose lovingkindness extends—and he personally stands guard over it—throughout the
generations, even thousands of generations, of the sons of Israel. His abundant forgiveness will remain the only hope and urgent need of sons and of sons of sons, etc.

Fourth, the rhetorically powerful shift to punishment language ensures that the overwhelming mercy language in this passage does not wholly obscure the reality of Yahweh’s provocation over idolatry and disobedience, or render the prospect of punishment obsolete. The generations listing in 34:7, slightly extended in comparison with 20:5, stands in counterpoint to the magnitude of his lovingkindness and forgiveness. Though subordinate, it still receives significant emphasis and resists any severe sidelining, thus constructing a tension which the book of Exodus never fully resolves. This tension is most directly expressed in the antithesis between “forgiving iniquity” (נשׂא עון) and “visiting-in-punishment iniquity” (פקד עון). In terms of Yahweh’s self-revelation, this extols his abundant forgiveness but also affirms his justice, jealousy, and seriousness about punishing iniquity. Yet its expression as an apparent contradiction, a paradox, asserts Yahweh’s freedom and continuing partial-hiddenness, even here at the point of his fullest self-revelation.

In addition to these informative-revelatory functions, the visiting phrase also serves persuasive-pragmatic ends within the rhetoric of Exod 34:6–7. It aims to solicit particular responses or actions on the part of Moses and the sons of Israel, including the following.

First, the threat of transgenerational punishment aims to restrain the sons of Israel from sinful disobedience in general, and from idolatry in particular. The specter of idolatry lurks in the context by virtue of the borrowed wording from 20:5 (the motive clause in the commandment against idolatry) and by virtue of the narrative context of the calf idol. Yahweh’s words which follow in 34:11–17 will also reveal a front-burner concern with avoiding other gods and idolatry. The visiting phrase implicitly addresses the hearers as “fathers” and again appeals to their natural affection and concern for their offspring, using pathos to strengthen the appeal. In 20:5,
the threat of transgenerational punishment may have activated the paternal affections and worries recently experienced in the wilderness (“Why did you bring us up from Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” 17:3). In 34:7, the sons of Israel have now experienced the deep grief and terror of seeing their sin nearly bring about the extermination and ruin of the entire people—including the children and grandchildren within the camp and all of the hopes and longings for many generations to come. In no few cases, they have received a sharp and bitter taste of such punishment in the slaughter by Levite swords, commanded by Yahweh through Moses. The Levites were thus ordained for Yahweh’s service, but at a dear price: “each one at the cost of his son or of his brother.” In 20:5–6, the threat of Yahweh’s transgenerational visitation drew upon the people’s vivid recollection of what Yahweh had just done to Egypt, after generations of delay (19:4; 20:2). The recognition that this is a fate that could befall Israel, here in Exod 34, is no longer merely hypothetical; they have come very near it. Only Moses’ intercession and Yahweh’s abundant lovingkindness and forgiveness have avoided this very-near disaster, and this experience must lend the language here a firm reality: it is not a vacuous or hyperbolic threat. Therefore even here, at the moment of supreme mercy, forgiveness, and restoration, the former message remains clear: flee idolatry—for the sake of your children and your children’s children.

Second, the rhetoric of transgenerational visitation of iniquity again exorts pious parenting. By arousing in its hearers such paternal affection and concern, it urges fathers to lead their sons in the exclusive worship of Yahweh, to recount for them what Yahweh has done, and to teach them Yahweh’s commandments. The golden calf narrative has no digressions comparable to those during of Passover narrative in Exod 12–13, in which the action ceases while Yahweh exhorts the people regarding the generations-long commemoration of the events, with explicit, scripted instructions to fathers of what to say to sons concerning “what Yahweh did
for us.” Yet the transgenerational language and concerns of 34:6–7, attached here to the fullest revelation of Yahweh’s forgiving and sustaining character, perhaps function as an understated equivalent. Not only the “wonders” of the Exodus, but also the “wonder” (34:10) of Yahweh sparing and forgiving the people and reestablishing his covenant with them is to be recounted from father to son through the ages. “We had nearly made a ruin of everything at Sinai, but Yahweh….” Whatever the value of this specific speculation, the transgenerational language functions, at a minimum, as general motivation to raise children to know and worship Yahweh.

