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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

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

3 John 4

ואני זאת בריתי אותם אמר יהוה
רוחי אשר עליך ודברי אשר־שמתי בפיקך
לא־ימושו מפיקך ומפי זרעך ומפי זרע זרעך אמר יהוה
מעתה ועד־עולם

“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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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AB | Anchor Bible |
| <i>ABR</i> | <i>Australian Biblical Review</i> |
| ABRL | Anchor Bible Reference Library |
| ACCS | Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture |
| <i>ACJ</i> | <i>The American Communication Journal</i> |
| AIL | Ancient Israel and Its Literature |
| AOAT | Alter Orient und Altes Testament |
| ApolOTC | Apollos Old Testament Commentary |
| <i>AsJT</i> | <i>Asia Journal of Theology</i> |
| <i>ASTI</i> | <i>Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute</i> |
| <i>AThR</i> | <i>Anglican Theological Review</i> |
| <i>BA</i> | <i>Biblical Archaeologist</i> |
| <i>BASOR</i> | <i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i> |
| BBB | Bonner biblische Beiträge |
| BBC | Blackwell Bible Commentaries |
| <i>BBR</i> | <i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i> |
| BDB | Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> |
| BEATAJ | Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentum |
| BETL | Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium |
| BH | Bible in History |
| <i>Bib</i> | <i>Biblica</i> |

| | |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| BIBAL | Berkeley Institute of Biblical Archaeology and Literature |
| BIBALDS | Berkeley Institute of Biblical Archaeology and Literature Diss. Series |
| <i>BibInt</i> | <i>Biblical Interpretation</i> |
| BibSem | The Biblical Seminar |
| BJS | Brown Judaic Studies |
| <i>BK</i> | <i>Bibel und Kirche</i> |
| BLC | Bible in Literature Courses |
| BLS | Bible and Literature Series |
| <i>BN</i> | <i>Biblische Notizen</i> |
| BOlam | Berit Olam |
| <i>BQ</i> | <i>Baptist Quarterly</i> |
| <i>BRev</i> | <i>Bible Review</i> |
| <i>BSac</i> | <i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i> |
| <i>BTB</i> | <i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i> |
| BVB | Beiträge zum Verstehen der Bibel |
| BWANT | Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament |
| <i>BZ</i> | <i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i> |
| BZAW | Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft |
| CBET | Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology |
| <i>CBQ</i> | <i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i> |
| CBQMS | Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series |
| CBS | The Classic Bible Series |
| CC | Continental Commentaries |
| <i>CHALOT</i> | <i>A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.</i> Edited by William L. Holladay. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988 |
| Comment | Commentaria |

| | |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ConBOT | Coniectanea Biblica: Old Testament Series |
| ConcC | Concordia Commentary |
| ConcCC | Concordia Classic Commentary |
| <i>ConcJ</i> | <i>Concordia Journal</i> |
| <i>CritIs</i> | <i>Critical Issues Commentary</i> |
| <i>CSSH</i> | <i>Comparative Studies in Society and History</i> |
| <i>CTJ</i> | <i>Calvin Theological Journal</i> |
| <i>CTQ</i> | <i>Concordia Theological Quarterly</i> |
| <i>CurBR</i> | <i>Currents in Biblical Research</i> |
| <i>CurTM</i> | <i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i> |
| <i>CV</i> | <i>Communio Viatorum</i> |
| <i>DCH</i> | <i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> . Edited by David J. A. Clines. 9 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2016 |
| <i>DOTP</i> | <i>Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch</i> . Edited by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003 |
| EANEC | Explorations in Ancient Near Eastern Civilizations |
| EBS | Encountering Biblical Studies |
| ECC | Eerdmans Critical Commentary |
| <i>EDB</i> | <i>Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000 |
| <i>ER</i> | <i>Encyclopedia of Religion</i> . Edited by Lindsay Jones. 2nd ed. 15 vols. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005 |
| <i>EuroJTh</i> | <i>European Journal of Theology</i> |
| EUSLR | Emory University Studies in Law and Religion |
| EvExCom | Evangelical Exegetical Commentary |
| <i>EvT</i> | <i>Evangelische Theologie</i> |
| ExpBC | The Expositor's Bible Commentary |

| | |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>ExpTim</i> | <i>Expository Times</i> |
| 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 |
| <i>Greg</i> | <i>Gregorianum</i> |
| <i>GTJ</i> | <i>Grace Theological Journal</i> |
| GTS | Gettysburg Theological Studies |
| <i>HALOT</i> | <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.</i> Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000 |
| <i>HAR</i> | <i>Hebrew Annual Review</i> |
| HBM | Hebrew Bible Monographs |
| <i>HBT</i> | <i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i> |
| HCOT | Historical Commentary on the Old Testament |
| HCS | Hermeneia Commentary Series |
| HerdBS | Herders Biblische Studien |
| <i>HeyJ</i> | <i>Heythrop Journal</i> |
| HOTE | Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis |
| <i>HS</i> | <i>Hebrew Studies</i> |
| HSM | Harvard Semitic Monographs |
| HSS | Harvard Semitic Studies |
| HThKAT | Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament |
| <i>HTR</i> | <i>Harvard Theological Review</i> |
| <i>HUCA</i> | <i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i> |

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|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| HUCM | Monographs of the Hebrew Union College |
| IBC | Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching |
| ICC | International Critical Commentary |
| IECOT | International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament |
| <i>Int</i> | <i>Interpretation</i> |
| <i>IR</i> | <i>Illiff Review</i> |
| IRT | Issues in Religion and Theology |
| ITC | International Theological Commentary |
| <i>ITQ</i> | <i>Irish Theological Quarterly</i> |
| <i>JAOS</i> | <i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i> |
| <i>JBL</i> | <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i> |
| JBLMS | Journal of Biblical Literature Monograph Series |
| <i>JBQ</i> | <i>Jewish Biblical Quarterly</i> |
| JBS | Jerusalem Biblical Studies |
| <i>JETS</i> | <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i> |
| <i>JJS</i> | <i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i> |
| <i>JNES</i> | <i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i> |
| Joüon | Joüon, Paul. <i>A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew</i> . Translated and revised by T. Muraoka. 2 vols. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1991 |
| JPSTC | Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary |
| <i>JQR</i> | <i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i> |
| <i>JR</i> | <i>Journal of Religion</i> |
| <i>JSem</i> | <i>Journal of Semitics</i> |
| JSNTSup | Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series |
| <i>JSOT</i> | <i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i> |
| JSOTSup | Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series |

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|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>JTIV</i> | <i>Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute</i> |
| <i>JTS</i> | <i>Journal of Theological Studies</i> |
| <i>Judaism</i> | <i>Judaism</i> |
| K&D | Keil, Carl Friedrich, and Franz Delitzsch. <i>Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament</i> . Translated by James Martin. Repr. 10 vols., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996 |
| <i>KatB</i> | <i>Katechetische Blätter</i> |
| 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 |
| <i>LSAWS</i> | <i>Linguistic Studies in Ancient West Semitic</i> |
| LSPC | Lexington Studies in Political Communication |
| <i>Maarav</i> | <i>Maarav</i> |
| MBI | Methods in Biblical Interpretation |
| MCI | Modern Critical Interpretations |
| <i>ModTh</i> | <i>Modern Theology</i> |
| MSU | Mitteilungen des Septuaginta-Unternehmens |
| NAC | New American Commentary |
| <i>NBf</i> | <i>New Blackfriars</i> |
| NCB | New Century Bible |
| NCBC | New Cambridge Bible Commentary |
| NCollBC | New Collegeville Bible Commentary |
| NEchtB | Neue Echter Bibel |
| <i>NGC</i> | <i>New German Critique</i> |
| <i>NIB</i> | <i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i> . Edited by Leander E. Keck. 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004 |

| | |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NIBCOT | New International Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament |
| NICOT | New International Commentary on the Old Testament |
| <i>NIDOTTE</i> | <i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis.</i> Edited by Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997. |
| NIVAC | NIV Application Commentary |
| NSBT | New Studies in Biblical Theology |
| NSKAT | Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar, Altes Testament |
| <i>Numen</i> | <i>Numen: International Review for the History of Religions</i> |
| OBO | Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis |
| OBT | Overtures to Biblical Theology |
| OECT | Oxford Early Christian Texts |
| <i>OTE</i> | <i>Old Testament Essays</i> |
| OTL | Old Testament Library |
| PBM | Paternoster Biblical Monographs |
| <i>Persp</i> | <i>Perspective</i> |
| <i>PhRh</i> | <i>Philosophy and Rhetoric</i> |
| PHSC | Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures and Its Contexts |
| POS | Pretoria Oriental Series |
| <i>ProEccl</i> | <i>Pro Ecclesia</i> |
| <i>PT</i> | <i>Poetics Today</i> |
| PTMS | Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series |
| PTW | Preaching the Word |
| QD | Quaestiones Disputatae |
| QE | Quaderni esegetici |
| <i>RB</i> | <i>Revue biblique</i> |
| <i>RTL</i> | <i>Revue théologique de Louvain</i> |

| | |
|------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| SBAB | Stuttgarter biblische Aufsatzbände |
| SBC | <i>Science & Christian Belief</i> |
| SBEC | Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity |
| SBET | <i>Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</i> |
| SBFLA | <i>Studii Biblici Franciscani Liber Annus</i> |
| SBJT | <i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i> |
| SBLDS | Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series |
| SBLMS | Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series |
| SBLSP | Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers |
| SBLSymS | Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series |
| SBS | Stuttgarter Bibelstudien |
| SBT | Studies in Biblical Theology |
| SBTS | Sources for Biblical and Theological Study |
| <i>Scriptura</i> | <i>Scriptura</i> |
| SCS | Septuagint and Cognate Studies |
| SEAJT | <i>South East Asian Journal of Theology</i> |
| <i>Semeia</i> | <i>Semeia</i> |
| SFSHJ | South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism |
| SHBC | Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary |
| SHS | Scripture and Hermeneutics Series |
| Siphrut | Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures |
| SJ | Studia Judaica |
| <i>SJOT</i> | <i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i> |
| <i>SJT</i> | <i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i> |
| SSN | Studia Semitica Neerlandica |
| StBibLit | Studies in Biblical Literature (Lang) |

| | |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| STI | Studies in Theological Interpretation |
| STJHC | Studies and Texts in Jewish History and Culture |
| <i>StudBib</i> | <i>Studia Biblica</i> |
| SubBi | Subsidia Biblica |
| T@C | Texts@contexts (Fortress) |
| TB | Theologische Bücherei: Neudrucke und Berichte aus dem 20. Jahrhundert |
| TBC | Torch Bible Commentaries |
| TBN | Themes in Biblical Narrative |
| TBS | Tools for Biblical Study |
| TBST | The Bible Speaks Today |
| <i>TBT</i> | <i>The Bible Today</i> |
| <i>TDOT</i> | <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren. Translated by John T. Willis et al. 16 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2018 |
| <i>Text</i> | <i>Textus</i> |
| <i>TJ</i> | <i>Trinity Journal</i> |
| TOTC | Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries |
| <i>TS</i> | <i>Theological Studies</i> |
| TSS | Theology and the Sciences Series |
| <i>TTR</i> | <i>Teaching Theology & Religion</i> |
| <i>TynBul</i> | <i>Tyndale Bulletin</i> |
| <i>TZ</i> | <i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i> |
| UBSHS | United Bible Societies Handbook Series |
| UCOP | University of Cambridge Oriental Publications |
| <i>VT</i> | <i>Vetus Testamentum</i> |
| VTSup | Supplements to Vetus Testamentum |

| | |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| WBC | Word Biblical Commentary |
| WC | Westminster Commentaries |
| WestBC | Westminster Bible Companion |
| <i>WTJ</i> | <i>Westminster Theological Journal</i> |
| WUNT | Wissenschaftlichen Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament |
| WW | <i>Word and World</i> |
| WWat | <i>Western Watch</i> |
| ZABR | <i>Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte</i> |
| ZAW | <i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i> |

ABSTRACT

Egger, Thomas J. “‘Visiting Iniquity of Fathers against Sons’ in Exodus.” Ph.D. diss., Concordia Seminary, 2018. 665 pp.

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 על פקד על 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 *פקד עון אבות על-בנים על-שלישים ועל-רבעים* (“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.”² 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.”³ 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.”⁴

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

² William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, AB 2B (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 172.