Third, the visiting phrase in Exod 34:7b functions to humble the hearers before Yahweh. Unlike the I-Thou address of the Decalogue, the third person address and the sole focus on Yahweh in this passage has left the hearers referred to in the rhetoric only by the four terms for sin (עון, פשע, חטאה) and the generations listing of fathers, sons, sons of sons, and third and fourth generations. These come together in the visiting phrase, where “iniquity” is associated with fathers and future generations. In the Decalogue, the people were addressed as the people of Yahweh who were called to and were presumed capable of obedience. In the rhetoric of Exod 34, after the golden calf, their iniquity is a central assumption—also looking forward, down the generations—so that their standing before Yahweh both at this narrative juncture and in the future is solely dependent upon his forgiving mercy, freely bestowed. This last point, too, is humbling. The tension created between “forgiving iniquity” (נשׂא עון) and “visiting-in-punishment iniquity” (פקד עון) moves his ways of mercy and punishment beyond the realm of total human comprehension and beyond all presumption. The tension reinforces the freedom of Yahweh to be gracious to whom he will be gracious (33:19). This in no way renders his forgiving lovingkindness less “abundant” (רב) or his pledge to “preserve it” less comforting or his intention to renew the covenant with Israel (by means of this forgiveness) less certain. But this rhetoric does aim to humble every Israelite hearer, with Moses in the following verse
responding as the ideal hearer: *making haste to bow low to the earth* and worshipping (34:8).

Fourth, and closely related to the above discussion of humility, the visiting phrase *urges the people toward repentance, and thus toward trust in his mercy and toward worship*. Yahweh, though slow to anger, is a God who visits iniquity in devastating punishment—if not now, eventually, at the time of his choosing (3:7, 16; 4:31; 32:34). His jurisdiction is enduring and his judgments are inescapable. The only hope for the people is Yahweh’s own forgiveness of their iniquity and rebellion and sin. Again, Moses is the model respondent to Yahweh’s proclamation. He prays that Yahweh would go with the stiff-necked people and forgive them. In fact, he prays, “forgive our iniquity and our sin.” The rhetorical accent in the visiting phrase on the urgency of repentance functions to heighten the people’s respect for Moses as their mediator before Yahweh, who implores and mediates Yahweh’s forgiveness (32:11–14, 30; 33:12–16). This language also spurs the people on to build the tabernacle, with its bronze altar and golden lid for atonement. Yahweh’s language impresses on the people their abiding need for his forgiveness throughout their generations, so they should hasten to construct the sanctuary where a lamb would be offered each morning and each evening as a whole burnt offering for atonement “throughout your generations” (29:42).

Fifth, the visiting phrase functions as a *warning against misinterpreting the patience of Yahweh*. In the preceding narrative, Yahweh responds to the people’s first and great sin in immediate and dramatic fashion. His anger beginning to burn, he declares to Moses his intention to exterminate them. Though relenting from this drastic course, Yahweh’s jealous displeasure is immediately apparent to the people through various chastenings, through the announcement that

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78 Moses’ identification with the people’s iniquity and sin before Yahweh can be given at least two explanations. First, as their mediator, he bears the people’s sin, of which he was not personally guilty, upon himself in mediation and intercession. Second, under the force of Yahweh’s address in 34:6–7, he has been left with no other place to stand before Yahweh than as one who, like the people, has iniquity, rebellion, and sin which require forgiveness.
Yahweh will no longer go with them, through the command to remove their finery while Yahweh decides what to do with them, and through Moses’ ascent to try to make atonement for their great sin.\textsuperscript{79} In contrast, however, Yahweh’s self-proclamation as “slow to anger” in 34:6–7 envisions an “ordinary” dynamic in which his anger will not immediately burn so as to come and confront the people. In such a situation, however, there will be a potential for misinterpretation and skepticism. And so, in addition to its empathic appeal to parental affection, this visiting phrase also functions, importantly, to offer a logical consideration. To those who might grow jaded and cynical, emboldened by Yahweh’s slowness to anger and inaction in calling idolaters and sinners to account—to those who might begin to think that Yahweh is impotent or indifferent—the transgenerational threat in this speech invites the following considerations. What if Yahweh is not indifferent to my idolatry and iniquity? What if, instead, he is becoming provoked, and even increasingly provoked? What if he is “storing up” his wrath and punishment against me so that it will be unleashed as a flood—against me or perhaps even against my sons or the sons of my sons? What if he is simply waiting until our iniquity is sufficiently full or sufficiently ripe or sufficiently putrid? This rhetorical appeal supports the previous aim by confirming the urgency of repentance, the urgency of turning away from idols, and the urgency of forgiveness before Yahweh—even at times when sin and idolatry may seem to enjoy total impunity.

A sixth function of the visiting phrase in Exod 34:7b has been alluded to throughout this chapter: the transgenerational language functions, indirectly, in the overarching purpose of this speech to instill in its hearers hope for the future, specifically to instill hope for this stiff-necked people in its future before this Yahweh. In light of the narrative characterization of this speech as a manifestation of Yahweh’s “goodness” and an proclamation of his mercy and grace (33:19),

\textsuperscript{79} “Perhaps I can make atonement for you,” Moses says (32:30).
and in light of its placement within the scene in which Moses, at Yahweh’s command, has in hand new stone tablets for the reestablishment of Yahweh’s covenant with Israel, the mere mention of Israel’s sons, sons of sons, and third and fourth generations comes as language of new hope and a restored future. Warning and urgency still attend this transgenerational hope, but such hope is now truly being restored. After a narrative (reaching back into Genesis) in which Yahweh has been repeatedly promising Israel a covenant relationship with him and good life in the land of their inheritance for length of days, for their offspring forever, from generation to generation—and then after this was apparently forfeited by their idolatry—the reappearance of transgenerational language, even as a warning, evokes all of the generations-long plans of Yahweh so pervasive in the preceding narrative.

Without elaborating on each of the following, it is evident from the foregoing discussion that Yahweh’s rhetoric in Exod 34:6–7 is consistent with his overarching goals in the Exodus narrative: to fulfill his promise to the fathers: rescuing their descendants from Egypt and giving them long life in the good land; to obtain a people—a holy, priestly people who worship him alone throughout their generations; to dwell in the midst of his people; to establish justice; and in all of this, to make his name known—to Israel and to all, through all generations.

On the heels of these six pragmatic functions of the visiting phrase, it is important to offer one more observation about the pragmatic aim of Yahweh’s 34:6–7 speech as a whole. In this scene, Yahweh is approaching Moses, his servant, who has found favor in Yahweh’s eyes and whom Yahweh has “known by name.” As discussed above, though this is a scene of great holiness and mystery (Moses can only see Yahweh’s backside), it is also a scene of wondrous personal presence and access and self-disclosure, in which Yahweh is fulfilling his desire to, in

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80 It is impossible to overstate how pervasive this theme is in the (Genesis and) Exodus narrative. This theme is traced and analyzed above under §7.1.
turn, be “known by name”—to be truly known, and to be truly loved. He proclaims his own enormous love for a people mired in “iniquity and rebellion and sin.” And certainly a major pragmatic purpose of this speech, on Yahweh’s part, is that those so loved and forgiven would requite his love. The powerful speech of Exod 34:6–7, that is to say, seeks to do more than merely coerce the people into avoiding idolatry. It does not seek simply to terrify them into coming to Yahweh for forgiveness, grudgingly, with gritted teeth and cringing. Rather, the speech seeks to change the hearts of the people, from constant testing and skepticism to loving trust and trusting love. This analysis is more than pious sentiment. It is borne out by the response of Moses and the people in the remainder of the narrative, as I will discuss below.

The implications of this last observation for reflections on the visiting phrase are significant. Through history, critical voices from Marcion to Mark Twain have lifted this phrase from its context and presented it as evidence that the God of the OT is monstrous. Among both Jews and Christians, as discussed above, it has been common to marginalize this passage: it is perhaps embarrassing, confusing, and even contradictory when other passages are considered. Yet here it stands, cemented to the name Yahweh by the proclamation of Yahweh himself. It is uttered by Yahweh in the moment of his supreme personal presence, self-disclosure, and commitment of love to the sons of Israel within the narrative.

It is not an aberration that he speaks of himself here as the eternal God who will deal with people as fathers-and-sons, as generations through time. He has been doing so since Gen 1. This is how Yahweh gives life to sons—through parents. This is how Yahweh, ordinarily, brings knowledge of his saving deeds and his forgiving mercy to sons—through parents. The blessings of his covenant with Israel are an “inheritance”—an expression of his ongoing intention to be, for the sons, such a beneficent, holy God as he has been for the fathers. The threat of transgenerational punishment is not a threat of blind, unrestrained, mistargeted rage; rather, in
this speech of love it expresses Yahweh’s continuing commitment to act in jealous punishment against those who would sabotage or squander the blessed future which he intends for his people.

As the canonical story of Israel unfolds, beyond the book of Exodus, such visitations of his devastating punishment against iniquity do indeed come, usually after long periods of patience and accumulating provocation, after repeated further warnings. In the day of such visitation, Yahweh’s self-revelation in Exod 34:6–7 (and 20:5–6) is recalled by his people. It is recalled and heard wrongly by some, such as those in Ezekiel’s day, who in continuing stiff-necked bitterness could not hear Yahweh speaking of their own iniquity in these words, but could only protest their innocence and impugn Yahweh’s judgment (Ezek 2:3; 5:10; 18:2). But by many others, Yahweh’s words here, including the language of transgenerational warning, are heard as words of love, words of hope, and words of invitation. Humbled and repentant, they confess to Yahweh their sins and the sins of their fathers, they grieve the calamity and humiliation of his people, and they wait upon his freely given mercy and restoration.81 This latter response, and not the former, corresponds to the intended rhetorical force of Yahweh’s proclamation in Exod 34:6–7.