³ Walter Brueggemann, William C. Placher, and Brian K. Blount, *Struggling with Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 43.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 268.

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.”⁵

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

⁵ Cited in Kathy Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition: Chapters in the Ancient Legacy and Its Humanist Reception* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1.

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.⁶ 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 על פקד עו, 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

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 אלה here as a number and that אלה 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 (יהוה, אלהים, and אל), the adjective “jealous” (קנא), “iniquity of fathers” (עון אבות), “lovingkindness” (חסד), “for thousands” (לאלפים), and the syntax of the qualifying phrases “with respect to those who love/hate me” (לאהבי, לשנאי). Proper only to Exod 34:6–7, the chapter goes on to examine the expression “*preserving* lovingkindness” (עשה חסד instead of נצר חסד), argues that עון נשא does mean “*forgiving* iniquity” (against an array of alternative proposals), and examines the syntax structure of the expression נקה לא ינקה (“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 על פקד

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 על פקד 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 על פקד 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 על פקד. Importantly, the usage of על פקד 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 על פקד 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:

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)²

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,”³ perhaps even “the fullest revelation of the name and qualities of God that man may bear.”⁴ 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

² Unless otherwise indicated, biblical quotations are my own translation, based on the text of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 4th ed., ed. Karl Elliger and Wilhelm Rudolph (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990). The translations of 20:5–6 and 34:6–7 on this page are developed and defended at length in §4 and §5 below.

³ 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), 52.

⁴ William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, AB 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 36.

God in the Pentateuch.”⁵ 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.⁶ The theological weight of such texts is self-evident; we might say it is God’s own theology. A narrational 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.⁷ 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.⁸

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

⁵ James W. Watts, *Reading Law: The Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 107.

⁶ Thomas Hieke, “Ein Bekannter stellt sich vor... Das Buch Exodus als vielfältige Quelle biblischer Rede von Gott,” *BK* 62 (2007): 221.

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

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).”

¹¹ Dale Patrick, *The Rhetoric of Revelation in the Hebrew Bible*, OBT (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1999), 205.

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),¹² tablets 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.¹³ 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

¹² Most English versions translate עֵדוּת (‘ēdut) as “testimony.” More precisely, it likely means “pact, covenant,” basically synonymous with בְּרִית (thus, the NRSV of Exod 31:18: “two tablets of the covenant”). See Horacio Simian-Yofre, “עֵדוּת,” *TDOT* 10:495–515; Daniel I. Block, “Reading the Decalogue Right to Left: The Ten Principles of Covenant Relationship in the Hebrew Bible,” in *How I Love Your Torah, O LORD!* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 26–29.

¹³ Stephen T. Hague, “אָרֹן,” *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 ¹⁴אני יהוה אלהיך 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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

Many have observed that Exod 20:2–6 stands as foundational and innermost in concentric rings of Pentateuch law, moving outward from this first commandment¹⁷ 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.”¹⁸ Patrick Miller

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).

¹⁶ Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 3:109.

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.”

¹⁸ Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 429–30 [LC I:324, 326].

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.”¹⁹ Dale Patrick regards vv. 2–6 as a single unit which functions as the “hermeneutical key ... of the Decalogue.”²⁰ “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.”²¹

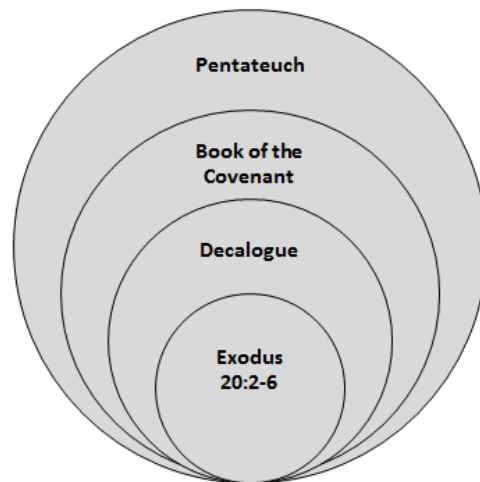


Figure 1

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.²² Scott

¹⁹ 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), 21.

²⁰ Patrick, *Rhetoric of Revelation*, 74.

²¹ Dale Patrick, *Old Testament Law* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 43.

²² Gordon J. Wenham, “Law and the Legal System in the Old Testament,” in *Law, Morality, and the Bible*, ed. Bruce N. Kaye and Gordon J. Wenham (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 27, describes the Decalogue as “the quintessence of Old Testament law.” David L. Baker, “The Finger of God and the Forming of a Nation: The Origin and Purpose of the Decalogue,” *TynBul* 56 (2005): 18–19, suggests that “the Decalogue is understood as a statement of the essentials of Old Testament ethics (= policy) while detailed laws in the Book of the Covenant, Holiness Code and Deuteronomical Laws explain how these principles are to be put into practice (= technique).” See

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.”²³ 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.”²⁴ 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.²⁵ Also here in Deuteronomy, John Walton and Georg Braulik discern the Decalogue behind the pattern of the other laws.²⁶ 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

also Joe Sprinkle, *The Book of the Covenant: A Literary Approach*, JSOTSup 174 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 17–34; Dennis T. Olson, “The Jagged Cliffs of Mount Sinai: A Theological Reading of the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:22–23:19),” *Int* 50 (1996): 251–63.

²³ Scott M. Langston, *Exodus Through the Centuries*, Blackwell Bible Commentaries (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 200, references *Collations of the Ten Commandments*, vol. 6 in *The Works of Saint Bonaventure*, trans. Paul J. Spaeth (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure University, 1995), 1.20, 22–23; 2.6; 3.1.

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.”

²⁵ William P. Brown, ed., *The Ten Commandments: The Reciprocity of Faithfulness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 3.

²⁶ John H. Walton, “Deuteronomy: An Exposition of the Spirit of the Law,” *GTJ* 8 (1987): 225, concludes that Deut 6–26 is “an expansion of the Decalogue with the intent of addressing the spirit of the law . . . with the express purpose of moving beyond to a truer understanding of God’s concerns and requirements. This then is much the same as what Christ does in the Sermon on the Mount.” Georg Braulik, “The Sequence of Laws in Deuteronomy 12–26 and in the Decalogue,” in *A Song of Power and the Power of Song: Essays on the Book of Deuteronomy*, ed. Duane Christenson, SBTS 3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 313–35. See also Stephen A. Kaufman, “The Structure of the Deuteronomical Law,” *Maarav* 1/2 (1978–1979): 105–58.

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

²⁷ Braulik, “Sequence of Laws,” 334.

²⁸ S. Dean McBride, “The Essence of Orthodoxy: Deuteronomy 5:6–10 and Exodus 20:2–6,” *Int* 60 (2006): 138.

²⁹ McBride, “Essence of Orthodoxy,” 140.

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.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 *to the exclusion* of the rest of the Torah by sectarian Jews and early Christians.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.

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

The *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 (כִּי) 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.³⁵

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

³⁴ Block, “Reading the Decalogue,” 52–53, cites m. Tamid 5:1; y. Ber. 3c. See also Geza Vermes, “Pre-Mishnaic Jewish Worship and the Phylacteries from the Dead Sea,” *VT* 9 (1959): 69; and F. E. Vokes, “The Ten Commandments in the New Testament and in First Century Judaism,” *SE* 5 (1968): 146–54, both referenced in Block.

³⁵ Martin Luther, *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 *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, *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.³⁶ 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.³⁷ 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 יהיה 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.³⁸ 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.”

³⁶ 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.

³⁷ Catrin H. Williams, *I Am He: The Interpretation of ‘ani hū’ 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.”

³⁸ Helmer Ringgren, “הוּא הוּא,” *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 ׀ 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

³⁹ Karl Elliger, “Ich bin der Herr—euer Gott,” in *Theologie als Glaubenswagnis: Festschrift für Karl Heim* (Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, 1954), 14.

⁴⁰ John Kessler, *Old Testament Theology: Divine Call and Human Response* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 199.

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 אָנַף (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 אֵשׁ [‘fire’] indicates the intense, consuming dimension so characteristic of Yahweh’s אֵשׁ אֱלֹהִים .”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*’ (אָנַף) in the Divine Context,” *JBL* 134 (2015): 238–39.

⁴² 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), 48.

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 (אהב) and longing (חשק) for Israel⁴⁶ should lead them to love (אהב) and to cleave (דבק) to him.⁴⁷ The strong affection connoted by these verbs is well-illustrated by the use of דבק and חשק in Gen 2:24 and Gen 34:8, respectively, both dealing

⁴⁴ Stefan Kürle, *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), 50.

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 Deuteronomistic insertions, Moran asserts, "If ... [Deut] 6:5 and 6:17 allude to the Decalogue, then it is clear that *le'ōh'bai ul'šōm'ere' mišwōtai* 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."

⁴⁶ Deut 4:37; 7:7, 8, 13; 10:15; 23:5.

⁴⁷ Deut 5:10; 6:5; 7:9; 10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20.

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; 10:12; 10:13; 10:17; 10:19; 10:20; 10:21; 10:24; 10:28; 10:30; 10:34; 10:37; 10:44; 10:48; 10:50; 10:54; 10:56; 10:60; 10:62; 10:64; 10:68; 10:70; 10:74; 10:76; 10:80; 10:84; 10:88; 10:92; 10:96; 10:100; 10:104; 10:108; 10:112; 10:116; 10:120; 10:124; 10:128; 10:132; 10:136; 10:140; 10:144; 10:148; 10:152; 10:156; 10:160; 10:164; 10:168; 10:172; 10:176; 10:180; 10:184; 10:188; 10:192; 10:196; 10:200; 10:204; 10:208; 10:212; 10:216; 10:220; 10:224; 10:228; 10:232; 10:236; 10:240; 10:244; 10:248; 10:252; 10:256; 10:260; 10:264; 10:268; 10:272; 10:276; 10:280; 10:284; 10:288; 10:292; 10:296; 10:300; 10:304; 10:308; 10:312; 10:316; 10:320; 10:324; 10:328; 10:332; 10:336; 10:340; 10:344; 10:348; 10:352; 10:356; 10:360; 10:364; 10:368; 10:372; 10:376; 10:380; 10:384; 10:388; 10:392; 10:396; 10:400; 10:404; 10:408; 10:412; 10:416; 10:420; 10:424; 10:428; 10:432; 10:436; 10:440; 10:444; 10:448; 10:452; 10:456; 10:460; 10:464; 10:468; 10:472; 10:476; 10:480; 10:484; 10:488; 10:492; 10:496; 10:500; 10:504; 10:508; 10:512; 10:516; 10:520; 10:524; 10:528; 10:532; 10:536; 10:540; 10:544; 10:548; 10:552; 10:556; 10:560; 10:564; 10:568; 10:572; 10:576; 10:580; 10:584; 10:588; 10:592; 10:596; 10:600; 10:604; 10:608; 10:612; 10:616; 10:620; 10:624; 10:628; 10:632; 10:636; 10:640; 10:644; 10:648; 10:652; 10:656; 10:660; 10:664; 10:668; 10:672; 10:676; 10:680; 10:684; 10:688; 10:692; 10:696; 10:700; 10:704; 10:708; 10:712; 10:716; 10:720; 10:724; 10:728; 10:732; 10:736; 10:740; 10:744; 10:748; 10:752; 10:756; 10:760; 10:764; 10:768; 10:772; 10:776; 10:780; 10:784; 10:788; 10:792; 10:796; 10:800; 10:804; 10:808; 10:812; 10:816; 10:820; 10:824; 10:828; 10:832; 10:836; 10:840; 10:844; 10:848; 10:852; 10:856; 10:860; 10:864; 10:868; 10:872; 10:876; 10:880; 10:884; 10:888; 10:892; 10:896; 10:900; 10:904; 10:908; 10:912; 10:916; 10:920; 10:924; 10:928; 10:932; 10:936; 10:940; 10:944; 10:948; 10:952; 10:956; 10:960; 10:964; 10:968; 10:972; 10:976; 10:980; 10:984; 10:988; 10:992; 10:996; 10:1000). Twice, Deuteronomy speaks of God repaying (שָׁלַם) those who hate him (שָׂנְאָה), as an exhortation to “keep the commandment, the statute, and the ordinances” given by Moses (Deut 7:10–11; cf. 32:41–43).⁴⁸

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 foretelling of the conquest of Canaan in 23:20–33, thus bracketing the Book of the Covenant.⁴⁹ 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 “Deuteronomistic 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.⁵⁰

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.⁵¹ There is polarity, but there is also what Raabe terms “asymmetry.”⁵² 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

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, FfSk 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.

| Exodus 20:2–6 | Pentateuch Rhetoric of Motivation |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| (for) I am Yahweh | “I am Yahweh” refrain |
| Yahweh, your God | pervasive appeals to fear, serve, worship, love, cling to, obey, and keep the commands of <i>Yahweh, (y)our God</i> |
| a jealous God (speaking from the fire) | Yahweh’s jealousy in Exod 34, Deut 4–6, and Moses’ Song in Deut 32; scenes of divine judgment by fire |
| stark polarity: visiting iniquity <u>or</u> showing steadfast love | blessings <u>or</u> curses life <u>or</u> death long days in the land <u>or</u> exile in another, etc. |
| for those who hate me— for those who love me and keep my commandments | 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 |
| visiting iniquity ... against sons, against the third and fourth generation—steadfast love to thousands | “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 |

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).⁵⁴

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).⁵⁵ 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).⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Dale Patrick, “The First Commandment in the Structure of the Pentateuch,” *VT* 45 (1995): 107–18.