9.3.4. The Narrative Outcome of Yahweh’s Speech in Exodus 34:6–7

Through his rhetoric in Exod 34:6–7, Yahweh seeks to change his hearers and to thereby change the situation in which he and the sons of Israel presently stand. So how do his hearers, in fact, respond? To this question, both the immediate response of Moses on the mountain and the broader response of Moses and the people in the remainder of the story are significant.

The narrative gives a two-verse report of Moses’ response to Yahweh’s theophanic name-proclamation, first noting his actions of worship and then his prayer to Yahweh:

And Moses hurried and bowed down and prostrated himself in worship. And he said, “Please, if I have found favor in your eyes, O Lord, may the Lord please go in our midst—for it is a stiff-necked people—and forgive our iniquity and our sin, and take us as your inheritance.” (Exod 34:8–9)

As Moses makes haste to bow before Yahweh in humble worship, he is responsive to Yahweh’s rhetorical aims: to humble the people, to make himself known, and to elicit their love by proclamation of his own. In his study *I am Yahweh*, Zimmerli observes that Yahweh’s will to be known as “Yahweh” is ultimately fulfilled in worship:

> The event of recognition is not an inward, reflective, or spiritual occurrence, but rather manifests itself in open, public prostration before Yahweh. Recognition is not just the illumination of a new perspective; it is a process of acknowledgement that becomes concrete in confession and worship and leads directly to practical decisions. 83

Moses’ humble worship here perhaps anticipates in microcosm the elaborate preparations for Israel’s tabernacle worship (and its inception) which will comprise the rest of the Exodus story 84.

In the foregoing, I have emphasized the significance of Yahweh’s own prediction and “pre-characterization” in Exod 33:19 of his name-proclamation which would come in 34:6–7: he speaks of it as “all his goodness” and anticipates that he will speak of his freely bestowed mercy and grace. Though the speech declares two distinct sets of qualities on the part of Yahweh and holds these in a tension which should not be dissolved, the overall purpose and tenor of the

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82 Here I translate כ in its most common explanatory (or evidential) sense, since this best captures Moses’ confidence in Yahweh’s forgiveness for iniquity and rebellion and sin just proclaimed. I must concede that a concessive sense of כ is also possible here (cf. NIV). The logic of explanatory כ here, its most natural meaning, would be that because the people will not readily change, their only hope is in Yahweh’s abundant mercy, just proclaimed. Another way of expressing this is that Yahweh is precisely the God whom these people need—accompanying, forgiving, and remaining in transgenerational covenant with them—because they are a stiff-necked people and because he is a forgiving God.

83 Walther Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 67. Zimmerli offers these generalizing comments on the basis of the people’s response to Yahweh’s fire from heaven in 1 Kings 18:39: “And when all of the people saw it, they fell on their faces, and they said, ‘Yahweh, he is God! Yahweh, he is God!’”

84 Moses’ response also reprises the response of the sons of Israel to Yahweh’s initial word of self-revelation mediated to them through Moses and Aaron: “And the people believed … and they bowed down and they prostrated themselves in worship” (Exod 4:30–31).
speech has been to draw Moses and Israel—in humility and in urgency—to seek and rely upon Yahweh’s goodness, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. In this sense, Moses’ prayer, though an earnest plea to Yahweh, is not a picture of bold intercessory resistance to Yahweh’s declaration, as was the case in the immediate aftermath of the calf apostasy (32:11–13). Here, his prayer “connects the dots” from Yahweh’s speech to the present situation in a way which crystallizes the speech’s significance. Both Moses’ humble worship and his prayer exhibit precisely the intended outcome of Yahweh’s rhetoric.

This stands over against readings of Exod 34 which would hear the polarity in Exod 34, and the final visiting phrase in particular, as undercutting the clarity of Yahweh’s intention to go with Israel and forgive their sin. Houtman, for example, hears in 34:7b “dark tones … [which] make that guarantee seem less than completely certain. Hence Moses does not yet see his task as intercessor finished (34:8, 9).” Brueggemann takes this sense even further:

For Moses at the mountain, it is not at all clear how the statement will play for Israel’s future. It may be, taken dramatically, that Yahweh is also not yet clear on this future. While the options are stated [in 34:6–7], the specific implementation for this case at the mountain is yet to be determined. In this determination, Moses in his boldness has a role to play. Both Houtman and Brueggemann helpfully highlight the continuing freedom of Yahweh and the reality of the punitive language which he employs in 34:7b, but both overstate the ambivalence of Yahweh at this point in the narrative. Both Yahweh’s prior words in 33:19 and his rhetoric in 34:6–7 strongly convey his desire to have mercy upon the sons of Israel. The speech, including the punishment language, is uttered as a part of Yahweh’s intention to renew his covenant with

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85 Moberly, Mountain of God, 91, can, for this reason, appropriately speak of 34:9 as the climax of the episode: “Not only is the character of God to be merciful, but it is precisely to the sinful who ought to be destroyed that this mercy is extended. The theme of the grace and mercy of God, already set forward in 32:14; 33:19; 34:6f., is brought to its climax in 34:9.” Moberly thus reads Moses’ prayer both as arising directly from the heart and intention of Yahweh’s speech and also as bringing the narrative scene to its culmination.