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 עבודה ("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.”⁵⁷ (96). 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.”⁵⁸

2.1.1.f. Exodus 20:5–6 and the Great Shema.

Patrick Miller and Gerald Janzen have argued persuasively that the *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 *Shema* is a mirror image of the first part of the Decalogue.”⁵⁹ 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, 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 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 Shema, which make Israel’s monotheism no mere matter of intellectual belief but

⁵⁷ Dale Patrick, *The Rendering of God in the Old Testament*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 96.

⁵⁸ Terence E. Fretheim, *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. *This is an entirely new reality for Israel, indeed for the world*” (author’s emphasis).

⁵⁹ J. Gerald Janzen, “On the Most Important Word in the Shema (Deuteronomy VI 4–5),” *VT* 37 (1987): 281; Patrick Miller, “The Most Important Word: The Yoke of the Kingdom,” *IR* 14 (1984): 17–29. See also Moran, “Near Eastern Background,” 85–87, who explains Deut 6:4–18 as “a series of citations and allusions to the beginning of the Decalogue.”

a matter of distinctive cultic practice and loving obedience that encompasses the whole of life.⁶⁰

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.”⁶¹ 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.”⁶² And Michael Widmer says plainly that Exod 34:6–7 contains “the most comprehensive account of YHWH’s nature in the entire Bible.”⁶³ 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

⁶⁰ Richard Bauckham, “Biblical Theology and the Problem of Monotheism,” in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 207–8.

⁶¹ 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), 51.

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).

⁶³ Michael Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, FAT 2/8 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 175. So also R. W. L. Moberly, “How May We Speak of God? A Reconsideration of the Nature of Biblical Theology,” *TynBul* 53 (2002): 193.

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

⁶⁴ James W. Voelz, *What Does This Mean? Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Post-Modern World*, 2nd ed. (St. Louis: Concordia, 2013), 113, 136–37 (author’s emphases).

⁶⁵ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 2:71.

⁶⁶ Graham A. Cole, “Exodus 34, the Middoth, and the Doctrine of God: The Importance of Biblical Theology to Evangelical Systematic Theology,” *SBJT* 12 (2008): 24–37.

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.⁶⁹ Such broad canonical distribution may evidence longstanding liturgical use of this text in ancient Israel.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.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.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.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.”⁷⁴ Scoralick labels Exod 34:6–7 a *Schlüsseltext* for grasping the unity and ordering of the Book of the

⁶⁹ 2 Kgs 13:23; Pss 25:6; 78:38; 86:5; 99:8; 106:45; Jer 30:11; Dan 9:9; Mic 7:18–20. Hermann Spieckermann, “Barmherzig und gnädig ist der Herr...,” ZAW 102 (1990): 1–18, speaks of more than 20 parallel passages.

⁷⁰ Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 216.

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).”

⁷² Thomas M. Raitt, “Why Does God Forgive?” *HBT* 13 (1991): 45.

⁷³ Raymond Van Leeuwen, “Scribal Wisdom and Theodicy in the Book of the Twelve,” in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John Gammie*, ed. Leo Perdue et al. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 31–49; Ruth Scoralick, *Gottes Güte und Gottes Zorn: Die Gottesprädikationen in Exodus 34,6f und Ihre Intertextuellen Beziehungen zum Zwölfprophetenbuch*, HerdBS 33 (Freiburg: Herder, 2002); Jan P. Bosman, “The Paradoxical Presence of Exodus 34:6–7 in the Book of the Twelve,” *Scriptura* 87 (2004): 233–43; Christopher R. Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets*, Studies in Theological Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Joel Barker, “From Where Does My Hope Come? Theodicy and the Character of YHWH in Allusions to Exodus 34:6–7 in the Book of the Twelve,” *JETS* 61 (2018): 697–715.

⁷⁴ Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics*, 216.

Twelve.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.”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 (*'emet*) 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.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.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.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

⁷⁵ Scoralick, *Gottes Güte und Gottes Zorn*, 204.

⁷⁶ Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 347, cites Pss 40:11–13, 18; 78:38; 79:5–6, 8–10, 21; 85:3–4, 6, 8, 11; 86:2–3, 5–6, 11, 16; 99:8; 111:1, 4–5, 7; 145:7–10.

⁷⁷ Gordon Wenham, “The Golden Calf in the Psalms,” in *A God of Faithfulness: Essays in Honour of J. Gordon McConville on His 60th Birthday*, ed. Jamie A. Grant, Alison Lo, and Gordon J. Wenham (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 174, 181.

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

⁷⁹ Sara Japhet, *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.”⁸⁰

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.⁸¹ 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 אהיה אשר אהיה (“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.”⁸² 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.”⁸³

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

⁸⁰ Baruch Halpern, “Why Manasseh is Blamed for the Babylonian Exile: The Evolution of a Biblical Tradition,” *VT* 48 (1998): 512–13.

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.

⁸³ Jerry R. Harmon, “Exodus 34:6–7: A Hermeneutical Key in the Open Theism Debate” (PhD diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005), 163.

relation to the surrounding narrative,⁸⁴ 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,”⁸⁵ 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.⁸⁶ John Goldingay, likewise, judges these verses to be “a retrospective systematic theological reflection” on the narrative.⁸⁷ Terence Fretheim notes the way in which this generalizing description of Yahweh “grows out of the story,” is “drawn into creedal statement,”⁸⁸ 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.”⁸⁹

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

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.

⁸⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 216.

⁸⁷ John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 3 vols. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003–2009), 1:37. Goldingay correlates this summative role of 34:6–7 with the narrative episode beginning in Exod 32, but such a limitation is unnecessary; the entire book of Exodus finds its apex and summary in 34:6–7.

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 Lamenters (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."

⁹² Horst Seebass, "Yahweh's Name in the Aaronic Blessing (Num 6:22–27)," in *The Revelation of the Name YHWH to Moses: Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity*, TBN (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 37–54, focuses on the connections with Exod 33:12–23, and especially 33:19; however, 33:12–23 are intrinsically tied to their own culmination in 34:6–7, thus binding also Exod 34:6–7 together with the priestly blessing in Num 6. Seebass, 45, notes that [Num 6] "v. 22 together with v. 27 make the pericope of 6:22–27 a tradition of the revelation of YHWH's name." The connections with the Exodus verses "enhance the understanding of Num 6:22–27 as a jewel of the self-revelation of YHWH." Christopher W. Mitchell, *The Meaning of BRK "To Bless" in the Old Testament*, SBLDS 95 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 96, understands the Aaronic Blessing as primarily a call for "God to have an *attitude* of goodwill toward the persons blessed..., God's favor [יָרַח] itself."

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

⁹³ Marvin A. Sweeney, “The Wilderness Traditions of the Pentateuch: A Reassessment of Their Function and Intent in Relation to Exodus 32–34,” in *Society of Biblical Literature: 1989 Seminar Papers*, ed. David J. Lull, SBLSPS 28 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 292–93.

⁹⁴ Pier Cesare Bori, *The Golden Calf and the Origins of the Anti-Jewish Controversy*, trans. D. Ward, SFSHJ 16 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 2–3.

⁹⁵ Daniel C. Timmer, *Creation, Tabernacle, and Sabbath: The Sabbath Frame of Exodus 31:12–17; 35:1–3 in Exegetical and Theological Perspective*, FRLANT 227 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009).

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.”

⁹⁸ Spieckermann, “Barmherzig und gnädig,” 1–18.

⁹⁹ King L. She, *The Use of Exodus in Hebrews*, StBibLit 142 (New York: Lang, 2011), 31.

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*

¹⁰⁰ Matthew Levering, “Contemplating God: YHWH and Being in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas,” *ITQ* 67 (2002): 27.

¹⁰¹ William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, AB 2A (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 609.

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.”¹⁰⁵ Hermann Spieckermann,¹⁰⁶ 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.”¹⁰⁷ 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.”¹⁰⁸

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.

¹⁰⁵ C. John Collins, “The Theology of the Old Testament,” in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 29.

¹⁰⁶ Spieckermann, “Barmherzig und gnädig,” 1–18; “God’s Steadfast Love: Toward A New Conception of Old Testament Theology,” *Bib* 81 (2000): 305–27; “Wrath and Mercy as Crucial Terms of Theological Hermeneutics,” 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), 3–16; Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *God of the Living: A Biblical Theology*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁷ Walter Brueggemann, “Crisis-Evoked, Crisis-Resolving Speech,” in *Deep Memory, Exuberant Hope: Contested Truth in a Post-Christian World*, ed. Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), 91–110. See also Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament and Old Testament Theology: An Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008). In the first of these, Brueggemann makes recurring reference to Exod 34:6–7; in the latter, the foundation for his OT theology is laid with an initial exposition of three “primal revelations” of God to Israel from the book of Exodus, which culminate in the third and most complete self-revelation of God in Exod 34:6–7 (57–71).

¹⁰⁸ James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 63.

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

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.”

¹¹¹ Spieckermann, “Barmherzig und gnädig,” 8.

¹¹² Spieckermann, “Wrath and Mercy,” 12–16.

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).¹¹⁴

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).”¹¹⁵

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.¹¹⁶

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

¹¹⁴ C. S. Cowles, “The Case for Radical Discontinuity,” in *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 195.

¹¹⁵ Eric A. Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 118, 192.

¹¹⁶ Studies which largely ignore the visiting phrase include: Pierre Berthoud, “The Compassion of God: Exodus 34:5–9 in the Light of Exodus 32–34,” in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 142–67; Thomas B. Dozeman, “Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Yahweh’s Gracious and Compassionate Character,” *JBL* 108 (1989): 207–23; Franz, *Barmherzige und gnädige Gott*; Harmon, “Exodus 34:6–7: A Hermeneutical Key”; Paul R. House, “God’s Character and the Wholeness of Scripture,” *SBET* 23 (2005): 4–17; Lane, *Compassionate but Punishing God*; Laney, “God’s Self-Revelation”; Tsai-Yun Lin, “The Golden Calf, God’s Nature, and True Worship in Exodus 32–34” (PhD diss., Trinity International University, 2010); Michel, “Ist mit der ‘Gnadenformel’?”; Moberly, “How May We Speak?”; 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); Raitt, “Why Does God Forgive?”

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.”¹¹⁷ J. Plastaras offers no reflection on the phrase “visiting iniquity of fathers against sons” under either Exod 20 or 34.¹¹⁸ Hyatt does not quote, mention, or comment on Exod 20:5b–6.¹¹⁹ On Exod 34, he mentions the important revelation of God’s character in 34:6, but ignores 34:7.¹²⁰ 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.¹²¹ 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.”¹²² 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.¹²³ Victor Hamilton discusses the prohibition of images in Exod 20, but ignores 20:5–6.¹²⁴ Lohfink’s *Theology of the Pentateuch* does not mention Exod 34:6–7, nor does he interact with the visiting phrase in Exod 20:5.¹²⁵ In view of

¹¹⁷ Martin Noth, *Exodus*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 261.

¹¹⁸ James Plastaras, *The God of Exodus: The Theology of the Exodus Narratives* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1966).

¹¹⁹ J. Philip Hyatt, *Exodus*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 212.

¹²⁰ Hyatt, *Exodus*, 225.

¹²¹ Everett Fox, *Now These Are the Names: A New English Rendition of the Book of Exodus* (New York: Schocken, 1986), 191. Fox cites Ronald E. Clements, *Exodus*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

¹²² Mark S. Smith, *Exodus*, NCollBC (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 80, 121.

¹²³ Oswald T. Allis, *God Spoke by Moses: An Exposition of the Pentateuch* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1951), 76.

¹²⁴ Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook to the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 192–93.

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.

Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

¹²⁶ John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 284–86, 315–16.

¹²⁷ Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 314.

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.¹²⁸ 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’ yentakkeh*, ‘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.¹²⁹

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.¹³⁰ 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.¹³¹

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

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 וְנִקְהָה לֹא יִנְקְהָה, 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 וְנִקְהָה לֹא יִנְקְהָה 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).

¹²⁹ Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: JPS, 1990), 392.

¹³⁰ Milgrom, *Numbers*, 393. Milgrom mentions Neh 9:17–18; Jonah 4:2; Joel 2:13; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8.

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.¹³² 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.”¹³³

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.¹³⁴

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

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.

¹³³ Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 110. Online: https://prts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Larger_Catechism.pdf.

¹³⁴ Martin Luther, *Small Catechism*, in Kolb and Wengert, eds., *Book of Concord*, 354 [SC I:22].

observance),¹³⁵ 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.”¹³⁶

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

¹³⁵ Martin Luther, “How Christians Should Regard Moses,” in *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, 55 vols. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 35:161–74.

¹³⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: U.S. Catholic Conference, 2000), 210–11.

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.¹³⁷ 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.”¹³⁸

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

¹³⁷ Ernst W. Hengstenberg, *Dissertations on the Genuineness of the Pentateuch*, trans. J. E. Ryland, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: John D. Lowe, 1847), 2:447, notes the differing position of Paul Von Bohlen, who describes the phrase as “a Levitical dogma (compare Exod. xx. 5, Num. xiv. 18), which Ezekiel occupies a whole chapter in combating.”

¹³⁸ Robert C. Dentan, “The Literary Affinities of Exodus xxxiv 6f,” *VT* 13 (1963): 36–37. Wellhausen advocated such a view of 34:6–7 as “edifying additions” (*erbauliche Zusätze*). 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), 143, observes that such an assumption resulted in “ein nur geringes Interesse an den Versen 6 und 7 in den Kommentaren.” Kürle, *Appeal of Exodus*, 43, observes, “Given the often noted theological importance of the *Gnadenrede* in Exod. 34:6–7, the exegetical literature on these verses is astonishingly sparse, apparently because of the secondary nature of these verses in the eyes of most critics.”

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*.¹³⁹ 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."¹⁴⁰ 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."¹⁴¹ 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.¹⁴²

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."¹⁴³ 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 34:6–7.¹⁴⁴

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-

¹³⁹ G. Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital*, SBT 8 (London: SCM, 1952); Gerhard 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 Testament Theology*, 2 vols., trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1962–65), 2:358–60.

¹⁴⁰ Donald E. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 287n25.

¹⁴¹ James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 77–78.

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

¹⁴³ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 216.

¹⁴⁴ von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:181.

critical concerns and the biblical theology movement.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.”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.¹⁴⁷ From this vantage, “value

¹⁴⁵ See Pigott, “God of Compassion,” 6n13, who traces the neglect of Exod 34:6–7 in the OT theologies of Walther Eichrodt, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Gerhard von Rad, Samuel Terrien, Th. C. Vriezen, and Claus Westermann. She notes as an exception Ralph L. Smith, *Old Testament Theology: Its History, Method, and Message* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 83–84, 137, 165, 176, 197–201, 217, 225, 298, 308.

¹⁴⁶ David Daube, *The Deed and the Doer in the Bible: David Daube’s Gifford Lectures, Vol. 1*, ed. Calum Carmichael (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation, 2008), 6.

¹⁴⁷ Henry Sumner Maine, *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, *The Christian Doctrine of Man* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1911); *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, *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.”¹⁴⁸

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.¹⁴⁹ 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).¹⁵⁰ 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).¹⁵¹

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,”

power and a clear public identity, hereditary (clan) identities move into the vacuum and individual rights are swallowed up into the collective honor, shame, customs, and feuds of the clan.

¹⁴⁸ H. D. Lewis, “Collective Responsibility,” *Philosophy* 24 (1948): 3–6, cited in Marion Smiley, “Collective Responsibility,” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Fall 2011 Edition: n.p. [cited 9 June 2015]. Online: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/collective-responsibility/>.

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.

¹⁵¹ von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:266.

reveals “the remarkable ethical change when compared with the true Jeremiah [in 31:29–30].”¹⁵² 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 biblio-developmental 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.”¹⁵³

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.”¹⁵⁴ Pieter Middelkoop roots our visiting phrase in the “inveterate belief of natural religion in a revenge-taking God.”¹⁵⁵ 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.

¹⁵⁴ Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 121–23.

¹⁵⁵ 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.

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.”¹⁵⁶

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,¹⁵⁷ 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.”¹⁵⁸ It is “a patently unjust doctrine.”¹⁵⁹ Coupled with the

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

¹⁵⁷ This tendency is documented by H. G. L. Peels, *The Vengeance of God: The Meaning of the Root NQM and the Function of the NQM-Texts in the Context of Divine Revelation in the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 271–74. Stephen H. Travis, *Christ and the Judgement of God: The Limits of Divine Retribution in New Testament Thought*, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 3–12, provides a helpful summary of objections, under the heading “The Judgement of God as a Problem.” For discussion of the ethics and dynamics of divine punishment, see R. W. L. Moberly, *The Ethics of Punishment* (London: Faber, 1968); Klaus Koch, “Is there a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?” in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, ed. James L. Crenshaw (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 57–87; Adrian Schenker, “Der strafende Gott: Zum Gottesbild im AT,” *KatB* 110 (1985): 843–50; 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); Garry J. Williams, “Penal Substitution: A Response to Recent Criticisms,” *JETS* 50 (2007): 71–86; Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love*, EUSLR (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011).

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,”¹⁶⁰ 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.”¹⁶¹ Kaminsky suggests that such objections stem “from a larger Enlightenment bias that places greater value upon moral systems that emphasize the individual.”¹⁶² 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.¹⁶³

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,¹⁶⁴ an assumption that undergirds

¹⁵⁹ Levinson, *Legal Revision*, 87.

¹⁶⁰ Bunyan Davie Napier, *The Book of Exodus*, LBC 3 (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1963), 79.

¹⁶¹ Bryan K. Blount, “The Last Word on Biblical Authority,” in *Struggling with Scripture*, ed. Walter Brueggemann, William C. Placher, and Brian K. Blount (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 54–55.

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.”

¹⁶³ Cicero, *De natura Deorum*, 3:38, cited in Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, AB 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 298; Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 56–57; Cornelius Houtman, *Exodus*, trans. S. Woudstra, 3 vols., HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 3:27, notes that Marcion used Exod 20:5 “for positing his dualism between the less than perfect God of the OT, the demiurge, and the God of love and mercy of the NT proclaimed by Jesus.”

¹⁶⁴ For the classic diagnosis of this tendency, see Langdon B. Gilkey, “Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language,” *JR* 41 (1961): 194–205. For a recent appeal to reassess the impact of these assumptions on exegetical and historical methodology, see Roland Deines, “God’s Role in History as a Methodological Problem for Exegesis,” in *Acts of God in History*, ed. Christoph Ochs and Peter Watts, WUNT 317 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 1–26. See also Denis Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action*, TSS

our modern (and post-modern) historical-scientific outlook.¹⁶⁵ 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.”¹⁶⁶ 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.”¹⁶⁷ For C. H. Dodd, the view of a provoked God working calamities in the world is not consistent with “the highest

(Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 45–47, 77–90; Terence E. Fretheim, “Issues of Agency in Exodus,” in *The Book of Exodus: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Craig A. Evans, and Joel N. Lohr, VTSup 164 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 591–608. Fretheim, 606, asserts: “God chooses to work in and through human beings and other creaturely agents (including human language and the created moral order) to achieve God’s purposes for Israel and the world. I could put it even more strongly: God *always* uses agents in God’s working in Israel and the larger world” (author’s emphasis). See also Mark McEntire, *Portraits of a Mature God: Choices in Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), who argues that an OT theology of God’s character and activity should privilege the later OT writings which come as the culmination of a long development of Israel’s religious thought. This mature portrait, “where God recedes into the background and becomes a subtle influence in various ways, rather than participating in the story as an active character,” is a more appropriate focus and center for OT theology than the portrait from earlier OT writings in which “the divine character is more active and more interesting” (p. 2). For two clear and articulate representatives of the “supernatural” position regarding intervening divine activity in the world, see C. John Collins, *The God of Miracles: An Exegetical Examination of God’s Action in the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000); John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:307–13. Fretheim and Goldingay orient their reflections around divine agency in Exodus. Collins, 19–22, provides a helpful summary description of the various models for God’s activity in relation to the creation.

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.

¹⁶⁷ A. J. Jacobs, *The Year of Living Biblically* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 329.

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.”¹⁶⁸ 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.¹⁶⁹

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.¹⁷⁰ 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.”

¹⁶⁹ Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 736–37.

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

¹⁷¹ Napier, *Book of Exodus*, 79.

¹⁷² Godfrey W. Ashby, *Go Out and Meet God: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, ITC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 84.

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.”

and assumed by readers of this text for centuries).¹⁷⁴ The following comments by G. Ernest Wright regarding God's self-description in Exod 34:6–7 are illustrative:

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.¹⁷⁵

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.”¹⁷⁶

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

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.

¹⁷⁵ G. Ernest Wright, “The Divine Name and the Divine Nature,” *Persp* 12 (1971): 180.

¹⁷⁶ Brueggemann, “Book of Exodus,” 947.

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.”¹⁷⁹ 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.¹⁸⁰

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?¹⁸¹

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:

relate textually to Exod 20 and 34:6–7. Who is the human agent through whom the Father’s voice testifies to and honors the Son (cf. 2 Pet 1:16–18)?

¹⁷⁹ Levinson, *Legal Revision*, 26–27.

¹⁸⁰ Patrick, *Old Testament Law*, 2.

¹⁸¹ Fretheim, “Issues of Agency,” 607.

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.¹⁸²

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,¹⁸³ 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.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸² Blount, "Last Word," 53–55.

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.¹ 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 (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,³ 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

¹ Notable exceptions are Michael Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, FAT 2/8 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); 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), 141–56.

² A helpful overview of ANE and Greco-Roman views of transgenerational punishment is provided by Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, AB 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 297–98. See also August Dillmann, *Exodus und Leviticus: Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1880), 211; Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 149; Abraham Malamat, “Doctrines of Causality in Hittite and Biblical Historiography: A Parallel,” *VT* 5 (1955): 1–12. Stanislav Segert, “Bis in das dritte und vierte Glied (Ex 20,5),” *CV* 1 (1958): 37–39, suggests a connection with the traditional parameters of blood vengeance still practiced by Arab Bedouins, where the obligation of vengeance extends through the fourth degree of kinship, while the fifth, called the *khomse*, is exempted.

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

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.”

⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 56–57 (my emphasis). Gregory’s hermeneutical goal is not only an interpretation “worthy of God” but also one which is profitable for human virtue. Transgenerational punishment undermines both, in his view.

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.”

cultic/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

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 cultic-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 Trible, *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 Deuteronomistic 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 Deuteronomistic 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.”

¹⁰ Strangely, the priority of Exod 34:6–7 and derivative nature of 20:5–6 is assumed even by 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), 43–50, in his otherwise synchronic and narratively sensitive study. In analyzing

theological rationale which led the redactor to modify Exod 34:6–7 to its later form in Exod 20:5–6.¹¹ 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.*¹²

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 irrelevant¹³ 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.

¹¹ 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*, JPSTC (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.”

¹² 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 mentioning 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 relationship 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).

¹³ 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*

abrogated¹⁴ theological concept. Others invest the phrase with some significance but not in the sense of a literal transgenerational punishment, regarding it as doxological hyperbole,¹⁵ or as morally¹⁶ or socially¹⁷ 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 Spoke 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 *קָנַן* 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).