86 Houtman, Exodus, 3:709.

87 Brueggemann, “Book of Exodus,” 948.
Israel; after all, he has just instructed Moses to hew stone tablets like the first and bring them up the mountain with him, so that Yahweh can write on them the words of the previous tablets (34:1–2).

Certainly, Moses still has a role to play as Israel’s mediator. His prayer for forgiveness and for the restoration of Yahweh’s generations-long blessings in 34:9 is answered by God with the promise to renew the covenant. But this is not to say that Yahweh’s words have left the situation hanging in limbo prior to Moses’ prayer. Rather, Yahweh’s rhetoric aims to call forth precisely such a prayer from Moses. Moses’ prayer comes as a kind of “Amen” to the force of Yahweh’s words, even as his prayer indeed appeals only for forgiveness (not punishment). Understood along these lines, I completely concur with Brueggemann’s elaboration: “On the basis of God’s rich self-disclosure, Moses now makes a petition (vv. 8–9) to which Yahweh responds (v. 10). Moses’ petition is that Yahweh should choose the first option (generosity) instead of the second (severity), though the latter is fully available to God and perhaps [sic] warranted in light of chap. 32.”

Moses’ final petition on behalf of the people is that Yahweh would not only “go with” and “forgive” but also “inherit us” (or “take us as your inheritance”). The organic relationship between this request and Yahweh’s rhetoric in 34:6–7 should not be overlooked. While the verb נחלת can be employed in a general sense of “get” or “possess,” it most often carries the sense of permanent, transgenerational possession. Thus, Moses’ prayer for Yahweh to “inherit us” is not merely that Yahweh would “take Israel back” but that he would restore the “permanence of the relationship of sonship of Israel to Yahweh as father…, a prayer that Israel’s eternal shepherd

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89 Christopher J. H. Wright, “נחל,” NIDOTTE 3:77, in discussing a family’s allotted land as נחלת, a hereditary possession, stresses that such property was viewed as inalienable—“it was not ‘owned’ by the current generation, but was held from ‘the fathers’ for the sake of posterity.”
would continue to save and bless his inheritance” throughout their many generations. In this sense, Moses’ prayer does not simply choose the first part of Yahweh’s speech in 34:6–7 and ignore the second. Rather, confident in the forgiveness and merciful intention of Yahweh for Israel expressed in 34:6–7a, Moses also hears in the transgenerational warning of 34:7b an evocation of Yahweh’s gracious long-term intentions for the people, and on this basis also he makes his supplication.

Moses’ prayer is the prayer of someone who has come to “know Yahweh by name,” for Moses prays here in worshipful acknowledgement of who Yahweh is. He is cognizant of the people’s deep iniquity, and of the deep crisis that this presents before Yahweh, but he is also cognizant of the deeper love and mercy of Yahweh which will restore their future. In this sense, Moses’ worship and prayer in 34:8–9 stand as a realization not only of Yahweh’s rhetorical intention in 34:6–7, but also of his overarching quest throughout the narrative: that people would come to know that “I am Yahweh.”

Such realization and recognition do not end with Moses on the mountain. The outcome of Yahweh’s rhetoric can also be observed in the response of the sons of Israel, to whom Moses mediates Yahweh’s theophanic self-proclamation, now attested by his own shining face (34:29–35). Among the people also, Yahweh’s words find their rhetorical intentions realized—for the remainder of the Exodus story. After their initial shock and fear at the divine glory radiating from Moses, the people gather around to hear him. Moses mediates to “all the congregation of the people of Israel” (35:1, 4, 20) Yahweh’s instructions regarding the Sabbath and his summons to take up an offering for the construction of the tabernacle. The response of the people displays humility, a sense of the urgency of forgiveness, and a heartfelt willingness to honor and worship Yahweh. Emphasis is placed upon their “willingness (נדב) of heart” (35:5, 21) and that offerings

of precious metals and other materials were brought by men and women whose hearts “carried” them (نفس) and whose spirits “inclined” them (נפש) in such generosity (35:22, 29). The quantity of such freely given materials is so great that Moses has to restrain them from bringing any more offerings (36:5–7). The narrator repeatedly emphasizes that Moses does “everything as Yahweh had commanded” and that the people also do “everything as Yahweh had commanded Moses.”

The redundant elaboration in chs. 35–40 of all of the tabernacle details from chs. 25–31 serves, in part, to highlight this perfect, willing obedience to all which Yahweh had commanded.