¹⁴ Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: JPS, 1991), 110, writes, “Over time ... intensification of the problem of evil led to a revision of this view (Exod 20:5), for it was perceived as engendering or deepening a pervasive feeling of hopelessness and apathy in an era of acute national crisis.... Jeremiah and Ezekiel felt compelled to deny cross-generational punishment.” Similarly, Peter Enns, *Exodus*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 415–16; William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, AB 2A (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 173; Daniel Friedmann, *To Kill and Take Possession: Law, Morality, and Society in Biblical Stories* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2002), 132–33; Bernard M. Levinson, *Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

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.”¹⁸

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.¹⁹ A father’s

Word and Presence: A Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy, ITC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 72, “Here is a solemn reminder that the consequences of our actions spread out to influence everyone within our total living environment.” Sarna, *Exodus*, 110, “Contemporary conduct inevitably has an impact upon succeeding generations. These historical effects are perceived in terms of God ‘visiting the sins’ of one faithless generation upon the next... This understanding of God’s governance of the world ... has an educational function.”

¹⁷ Enns, *Exodus*, 416–17, claims this is not a statement of “literal blood descendants paying for their fathers’ sins,” but rather an affirmation that “the degree to which Israel obeys the commandments ... will affect the long-term vibrancy and health of the community.” Joel S. Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility in the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 188, hopes that such passages “can provide a much needed corrective to current ethical thinking that seems to treat society as nothing more than a collection of unrelated individuals who just happen to live together.” Morris A. Inch, *Scripture as Story* (New York: University Press of America, 2000), 36, “The accompanying rationale recognizes the social implications of our actions. That is, whatever we do or fail to do impacts others.”

¹⁸ In fact, not all categorize אֶלְפִּים as a number; אֶלְאָ can also denote a family or military unit. See below.

¹⁹ Georg Fischer and Dominik Markl, *Das Buch Exodus*, NSKAT 2 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2009), 225, explain, “d.h. in jener Großfamilie, die unter einem Dach zusammenlebt und in der sich Handlungsmuster oft fortsetzen.” So also Daniel I. Block, “‘You Shall Not Covet Your Neighbor’s Wife’: A Study in Deuteronomic Domestic Ideology,” *JETS* 53 (2010): 458n28, “It is preferable to interpret the idiom horizontally, that is, the effects of the sins of the head of the household extend to the entire *bêt ’āb*, ‘household of the father.’ In ancient Israel, up to four generations could live at one time in the household of the patriarch.” Enns, *Exodus*, 416, criticizes the assumption of three or four generations living under one roof as “too speculative to be of definitive help (do we know that three or four generations lived under one roof?)” Helpful summaries and studies of the “household of the father” include: Laurence E. Stager, “The Archaeology of the Family in Ancient Israel,” *BASOR* 260 (Fall 1985) 1–35, esp. 17–23; Helmer Ringgren, “*’ābh*,” *TDOT* 1:1–19, esp. 8–10; Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Household in Ancient Israel and Early Judaism,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Leo G. Perdue (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 169–85; Shunya Bendor, *The Social Structure of Ancient Israel: The Institution of the Family (Beit ’ab) from the Settlement to the End of the Monarchy*, JBS 7 (Jerusalem: Simor, 1996). Scoralick “JHWH, JHWH,” 148–49, emphasizes the three or four generations of the “house of the father” as the

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.²⁰ 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.²¹ 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.

²⁰ Donald E. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 238, "The sins of one family member will bring suffering on the whole family, all the generations now alive." Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster, 1974), 405, may also suggest a "one fell swoop" interpretation, when he comments that Exod 20:5 is couched "in the set terminology of the ban"—that is, the holy war imperative that entire groups be annihilated, including children. So also Walther Zimmerli, *The Law and the Prophets: A Study of the Meaning of the Old Testament*, trans. R. E. Clements (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 58, suggests that the formula "presumably stems from the law commanding the destruction of certain persons and property which are placed under Yahweh's ban (Heb. *herem*)." Dale Patrick, *Old Testament Law* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1985), 47, emphasizes that both fathers and sons are punished, as the iniquity "comes back to haunt the perpetrators and their successors." See also David Noel Freedman, "God Compassionate and Gracious," *WWat* 6 (1955): 14–15; Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 81; Walther Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline*, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978), 111.

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.”²² 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.”²³ This dynamic is sometimes associated with ancient views of a “curse.”²⁴

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.²⁵

Another alternative sees a *delay* at work in God’s transgenerational visitation of sins, so

²² Milgrom, *Numbers*, 395. Milgrom accents this meaning for the Decalogue occurrence of the phrase, but relates the same phrase in Exod 34:7 and Num 14:18 to the gracious deferral of punishment.

²³ Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 418.

²⁴ Josef Scharbert, *Solidarität in Segen und Fluch im Alten Testament und in seiner Umwelt*, BBB 14 (Bonn: Hanstein, 1958), 127–28, considers corporate conceptions of guilt and punishment in Israel under the ancient concept of a curse, noting the function of the formula in 20:5 as limiting the curse’s reach. Thomas W. Mann, *The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 154, also connects Deut 5:9 (= Exod 20:5) to the category of a curse: “The curse is a malignant power that extends beyond those who are originally responsible, reaching down through several generations. Once invoked, the curse cannot be avoided or expelled, only endured until it is lifted.”

²⁵ Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics*, 327–28, “Numbers 14:20–35 sheds light on the enactment of the divine name, particularly on the logic of YHWH’s visitation. In this context, YHWH’s visitation to the fourth generation seems to mean that judgement encompasses all succeeding generations as long as the rebellious age group remains alive. While they are alive, the innocent youth is to remain with their parents in the wilderness as shepherds and are to partake in the punishment (14:33). Once the condemned generation died, the children will no longer share in the guilt and judgement of their parents.” So also Mark J. Boda, *A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament*, Siphut 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 45.

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 נָשָׂא עוֹן in Exod 34:7a, where נָשָׂא 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

²⁶ Noel D. Osborn and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on Exodus*, UBSHS (New York: United Bible Societies, 1999), 474, present this position in their translation notes for Exod 20:5: “Here punishment is not placed on the fathers, but rather upon the children.” Similarly, Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 336, designates this a “vicarious punishment.” Pseudo-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 11:6, is even more concrete in his paraphrase of Exod 20:5: “For I am the Lord your God, a zealous God, and visiting the sins of the sleeping sinners upon the living sons.” C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1900; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 1:117, point out, however, that the Exodus formula says “nothing about whether and how fathers themselves are punished.”

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 Dekaloganfang 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.

²⁹ Schenker, *Versöhnung und Widerstand*, 87, sees an intended double meaning in the verb נָשָׂא: either that God dissolves/cancels iniquity so that it no longer exists, or that he retains it for later. A similar reading of the verb נָשָׂא is suggested by Yochanan Muffs, *Love and Joy: Law, Language and Religion in Ancient Israel* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 20; Herbert C. Brichto, “The Worship of the Golden Calf: A Literary Analysis of a Fable on Idolatry,” *HUCA* 54 (1983): 18–19; and Scoralick, “JHWH, JHWH,” 148.

“on the great day of judgment.”³⁰

3.1.1.b. Upon Innocent or Guilty Sons?

Do Exod 20:5 and 34:7b envision the punishment of innocent sons of guilty fathers³¹ or only guilty sons of guilty fathers?³² 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.³³ 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 luden und die die gleiche ist wie die ihrer Väter.”

³³ Cornelius Houtman, *Exodus*, trans. Sierd Woudstra, HCOT, (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 3:28, states that the prepositional phrase “applies equally to the children and the parents.” The targumim also paraphrase Exod 20:5 thus. Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 117, argues that the syntax requires this, and that if לַשְׂנְאִי “referred to the fathers alone, it would necessarily stand after אֲבוֹתָי.” Josef Scharbert, “Formgeschichte und Exegese von Ex 34,6f und seiner Parallelen,” *Bib* 38 (1957): 146, takes לַשְׂנְאִי as a dative expression modifying the clause “I am a jealous God,” specifying that Yahweh is such a God to those who hate him. Thus, “die Drohung bzw. Verheissung richtet sich nicht an die Hassenden bzw. Liebenden, insofern sie Väter für die kommenden Generationen sind, sondern an jede einzelne Generation, die hasst bzw. liebt. Hass oder Liebe sind das allein Entscheidende dafür, wie sich Gott zu den Menschen verhält.” For Scharbert, this reading is confirmed by his assumed connection between Exod 20:5 (= Deut 5:9) and Deuteronomic thought, in light of passages such as Deut 4:25–31; 29:9–30:10; and esp. Deut 7:9–10. Note also the rendering of Konrad Schmid, “Kollektivschuld? Der Gedanke übergreifende Schuldzusammenhänge im Alten Testament und im Alten Orient,” *ZABR* 5 (1999): 219, “Die Schuld der Väter wird dann an den Söhnen

exclusively to “fathers,” however, then the punished sons may themselves be innocent.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.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.³⁶

[usw.] ... heimgesucht, wenn sie Jhwh hassen,” which implies the guilt of the sons. Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Abraham and the Righteous of Sodom,” *JJS* 33 (1982): 124, views the prepositional phrase as a later addition to v. 5, and explains: “The addition would, in other words, have the purpose of making clear that if there is a solidarity in guilt between the generations, it is because the children choose to follow their parents’ example, and not because the guilt of one generation is transmitted to the next by virtue of the way God administers justice.” Waltke and Yu, *Old Testament Theology*, 418, after posing the difficulty of reconciling Exod 20:5 with Ezek 18, suggest, “The answer lies in the phrase ‘of those who hate me.’” Likewise Horace D. Hummel, *Ezekiel 1–20*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), “The determinative verbs (participles) remain ‘those who hate me’ and ‘those who love me,’ which indicate that the subsequent generations continue in unbelief or in faith, respectively, and so are requited by God accordingly.” Bernard Grossfeld, ed., *The Targum Onkelos to Exodus* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988), 54–55, esp. 55n2, observes that Targum Onkelos exhibits the strong rabbinic tradition of understanding the descendants in Exod 20:5 as those who “follow their fathers in sinning.” See also James Kugel, *The Bible As It Was* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 432–34. Sarna, *Exodus*, 111, writes, “This phrase may modify ‘parents’ or ‘children’ or both. Rabbinic exegesis seized on the ambiguity to soften the apparent harshness of the statement: The verdict applies only when subsequent generations perpetuate the evils of their parents.”

³⁴ Osborn and Hatton, *Handbook*, 474, assert without explanation, “*Of those who hate me* refers back to *the fathers*, not to the future generations” (authors’ emphasis). Francesco Spadafora, *Collettivismo e Individualismo nel Vecchio Testamento*, QE 2 (Rovigo: Istituto 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 indefinamente la mia benevolenza sui discendenti di coloro che mi amano!’ Le generazioni che disendono da una generazione prava 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).

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

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, *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,”³⁷ “psychic community,”³⁸ “family solidarity,”³⁹ or “corporate identity.”⁴⁰ 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.”⁴¹ In other words, there is a

of Scoralick and Assmann in footnote 19 above.

³⁷ See H. Wheeler Robinson, “The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality,” BZAW 66 (1936): 49–62; *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964). Leaning on heavily evolutionary and Eurocentric models from psychology, anthropology, and legal history, Robinson postulated a corporate social and legal identity within ancient Israel, in which the individual had no unique standing separate from his clan, and the clan itself derived its identity from a real or fictive descent from a single father. Significant critiques of Robinson’s ambiguous terminology, dependence on discredited anthropological studies, and illegitimate application of the concept to legal issues within the OT have been raised by J. Roy Porter, “The Legal Aspects of the Concept of ‘Corporate Personality’ in the Old Testament,” VT 15 (1965): 361–80; and John W. Rogerson, “The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality: A Re-examination,” in *Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament*, ed. Bernhard Lang, IRT 8 (London: SPCK, 1985), 43–59; repr. from JTS NS 21 (1970): 1–16; and Jurrien Mol, *Collective and Individual Responsibility: A Description of Corporate Personality in Ezekiel 18 and 20*, SSN (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 111–61. Rex Mason, “H. Wheeler Robinson Revisited,” BQ 37 (1998): 222–25, while acknowledging the validity of criticisms, argues for the continuing value of Robinson’s thought in this area, suggesting that “in a period which has seen so extensive a re-introduction of nineteenth-century competition between individuals in the name of greater efficiency and profit..., his emphasis on the corporate, the communal, has a prophetic ring about it.” Freedman, “God Compassionate and Gracious,” 14, among others, uses the language of “corporate personality” in explaining Exod 34:7.

³⁸ Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture I–II*, trans. Aslang Møller (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 1:50.

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.

solidarity of sins, not merely a solidarity of identity.⁴²

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.⁴³ 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

⁴² Scharbert, “Formgeschichte,” 143–44, “Bewahren die Nachkommen die Solidarität des Charakters, der Gesinnung, der religiösen Haltung mit den frommen Vätern, dann erfährt die göttliche Huld auch nach unzähligen Generationen keine Minderung. Bilden aber die Nachkommen eine solidarische Einheit mit gottlosen Vätern, dann müssen sie, auch wenn Gott lange zugewartet hat, damit rechnen, dass die göttliche Langmut einmal aufhört und die Bosheit ein Mass erreicht, für das es keine Nachsicht mehr gibt. Dann müssen die Söhne auch die Sünden der Väter noch mittragen und mitbüßen.”

⁴³ Klaus Koch, “Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?” *ZTK* 52 (1955): 1–42; trans. and pub. as “Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?” in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, ed. James L. Crenshaw, IRT 4 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 57–87, ties deeds and consequences tightly together in “eine schicksalwirkende Tatsphäre” (a consequence-effecting sphere of action). Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper, 1962), 1:385, follows Koch: “Retribution is not a new action which comes upon the person concerned from somewhere else; it is rather a last ripple of the act itself which attaches to its agent almost as something material.” However, Koch’s thesis that there is no biblical doctrine of divine retribution (in the sense of God intervening in the world) but rather a moral order in which evil deeds have built-in consequences, is now widely viewed as overstated, or at least weakly argued. His arguments have been countered effectively by Josef Scharbert, “Das Verbum PQD in der Theologie des Alten Testaments,” *BZ* 4 (1960): 209–26; repr. in *Um das Prinzip der Vergeltung in Religion und Recht des Alten Testaments*, ed. Klaus Koch (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 278–99; and Patrick Miller, *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets* (Chico, CA.: Scholars Press, 1982), 132–39. See also D. A. Carson, “The Wrath of God,” in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 37–64, who interacts helpfully with Koch specifically (pp. 42–45) and with these issues more broadly. Lennart Boström, *The God of the Sages: The Portrayal of God in the Book of Proverbs*, ConBOT 29 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1990), 134, writes regarding Koch’s thesis, “We detect the influence of such a view only in a limited number of sayings [in Proverbs] and never in contrast to belief in the Lord and retribution.” Terence Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 341n28, notes: “The interpreter ... does not have to choose between God and the moral order; both are involved in every move from sin to consequence. The moral order is a divine agent, and God is genuinely active in and through that agent.” See also Fretheim, “Issues of Agency in Exodus,” in *The Book of Exodus: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Craig A. Evans, and Joel N. Lohr (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 591–609. Similarly, Rolf P. Knierim, “On Punishment in the Hebrew Bible,” in *God’s Word for Our World, Volume II: Theological and Cultural Studies in Honor of Simon John De Vries*, ed. J. Harold Ellens et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 216–32.

conduct *inevitably* has an impact upon succeeding generations.”⁴⁴ Descendants 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.”⁴⁵

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.⁴⁶

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).⁴⁷

[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.⁴⁸

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

⁴⁴ Sarna, *Exodus*, 110.

⁴⁵ Samuel R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, 3rd ed., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 277. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 467, cites and affirms Driver. Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, 243, dismisses such explanations as mere “modernization[s] of the verse,” “apologetic interpretations ... which it is not possible to accept.”

⁴⁶ J. Gordon McConville, *Deuteronomy*, ApOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 127.

⁴⁷ Langdon B. Gilkey, “The Political Dimensions of Theology,” *JR* 59 (1979): 160; cited in Mann, *Book of the Torah*, 108. Parenthetical reference to Exod 20:5 in the original.

⁴⁸ James K. Bruckner, *Exodus*, NIBCOT 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 302, 306. Italics and boldface in original, indicating variance of paraphrase from NIV wording, are removed here.

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

⁴⁹ J. Carl Laney, "God's Self-Revelation in Exodus 34:6–8," *BSac* 158 (2001): 50–51.

⁵⁰ Wright, "The Divine Name," 182–83.

⁵¹ Driver, *Book of Exodus*, 195–96 (author's emphasis).

⁵² John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 2 vols. (Carlisle, PA: Evangelical Press, 2000–2001), 2:39.

⁵³ Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 285. Parenthetical reference in original.

⁵⁴ George Jackson, *The Ten Commandments* (New York: Revell, 1898), 55.

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

⁵⁶ R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 2 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 156.

⁵⁷ Annemarie Ohler, *The Bible Looks at Fathers*, trans. Omar Kaste (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 95.

⁵⁸ Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (London: Continuum, 1994), 9–10, 11.

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 פקד (“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 פקד” below, particularly the position of André Wénin.

consequences. While some scholars speak in more direct terms of Yahweh's punishment or even "vengeance,"⁶³ few describe the kind of active, personal, determinative, "interventionist" punishment by God exhibited in Exod 1–15.⁶⁴ 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,⁶⁵ and the later OT accent on "the iniquity of our fathers" as a national (rather than merely familial) reality,⁶⁶ 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):⁶⁷ "God will visit ... covenant sanctions upon the community for generations to come" with decisive impact on "the relation Yahweh will have with Israel."⁶⁸

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 אלפים 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."

⁶⁶ Lev 26:39; Jer 11:10; Lam 5:7; Ezra 9:7; Neh 9:2; and Dan 9:16. See Josef Scharbert, "Unsere Sünden und die Sünden unserer Väter," *BZ* n. s. 2 (1958): 20.

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.

⁶⁸ Brueggemann, "Book of Exodus," 947.

groups.⁶⁹ If a number, does it imply thousands of people⁷⁰ (*breadth* of mercy) or thousands of generations⁷¹ (*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?⁷² Is third or fourth merely a biblical idiom (“x or x+1”) for “whatever number” or “plenty of”⁷³—and if so, is it still dwarfed by,⁷⁴ or perhaps rhetorically equivalent to,⁷⁵ 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)?⁷⁶

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

⁶⁹ Bernard Lang, “The Number Ten and the Iniquity of the Fathers,” *ZAW* 118 (2006): 236, takes it as “tribes, clans, or families,” and sees it as an equivalent parallel with “third or fourth generation,” which he takes as a reference to a family unit as well, an allusion to the four-generation “house of the father.” Similarly, Pieter A. 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): 43; Shunya Bendor, *The Social Structure*, 94–97; Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, 1:50.

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.

⁷³ Stuart, *Exodus*, 454, citing Stanley Gevirtz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 18–21. See also Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, 297.

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.

Exod 20:5 and 34:7.⁷⁷ The phrase has garnered interest in several areas of study, including: (1) lexical studies of the multivalent verb נָקַד ; (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 נָקַד

E. A. Speiser ventures, “There is probably no other Hebrew verb that has caused translators as much trouble as *pqd*.”⁷⁸ Key studies are those of Klaus Koch (1955), Josef Scharbert (1960), Gunnel André (1980), and J. C. Lübke (1990), supplemented by a number of articles.⁷⁹ 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.⁸⁰ Lübke investigates נָקַד according to componential 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

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.”

⁷⁸ Ephraim A. Speiser, “Census and Ritual Expiation in Mari and Israel,” *BASOR* 149 (Feb. 1958): 21.

⁷⁹ Koch, “Vergeltungsdogma?”; Scharbert, “Verbum PQD”; Gunnel André, *Determining the Destiny: PQD in the Old Testament*, ConBOT 16 (Lund, Sweden: Gleerup, 1980); André, “ נָקַד *pāqad*,” *TDOT* 12:50–63; John Clifton Lübke, “Hebrew Lexicography: A New Approach,” *JSem* 2 (1990): 1–15.

⁸⁰ André, *TDOT* 12:57–59.

consequences, chastise.”⁸¹

While פקד is often paired with the preposition על, marking the recipient in contexts of divine punishment, no systematic study of the collocation על פקד 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 על פקד 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,⁸² 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?”⁸³ 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]”⁸⁴ and are ultimately anthropomorphisms, serving as “metaphorical pointer[s] to the inescapable

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.

⁸³ 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), 110–59; repr. of “Is There a Doctrine of ‘Collective Retribution’ in the Hebrew Bible?” *HUCA* 65 (1994): 35–89.

⁸⁴ Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 151.

consequences of evil conduct.”⁸⁵ 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.⁸⁶

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.⁸⁷ He

⁸⁵ Krašovec, *Reward, Punishment, and Forgiveness*, 153–54.

⁸⁶ Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility*, 13–14. Richard A. Freund, “Individual vs. Collective Responsibility: From the Ancient Near East and the Bible to the Greco-Roman World,” *SJOT* 11 (1997): 279–304, supplements the work of Kaminsky, demonstrating (p. 280) that, while allowing for an ebb and flow of emphasis based on socio-historical circumstances, “collective and individual responsibility are not prima facie incompatible and seem to have coexisted together in antiquity.” Freund pushes beyond the Hebrew Bible, tracing corporate notions, including the language of divine visitation for the sins of fathers, forward into the Apocrypha, the targumim, and the sectarian literature of the Qumran community.

⁸⁷ Barnabas Lindars, “Ezekiel and Individual Responsibility,” *VT* 15 (1965): 452–67; Herbert G. May, “Individual Responsibility and Retribution,” *HUCA* 32 (1961): 107–20; Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, AB 22 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983); Paul Joyce, “The Individual and the Community,” in *Beginning Old Testament Study*, ed. J. Rogerson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 75–89; *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel*, JSOTSup 51 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989); Gordon H. Matties, *Ezekiel 18 and the Rhetoric of Moral Discourse*, SBLDS 126 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1990). Since Kaminsky’s monograph was published,

proposes that Jer 31 and Ezek 18

may have arisen as *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.⁸⁸

Kaminsky concludes that individual and corporate conceptions “function in a complementary, rather than a contradictory, fashion,”⁸⁹ and he warns,

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.⁹⁰

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.”⁹¹ 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

other relevant studies include Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Can These Bones Live?: The Problem of the Moral Self in the Book of Ezekiel* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000); Christopher J. H. Wright, “The Way of the Individual,” in *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 363–86; Andrew Mein, *Ezekiel and the Ethics of Exile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Jurrien Mol, *Collective and Individual Responsibility: A Description of Corporate Personality in Ezekiel 18 and 20* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

⁸⁸ Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility*, 153.

⁸⁹ Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility*, 178.

⁹⁰ Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility*, 119.

⁹¹ Kaminsky, *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.

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).⁹²

Fishbane translates פקד in Exod 34:7 as “requite.”⁹³ 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.⁹⁴ He refers to the visiting phrase as “the *theologoumena* of extended grace and punishment,” as “the divine

⁹² Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 339, 343.

⁹³ Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 335.

⁹⁴ Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 336. Here Fishbane cites Moshe Greenberg, “Some Postulates of Biblical Criminal Law,” in *Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume*, ed. M. Haran (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1960), 5–28. Greenberg emphasizes the *distinction* between OT and ANE laws in terms of *human justice*, citing examples in which ANE laws call for the death of the builder’s son if a collapsing house kills the houseowner’s son; prostitution of the wife of a seducer to the father of the girl seduced; etc. Exodus 21:31 conspicuously does not extend this practice to the son of an ox-owner, whose ox gores and kills another man’s son.

teachings of deferred punishment,” and as “the notion that divine mercy was expressed through deferred punishment.”⁹⁵ 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 *tradicum* 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 controversion. 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*⁹⁶ 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.”⁹⁷ 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.⁹⁸

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.

⁹⁵ Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 343, 436.