Perhaps the most significant change on the part of the people after Yahweh’s speech in 34:6–7 comes not in what they do or say, but in what they do not say. After 34:6–7, Moses prayed for Yahweh’s presence, Yahweh’s forgiveness, and the restoration Yahweh’s transgenerational blessing and purposes to Israel—his words standing as a model response to Yahweh’s rhetoric. As for the sons of Israel, their reported speech throughout the narrative has repeatedly exhibited distrust, disobedience, and rebellion (2:14; 5:21; 14:11–12; 15:24; 16:2–3; 17:2–3). Their most recent statements have been their demand “Make for us gods” in 32:1 (narratively repeated in Aaron’s excuse to Moses in 32:23), and their idolatrous proclamation, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt” in 32:4 (narratively repeated by Yahweh’s report to Moses in 32:8). Against this backdrop, their willing obedience after 34:6–7, coupled by their total quietness for the remainder of the narrative, stand as their own model and appropriate response to Yahweh’s rhetoric. In this sense, their silence exhibits a

91 Note especially the summary statements to this effect in Exod 39:42–43 and 40:16, as well as the litany-like crescendo of such statements in 40:19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32.

92 After Yahweh’s theophany to Moses, no words for the people as a whole are reported in the Exodus story. The closing chapters are full, of course, of Moses’ instructions to the people. The only other characters to speak are the craftsmen, who make a single statement (36:5) reporting that the offerings which the people are bringing are more than enough. This itself stands in meaningful contrast to the people’s earlier grumblings regarding the lack of provisions.

93 In noticing the complete silence of stiff-necked Israel in Exod 33–40, the rebuke of Job to his friends comes to mind: “If only you would keep totally silent; for you, that would be wisdom!” (Job 13:5)
humility and devotion perfectly fitted to the divine self-proclamation which has been reported to them.

The people’s entire occupation in the closing chapters is the construction of Yahweh’s sanctuary. It will be a place of priestly mediation (39:7; cf. 28:12) and atonement (29:35–42) for the forgiveness of their sins before Yahweh. The rites being established here at Yahweh’s command will be permanent practices, enduring throughout their generations.94 Throughout the tabernacle chapters in Exodus, the role of “Aaron and his sons” is emphasized, highlighting not only the present consecration of Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, but especially the “perpetual priesthood” of Aaron’s line “throughout their generations.” Such an emphasis implicitly accents the tabernacle as the place of worship and atonement for the people and for their sons and sons of sons, throughout their generations. Thus, the people’s willing, obedient, single-minded devotion to the construction of the tabernacle stands as a fitting response to Yahweh’s words of merciful restoration coupled with transgenerational warning.

In summary then, Yahweh’s speech in 34:6–7 results in, or at the very least is followed by, a Moses who bows low in reverent worship and humbly petitions for Israel’s forgiveness and the restoration of the transgenerational covenant. It results in a silent, humbled, obedient Israel who gladly bring offerings and participate in the construction of Yahweh’s sanctuary, a place of worship and atonement for the sons of Israel and for their offspring throughout their generations. Thus, the impress of Yahweh’s great name-speech is stamped upon the remainder of the story, up to its closing scene, with the glory of Yahweh tabernacling in the midst of the people, and with “the whole household of Israel” gazing upon Yahweh’s fire and cloud in all their journeys (40:38).

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94 On the permanent, transgenerational nature of the tabernacle and its priesthood, see above §7.1.2.e.
CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of this study, a number of conclusions can be offered regarding the meaning and function of the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” within the Exodus narrative.

1. The phrase is well-fitted to its Exodus narrative context. It strongly resonates with a number of Exodus themes, and each of its occurrences (20:5 and 34:7) contributes to a distinct portrayal of Yahweh which is integral to the Exodus storyline of his unfolding self-revelation.

2. The phrase recalls Egypt’s fate. Especially in Exod 20:5, this phrase functions rhetorically and theologically to warn Israel against idolatry and rebellion, lest they come to be treated as Yahweh treated Egypt, who, after oppressing God’s people for generations and then refusing to acknowledge Yahweh, received Yahweh’s visitation against their sins (Exod 3:16) in plagues and especially in the death of their firstborn sons.

3. The phrase is not static. There is a development of its meaning and function from Exod 20:5 to 34:7. Both occurrences are meaningful, yet the narrative sets forth Exod 34 as the fullest and ultimate articulation. This stands in contrast to the prevailing critical view that Exod 34:6–7 is a more original formulation and, among other ramifications, invites consideration of the theological and rhetorical significance of the ways in which 34:6–7 alters 20:5–6—the omission of the phrases “to those who hate/love me,” the reversal of the punishment-grace sequence, etc.