⁹⁶ Bernard M. Levinson, *Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Much of the material in *Legal Revision* was published previously in “The Human Voice in Divine Revelation: The Problem of Authority in Biblical Law,” in *Innovations in Religious Traditions: Essays in the Interpretation of Religious Change*, ed. Michael A. Williams, Collett Cox, and Martin S. Jaffee, *RelSoc* 31 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1992), 35–71; and “‘You Must Not Add Anything To What I Command You’: Paradoxes of Canon and Authorship in Ancient Israel,” *Numen* 50 (2003): 1–51. A shorter version of *Legal Revision* was previously published in French in 2005 under the title *L’Herméneutique de l’innovation. Canon et exégèse dans l’Israël biblique* (Brussels: Éditions Lessius, 2005).

⁹⁷ Levinson, *Legal Revision*, 11.

⁹⁸ Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 18–19, also speaks of the “inner-biblical dynamic of *tradicum-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” terminology⁹⁹ and the notion of “visiting iniquity of fathers upon sons to the third and fourth generation” in connection with neo-Assyrian treaties.¹⁰⁰ 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.”¹⁰¹ 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.”¹⁰² 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.¹⁰³ Therefore, Levinson’s thesis profits from an “original”

⁹⁹ Against prevailing views, Levinson does not read the prepositional phrases “to those who hate/love me” as late additions to Exod 20:5–6.

¹⁰⁰ Levinson, *Legal Revision*, 51–54.

¹⁰¹ Levinson, *Legal Revision*, 54 (my emphasis).

¹⁰² Levinson, *Legal Revision*, 53n52, 54n54, 55n56, 167.

¹⁰³ 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.”¹⁰⁴ 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 betonten theologischen Bedeutung von Ex 34,6f. ist die exegetische Literatur zur Stelle erstaunlich spärlich.”¹⁰⁵ 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.¹⁰⁶ 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 קָפַד , 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.”¹⁰⁷ 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.¹⁰⁸

Robert Dentan’s 1963 study, “The Literary Affinities of Exodus xxxiv 6f,” explicitly seeks to “examine the formula in isolation from its present context.”¹⁰⁹ 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.”¹¹⁰ (Thus, Dentan shifts the meaning of the passage away from its narrative-contextual significance entirely.¹¹¹) He ascribes the transgenerational language specifically to wisdom influences (cf. Job 5:4; 20:10)¹¹² 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.”¹¹³ Yet he offers little explanation, merely observing that “the

¹⁰⁷ Scharbert, “Formgeschichte,” 139.

¹⁰⁸ Scharbert, “Formgeschichte,” 149.

¹⁰⁹ Dentan, “Literary Affinities,” 38.

¹¹⁰ Dentan, “Literary Affinities,” 48–49.

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.”¹¹⁴

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”¹¹⁵ and because it is “the speech to which Israel ‘regresses’ in times of most acute crisis.”¹¹⁶ In his view, Exod 34:6–7 reveals “a Character who has a profound disjunction at the core of the Subject’s life.”¹¹⁷ 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.”¹¹⁸ 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).

¹¹⁶ Walter Brueggemann, “Crisis-Evoked, Crisis-Resolving Speech,” *BTB* 24 (1994): 91.

¹¹⁷ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 268.

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.”¹¹⁹

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,¹²⁰ 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 Spieckermann¹²¹ 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.¹²²

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

¹¹⁹ Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics*, 182.

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.

¹²¹ Hermann Spieckermann, “Barmherzig und gnädig ist der Herr...,” *ZAW* 102 (1990): 1–18.

¹²² This idea is further developed in Spieckermann, “God’s Steadfast Love: Toward A New Conception of Old Testament Theology,” *Bib* 81 (2000): 305–27; “Wrath and Mercy as Crucial Terms of Theological Hermeneutics,” 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), 3–16.

situation which gave rise to this bold, grace-tilting 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

¹²³ Spieckermann, “Barmherzig und gnädig,” 9.

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 וַיִּשָׂא עוֹן 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 chiasmic structure in Exod 34:6–7 in which the *Stichwort* טוה 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 geschieht 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.

¹²⁹ Scoralick, “YHWH, YHWH,” 154.

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,"¹³⁰ and Walter Moberly's *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34*.¹³¹ 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."¹³²

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.¹³³ 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

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).

¹³¹ R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34*, JSOTSup 22 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983).

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.

¹³³ Michael Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, FAT 2/8 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004). Moberly, *Mountain of God*, focuses on the unity of the story related in Exod 32–34, and treats Exod 34:6–7 within this discussion. Widmer, on the other hand, focuses on Moses' intercessory prayers in Exod 32–34 and in Num 13–14, and treats Exod 34:6–7 as an element within this "prayer dynamic."

stands as a “divine re-characterization.”¹³⁴ Relating 34:6–7 to God’s promise in 33:19, he identifies Yahweh as its speaker, so that “according to the intrinsic logic of the text, Exodus 34:6–7 contains not some kind of credo or formula, but YHWH’s self-revealed attributes.”¹³⁵ 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.¹³⁶

Widmer pays particular attention to the transgenerational language in Exod 34:7b. Building on Scharbert and others, he reads the *קָדַם*-phrase to mean that “God comes first to examine the sins of successive generations before measures are taken.”¹³⁷ Regarding the preceding language of Yahweh “bearing iniquity” (*נִשָּׂא עֲוֹן*), 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.”¹³⁸

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 *נִשָּׂא* is enforced and exemplified in Numbers 14 where YHWH patiently ‘bears’ Israel’s sins until a time when He calls them to accountability.”¹³⁹ 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.”¹⁴⁰ In Numbers, children suffer for forty years with their parents in the wilderness—

¹³⁴ Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics*, 184, 202.

¹³⁵ Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics*, 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 (נָשָׂא) 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 (פָּקַד) 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), iniquity of fathers (עון אבות), third and fourth (רביעם and שלשים), acting in lovingkindness to/for (עשה חסד ל), to/for thousands (לאלפים), hating and loving (שנא and אהב), preserving lovingkindness (נצר חסד), forgiving iniquity (נשא עון), and will certainly not leave unpunished (ונקה לא ינקה). 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 על עון...על (“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 על־פני, 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 קנא 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

¹ Verses 3 and 4 terminate with *rebia* ‘ (rather than with *sop pāsûq* and *sillûq*) in many MT manuscripts, and there is an *atnah* (rather than *sop pāsûq*) before the *sillûq* 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).

² See Josh 24:19. H. G. L. Peels, “קנא,” *NIDOTTE* 3:938. Joüon, 1:252–53, lists the forms under two separate nominal morphologies: *qattal* (§88.H.a.) and *qattāl* (§88.I.a.). However, he notes that *qattāl* is rare, and it carries no characteristic nuance which would separate it from *qattal*. Furthermore, Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 14n12, notes that the Nash Papyrus “does not reflect a witness for the biblical text in the generally accepted sense of the word because it presumably contains a liturgical text,” a reference to its significant conflation of the Exodus and Deuteronomy texts of the Decalogue, written on a single papyrus leaf and followed by the Shema. William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, AB 2B (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 111, suggests that “Nash preserves the original pronunciation (*qannō*’), MT the original spelling (*qn*’).”

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.

⁴ M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, “Hebrew Biblical Manuscripts: Their History and Their Place in the HUBP Edition,” *Bib* 48 (1967): 243–90; cited in Tov, *Textual Criticism*, 38–39.

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 נצַר חֶסֶד in v. 7, the LXX expands this to two verbs and two qualities: δικαιοσύνην διατηρῶν καὶ 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 חֶסֶד 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 נצַר, yet the second verb ποιέω (הַעֲשֵׂה) is more expected in expressing acts of חֶסֶד and appears in the parallel expression in Exod 20:6. The LXX rendering δικαιοσύνη

⁵ Judith E. Sanderson, *An Exodus Scroll from Qumran: 4QpaleoExod^m 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 נִדְּוָה in Exod 34:9.

⁷ On חֶסֶד as δικαιοσύνη, see Gen 19:19; 20:13; 21:23; 24:27; and Exod 15:13. On חֶסֶד as ἔλεος, see Gen 24:12, 14, 44, 49; Gen 40:14; and esp. Exod 20:6. Exod 34:6 renders the expression חֶסֶד־רַחֲמֵי with πολυέλεος. See also Josh 2:12, 14.

⁸ Consider the narrative contexts of Gen 19:19; 20:13; 21:23; and 24:27. Note also the rendering of the Hebrew pairing חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת in Gen 24:27 and 24:49 as δικαιοσύνην...καὶ ἀλήθειαν and ἔλεος καὶ 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 צִדְקָה or צְדָקָה, and where the paired expression חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת (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 נצר 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 וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנְקָה 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 וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנְקָה (“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 כי אנכי יהוה אלהיך אל קנא פקד עון אבת על-בנים על-שלשים ועל-רבעים לשנאי:

6 ועשה חסד לאלפים לאהבי ולשמרי מצותי:

4.2.1. כי, For, Because

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

⁹ This doubling may also be influenced by the final words of the previous verse, Exod 34:6: וְרַב־חַסֵּד וְאֵמֶת. As noted above, the LXX of Gen 24:49 renders וְאֵמֶת חַסֵּד וְאֵמֶת as ἔλεος καὶ δικαιοσύνη.

¹⁰ Benyamim Tsedaka and Sharon Sullivan, *The Israelite Samaritan Version of the Torah: First English Translation Compared with the Masoretic Version* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 210.

¹¹ Marinus D. Koster, *The Peshitta of Exodus: The Development of Its Text in the Course of Fifteen Centuries*, trans. C. A. Franken-Battershill (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1977), 536–40.

evidential) sense, giving the evidence of or argument for the preceding assertion,¹² in this case the injunction against having other gods and idolatry. Rifat Sonsino lists כִּי-clauses first in his classification of the literary forms of the motive clauses in OT law. “Most often, [כִּי] expresses the reason behind the law.... On occasion, it may also introduce a dependent parenetic clause.”¹³

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.¹⁴ 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.”¹⁵ 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 20.¹⁶ Berend Gemser notes that the Decalogue contains three such motive clauses, all introduced by כִּי (Exod 20:5–6, 7, 11).¹⁷ Sonsino reckons a fourth, Exod 20:12, the promise attached to the command to honor parents, introduced by לְמַעַן (“so that”) rather than by כִּי (“because”), yet

¹² Jöüion, §170*da*; Arnold and Choi, §4.3.4.b.

¹³ Rifat Sonsino, *Motive Clauses in Hebrew Law: Biblical Forms and Near Eastern Parallels*, SBLDS 45 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980), 70–71.

¹⁴ Sonsino, *Motive Clauses*, 110–15.

¹⁵ Sonsino, *Motive Clauses*, 114.

¹⁶ Berend Gemser, “The Motive Clause in Old Testament Law,” in *Adhuc Loquitur: Collected Essays of Dr. B. Gemser*, ed. Adrianus van Selms and Adam S. van der Woude, POS 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 111–12, “The motive clauses ... testify to the deep religious sense and concentrated theological thinking of their formulators.... The motive clauses constitute an instructive compendium of the religion, theology, ethics and democratic, humanitarian outlook of the people of Israel as represented in the Old Testament laws.”

¹⁷ Gemser, “Motive Clause,” 97.

standing as an additional significant parallel to Exod 20:5b–6.¹⁸

4.2.2. אֲנִי (not אָנֹכִי), The Longer Pronoun “I”

While the strict lexical meaning of the independent first person pronoun אֲנִי requires little comment, the question does arise whether any significance attaches to the choice of אֲנִי יְהוָה (rather than אָנֹכִי יְהוָה) in 20:5. The usage of these alternate lexemes is fairly balanced in Exodus, with 39 occurrences of אָנֹכִי and 22 of אֲנִי, but the use of אֲנִי with the Tetragrammaton as its predicate occurs only in 20:2 and 20:5.¹⁹ Elsewhere in the OT, this אֲנִי יְהוָה 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 אֲנִי יְהוָה are in the highly rhetorical passages of Isa 43:11, 44:24, and 51:15. In contrast, the expression אָנֹכִי יְהוָה is found 17x in Exodus alone, and 196x in the Hebrew Bible. The comparative rareness of אֲנִי יְהוָה has fueled rabbinic²⁰ and source-critical²¹ speculations.

¹⁸ Sonsino, *Motive Clauses*, 86.

¹⁹ The sequence אֲנִי יְהוָה also occurs in Exod 4:11, but here יְהוָה is in apposition to אֲנִי, 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). אֲנִי 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 אֲנִי as an E tendency, in contrast to the exclusive use of אָנֹכִי 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 אֲנִי are explained by its heightened deictic force.