4. The phrase protects and highlights the beneficent, generations-long purposes of God for his unique, covenant people, Israel—warning fathers not to squander these blessings desired and intended by Yahweh. While the bare visiting phrase has been striking and off-putting to both ancient and modern hearers, it is most properly comprehended as a warning against forsaking
this God and his enduring purposes of blessing and habitation with this people throughout their generations. He desires to fulfill his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by delivering the sons of Israel from Egypt and dwelling in their midst in the land of promise throughout their many generations to come. And so, he sternly warns against squandering this enduring blessing for their progeny. This is perhaps the key—though not the sole—rhetorical function of the phrase.

5. Thus, contextually, the phrase is primarily concerned with and directly describes Yahweh’s dealing with Israel as a nation—a collective, national dynamic in which the iniquity of rebellious generations may finally be visited upon later rebellious generations, with divine visitation upon the nation, upon the people as a whole.

6. At the same time, while both occurrences of the phrase address Israel in the context of Yahweh’s enduring covenant purposes, it indirectly reflects a broader dynamic of Yahweh’s dealing with humanity as family lines across time—as fathers-and-sons. This sense of corporate, familial identity is presented in the Genesis and Exodus narratives not merely as a culturally experienced, culturally constructed mindset, but most significantly as an ontological and theological reality, the fruitful multiplication of human families under Yahweh’s blessing—or sometimes sanction—and within his historical purposes. That Yahweh deals with persons and groups in view of their line of ancestry is a notion at the heart of every major dimension of the Exodus story (see §7.1).

7. The expression פָּקַד על פָּקַד denotes “visiting-in-punishment against X. In contexts dealing with iniquity, the collocation פָּקַד על does not denote God’s “noticing,” “inspecting,” or “examining.” The oft-repeated claim that OT Hebrew has no term for “punishing” is simply incorrect. (See §5.2).

8. The expression פָּקַד על in general, and also in Exod 20:5 and 34:7 specifically, refers to
the direct, personal, intervening activity of Yahweh to come and punish sin. It is not merely a cipher for the natural consequences of sin across generations, observable in many ways all around us (although the hereditary nature of worship and ways of life is clearly assumed within the logic and theology of the phrase). While Yahweh’s punishing “visitation” may employ secondary means (plague, hail, armies), the phrase does not point primarily to the self-arising consequences of iniquity (e.g. poverty falling upon the children of a drunkard) or to natural cycles of sin (e.g. abused children abusing their own children). Instead, God’s visitation of iniquity comes as a decisive, divine overturning of the ongoing order of evil and its apparent impunity.

9. The visiting phrase affirms that although Yahweh may sometimes delay and withhold punishment for a time, even for generations, *Yahweh does not simply leave sin unpunished*. An initial period of delay or impunity is consistent with the meaning and use of פַּקַּדְתֶּה elsewhere in the OT. In Exod 20:5, its transgenerational threat trumpets the enduring jurisdiction of Yahweh to punish and the certainty that he will reckon with sin, even if, at times time, idolatry and iniquity may appear to continue with impunity. In 34:7 these facets are still in view, but another contextual factor is prominent: the overwhelming accent on Yahweh’s merciful patience and forbearance bringing about this delay. Here, “third and fourth generations” now stands within the orbit of Yahweh’s “slowness to anger,” contributing to the image of withheld, delayed punishment. Yet the visiting phrase also warns of a limit and endpoint to Yahweh’s patience, fleshing out the emphatic claim which precedes it: “yet he certainly will not neglect punishment.” Yahweh’s patience is not divine indifference or impotence. Idolatry is not harmless. Forgiveness is critically necessary! The visiting phrase vividly warns that if iniquity before Yahweh is not forgiven, it does not simply go away or fall unnoticed through the cracks—it stands as an accumulating familial affront and provocation to Yahweh, who may patiently
restrain his response but who eventually visits in devastating punishment.

10. Contextually, the phrase should be understood as describing *a divine punishment which is deserved and just*. Nothing in the Exodus context encourages a reading of this phrase as Yahweh punishing innocent sons of iniquitous fathers. Rather, whenever Yahweh’s great patience expires or his gracious forgiveness is not granted, the just principle obtains throughout Exodus that “the one who sins, I will blot him out of my book” (Exod 32:33). This claim may seem a facile, convenient apology for the difficulties of the visiting phrase, but it is demonstrated in some detail under §7.6 above.

11. The phrase *contributes to the narrative theme of Yahweh’s hiddenness and freedom*. It does not offer a finely tuned systematic theology nor lay out a detailed procedure for divine transgenerational jurisprudence. Rather, it asserts the reach of divine jurisdiction. It asserts Yahweh’s power and prerogatives at the mysterious intersection between his patient mercy and his justice. *This frustrates any comprehensive understanding or precisely predictable application of the phrase*. Divine punishment is not transgenerational in any necessary or mechanical sense. Man can neither dictate nor predict when God will come down in visitation (“In the day when I visit, I will visit their sins against them,” Exod 32:34b); he cannot be assured that God will delay for three or four generations (34:10; cf. Deut 7:9–10); he has no claim or control over the patient yet punishing God. How will such transgenerational punishment look or play out? Yahweh may work this out in a number of ways. God is free, and his ways, ultimately, hidden. Mystery and freedom also surround Yahweh’s forgiveness (Exod 33:19). Thus, the phrase fits into the larger theme of Yahweh’s freedom and the partial-hiddenness of his ways and timing within Exodus (e.g., Exod 3:14; 32:34; 33:19). The phrase sets up the paradox of a Yahweh who is both נָשָׂא עון and פַּקֵּד עון in 34:6–7. This tension between “forgiving iniquity” and “visiting iniquity” is never fully resolved in the book of Exodus, but Yahweh’s words in 33:19 and 34:1–2, Moses’ prayer in
and the remainder of the Exodus narrative make clear that Yahweh’s desire for his people is forgiveness, restoration, and blessing throughout their generations. And his words in 34:6–7, including his use of the visiting phrase in v. 7b, are an expression of this desire.

12. **Rhetorically, Yahweh uses the phrase to accomplish his revelatory goals within the narrative.** The phrase reveals him, in particular, to be offended by iniquity, just, worthy of proper fear, exercising an unending jurisdiction across history (in terms of punishing but also in fulfilling his gracious purposes), of a consistent and reliable character (even as he remains free and partially hidden).

13. **Rhetorically, Yahweh also uses the phrase toward persuasive-pragmatic ends, to accomplish his goals within the narrative.** The phrase aims to persuade the people not to be stubborn, unbeloiving, and idolatrous like Pharaoh/Egypt (who experienced Yahweh’s visitation of fathers’ iniquity against sons); to teach true worship to their children; not to misinterpret Yahweh’s patience; to repent with urgency before Yahweh; to worship Yahweh and cling to his mercy; and to treasure their enduring inheritance and their standing within this still-multiplying covenant community. All this serves Yahweh’s overarching goals in the narrative: that they might know him, that they might be and remain his own holy people, that he might establish and uphold justice, that he might give them good life in a good land, and that he might dwell in their midst throughout their generations.

14. The phrase anticipates the likelihood that, over the course of time, the stiff-necked sons of Israel may fall again into idolatry and rebellion, generations of sons following their fathers in this iniquity and finally receiving Yahweh’s visitation-in-punishment. Precisely this situation would come with the destruction and exile under Babylon. In such circumstances, some invoked the transgenerational threat of the visiting phrase in order to protest their innocence and impugn divine justice: “The fathers have been eating sour grapes, and so the children’s teeth are blunted”
(Ezek 18:1). To this misapplication of Exod 20:5 and 34:7, the divine response was “The soul which sins, it shall die” (Ezek 18:4). This is essentially the same just principle declared by Yahweh in Exod 32:33: “The one who sins against me, I will blot him out of my book.” In the face of the exile, however, many other OT voices invoked the visiting phrase in a more fitting manner. They confessed their sins and the sins of their fathers (as Moses explicitly instructs in Lev 26:39–40), acknowledging the justice of Yahweh’s transgenerational punishment in their confession:

Against Yahweh our God we have sinned—we and our fathers—from our youth until this day, and we have not obeyed the voice of Yahweh our God. (Jer 3:25)

We acknowledge our wickedness, the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against you. Do not spurn us—for the sake of your name. Do not treat your glorious throne with contempt. Remember, and do not annul your covenant with us. (Jer 14:20–21)

And the sons of Israel gathered, fasting and in sackcloth, with earth on their heads. And the descendants of Israel separated themselves from all the sons of foreigners. And they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers…, “You are righteous in all that has come upon us; for you have acted faithfully, but we have acted wickedly. Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not done what you instructed; they have not paid attention to your commandments or to the testimony which you witnessed against them. (Neh 9:1–2, 33–34)

From the days of our fathers we have been in great guilt, until this very day. And because of our iniquities we have been given—we, our kings, our priests—into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword and captivity and plundering and humiliation, as it is this day. (Ezra 9:7)

O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, may your anger and your wrath turn away from your city, Jerusalem, your holy mountain. For because of our sins and because of the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become a reproach to all those who live around us…. Not on account of our own righteous deeds are we presenting our pleas of grace before you, but because of your great mercies. O Lord, hear! O Lord, forgive! O Lord, pay attention! O Lord, act—do not tarry! (Dan 9:16–18)

The prerogative of Yahweh to punish the sins of the fathers against the sons, even against the third and fourth generation, continues throughout the OT. After all, the visiting phrase stands at the heart of Yahweh’s foundational self-revelation in the book of Exodus. Yet his self-
proclaimed compassion, grace, abundant lovingkindness, and readiness to forgive also endure throughout the OT, and forever. For Yahweh is a God who desires good for the sons of Israel, throughout their generations.
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