Granting that later OT texts do demonstrate a preference for אָנִי,²² the clustering of the expression אֲנִי יְהוָה in texts directly referencing Yahweh’s self-proclamation at Sinai may suggest another explanation for the use of אֲנִי יְהוָה in Exod 20:2 and 5. While semantically equivalent to אָנִי, the more distinct אֲנִי may be employed here precisely because it is more distinct. With an extra syllable and longer vowels, it is rhythmically more *replete*.²³ Preceded and followed in Exodus by 17 repetitions of אֲנִי יְהוָה, the exclusive use of אֲנִי יְהוָה in Exod 20 is more *rare*. Thus, the expression אֲנִי 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. יהוה, אלהים, and אל, Yahweh, Elohim, and El

The first two of these appellations for Israel’s God are among the most common words in the OT, with יהוה occurring more than 6800x and אלהים 2600x. The noun אל is comparatively less frequent, with 238 occurrences.²⁴ 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.²⁵

The divine name יהוה 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*

²² Charles L. Feinberg, “אָנִי (’ānōkî),” *TWOT* 1:58; Haiim B. Rosén, “אָנִי and אֲנִי: Essai de grammaire, interpretation et traduction,” in *East and West: Selected Writings in Linguistics by Haiim B. Rosén: Part Two: Hebrew and Semitic Linguistics* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1984), 280–81; Mark F. Rooker, *Biblical Language in Transition: The Language of the Book of Ezekiel*, JSOTSup 90 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990), 72–74. Rooker notes that אֲנִי does not occur at all Haggai, Zech 1–8, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Ezra, or Esther, and only once each in Ezekiel, Malachi, Daniel, Nehemiah, and Chronicles.

²³ Walther Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 18, notes this aural weight and speaks of “the more profound sounding *’nky*.”

²⁴ Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *God of the Living: A Biblical Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 23.

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 היה 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:

²⁶ G. R. Driver, "The Original Form of the Name Yahweh: Evidence and Conclusion," *ZAW* 46 (1928): 24. Cited in Raymond Abba, "The Divine Name Yahweh," *JBL* 80 (1961): 321.

²⁷ William Foxwell Albright, "Contributions to Biblical Archaeology and Philology," *JBL* 43 (1924): 374–75; David Noel Freedman, "יהוה," *TDOT* 5:513–15; Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 65–66.

²⁸ Shelomo Dov Goitein, "YHWH the Passionate: The Monotheistic Meaning and Origin of the Name YHWH," *VT* 6 (1956): 7–8.

²⁹ Thomas Römer, *The Invention of God*, trans. Raymond Geuss (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 32–34.

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 יהוה אנכי 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.

³¹ Freedman, "יהוה," *TDOT* 5:515.

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 יהי 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)’”

³² Andrea D. Saner, “*Too Much to Grasp*”: Exodus 3:13–15 and the Reality of God, JTISup 11 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 30.

³³ Karla J. Bohmbach, “Names and Naming,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 944; cited in Máire Byrne, “The Importance of Divine Designations in Old Testament Theology,” *ITQ* 74 (2009): 339.

³⁴ Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *In Search of God: The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987): 12.

³⁵ See J. Gerald Janzen, “What’s in a Name? ‘Yahweh’ in Exodus 3 and the Wider Biblical Context,” *Int* 33 (1979): 229, “The primary context for our understanding of the meaning of the divine name Yahweh in the Bible is, not the history of the religion of Israel and of the ancient Near East generally, but the practice within the Bible of popular etymology.” See also Barry J. Beitzel, “Exodus 3:14 and the Divine Name: A Case of Biblical Paronomasia,” *TJ* 1 (1980): 5–20. While both scholars propose historical roots to the divine name which predate biblical usage, neither sees Exodus 3:14 as a direct clue to such usage. Instead, the expression יהוה אשר אהיה has its own purpose and role within the literary context which should serve as the basis for understanding the literary and theological significance of the Tetragrammaton with the book of Exodus.

seems more hermeneutically significant than the proposals above.³⁶ 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; 6:3³⁷) 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 (אלהיך), a jealous deity (אל), reckoning fathers’ sins....”³⁸ 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.³⁹ 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.”⁴⁰ 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 יהוה 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: ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὄν.

³⁷ The precise sense of Exod 6:3 has been widely debated, particularly the question whether the vocable 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.

³⁹ Moberly, *Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 87.

⁴⁰ This sufficing 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 and especially אל, 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, אל 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 אל and אלהים is often interchangeable, Franz has noted that אל 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 אל. The basic equivalency in meaning between אל and אלהים is attested in Ps 118:28, where אלי and אלהי stand in poetic parallelism. Note also the opening words of Ps 63:2: אלהים אתה אלי (“O *Elohim*, you are my *El!*”).

⁴² 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), 46.

⁴³ This claim opposes Frank Moore Cross, “אֱלֹהִים,” *TDOT* 1:257, 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 אל קנא, 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 אל + 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* 1:400. The function of אל as a common/generic noun is most starkly illustrated in Hos 11:9 and Isa 31:3, which assert that a subject is “god (אל) and not man (איש)” or “man (אדם) and not god (אל).”

⁴⁶ Matthias Franz, *Der barmherzige und gnädige Gott: Die Gnadenrede vom Sinai (Ex 34, 6–7) und ihre*

Exod 20:5: כי אנכי יהוה אלהיך אל קנא.

4.2.4. קנא, Jealous

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.”⁴⁷ Provan describes Yahweh’s jealousy as “an intolerance of rivals” and Thoennes as “an intolerant love.”⁴⁸ 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.”⁴⁹

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.”⁵⁰ The emotional intensity of קנא is captured by the pious exclamation,

Parallelen im Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt, BWANT 160 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003), 113–14. Another distinction in usage is that אל more often functions as a category, and אלהים, while still a common noun, makes specific reference to the God of Israel as the subject of verbs. Psalm 7:12 illustrates this (אלהים שופט צדיק ואל זעם) (בכל יום). Most English versions translate אל as a second predicate of אלהים rather than as its own subject of a second clause, that is, “God is a righteous judge, a god having indignation every day.” In contrast, KJV mistranslates, “God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day.” Ps 50:6b (כי אלהים שפט הוא) may be an exception, although no English translation renders it as “for he is a God who judges” (with God as the predicate, which the occurrence of אל here might have invited), but rather something like “for God himself is judge” (that is, with אלהים functioning as the subject noun).

⁴⁷ K. Erik Thoennes, *Godly Jealousy: A Theology of Intolerant Love* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2005), 13.

⁴⁸ Iain Provan, *Seriously Dangerous Religion: What the Old Testament Really Says and Why It Matters* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 70. Thoennes uses the phrase “intolerant love” as the subtitle of his book (see previous note).

⁴⁹ Contra John Kessler, *Old Testament Theology: Divine Call and Human Response* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 206.

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 קנאה: 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 אֵל קָנָא 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 theophanic 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, אנה, 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 גדולה), and with a great wrath (חמה גדולה) I am jealous for her” (8:2).⁵⁵ Frequently related to Yahweh’s anger, “קנא penetrates down further to the reason for his

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 חמה in Num 25:11; Ezek 5:13; 16:38, 42; 23:25; 36:6; Zech 8:2; Prov 6:34; 27:4; alongside חרון in Zeph 3:8; and alongside עברה in Zeph 1:18 and Ezek 38:19.

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

⁵⁵ See also Zech 1:14–15, which clarifies that this zealous 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 קנא 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 אל קנא 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 קנא 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 (כי) 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 (לשנא) and the use of the plural מצוה 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.

⁵⁷ E. Reuter, “קנא *qn'*,” *TDOT* 13:48.

⁵⁸ Mettinger, *In Search of God*, 74. See also Ortlund, *Zeal Without Knowledge*, 29.

⁵⁹ Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament*, TBS 7 (Leiden: Deo, 2005), 484.

⁶⁰ Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: JPS, 1996), 66.

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” (זנה), a concept closely related to divine jealousy (קנא), 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.⁶² 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.⁶³ 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.”⁶⁴ 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*.⁶⁵ The verbs of love and hate in 20:5–6 are frequently used in the Pentateuch to describe marital affection and

⁶² Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 242–43; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, AB 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 295–96; Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 65; Göran Larsson, *Bound for Freedom: The Book of Exodus in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 151–52; S. Dean McBride, “The Essence of Orthodoxy: Deuteronomy 5:6–10 and Exodus 20:2–6,” *Int* 60 (2006): 147; and Lane, *The Compassionate but Punishing God*, 43–44.

⁶³ H. G. L. Peels, “*קנא*,” *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 *קנאה* 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 *קנאי* and *קנאה* 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*’ (*קנא*) 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.

⁶⁵ Richard H. Bell, *Provoked to Jealousy: The Origin and Purpose of the Jealousy Motif in Romans 9–11*, WUNT 2/63 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 16.

devotion (אהבה, love)⁶⁶ or the withholding of due affection and love within a marriage (שנאה, hate).⁶⁷ Mills suggests that perhaps the marriage covenant is a more appropriate parallel to Sinai than a suzerainty-vassal treaty.⁶⁸ The double use of אִנְיָ 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.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.⁷⁰ However, acknowledging אִנְיָ 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.⁷¹ Brongers rejects the sense of “envious” or “jealous” for אִנְיָ as “einen

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

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

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.

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.”

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.”

⁷¹ Michael C. McCarthy, “Divine Wrath and Human Anger: Embarrassment Old and New,” *TS* 70 (2009): 845–74; Alastair H. B. Logan, “The Jealousy of God: Exod 20:5 in Gnostic and Rabbinic Theology,” in *Studia Biblica 1978*, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone, JSOTSup 11 (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1979), 197–200, discusses the denigration of the “jealousy” of God by Marcion and the gnostics. In our post-September-11th context, Peter Sloterdijk, *God’s Zeal: The Battle of Three Monotheisms*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 82, 96, warns against the “logic of the one” inherent in the portrayal of a jealous, exclusive deity: it fosters “zealous universalism” and “inherent supremacism” and becomes “the mother of intolerance.” Similarly, Christopher Craig Brittain, *Religion at Ground Zero: Theological Responses in Times of Crisis* (London: Continuum, 2011); Regina M. Schwartz, *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Christoph Dohmen, “‘Eifersüchtiger ist sein Name’ (Exod 34, 14): Ursprung und Bedeutung der alttestamentlichen Rede von Gottes Eifersucht,” *TZ* 46 (1990): 289, points out that “die Schwierigkeiten mit diesem ‘Charakterzug Gotte’ werden bei genauerem Hinsehen aber noch grösser, denn allzu häufig wird im Alten Testament die Eifersucht Gottes direkt mit Zorn, Gewalt, und Vernichtung in Verbindung gebracht.” John J. Collins, “The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimization of Violence,” *JBL* 122 (2003):

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 (קנא).” “The name identifies the very person,”⁷⁵ and, thus, a recognition of the anthropomorphic nature of קנא 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 קנאָת 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 קנא occurs, he tries to avoid ideas of ‘jealousy’ or ‘envy’.... Perhaps Brongers ... wants to remove any anthropopathic description of God in the OT.”

⁷³ John C. L. Gibson, *Language and Imagery in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 23, 26.

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, “קנא qn’,” *TDOT* 13:54.

“Yahweh’s jealousy ... is demanded by what he *is*.”⁷⁶ Third, while נָקַד 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

⁷⁶ John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC 3 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 287 (emphasis in original).

⁷⁷ Paul R. Raabe, “The Two ‘Faces’ of Yahweh: Divine Wrath and Mercy in the Old Testament,” in *And 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 נָקַד, the use of the Hiphil of נָקַד (“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 Reveal Our Deepest Questions About God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999), 107–19.

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.”⁸²

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.”⁸³ 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).”⁸⁴ 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.”⁸⁵

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*.⁸⁶ On the one hand, God is

⁸² Yochanan Muffs, *Love and Joy: Law, Language and Religion in Ancient Israel* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 13. J. A. Baird, *The Justice of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1963), 71–72, gives a similar warning against views in NT scholarship in which the justice of God taught by Jesus is “depersonalized.”

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 zealotry by His experience with Israel in the desert: I loved (11:1) and they betrayed me (9:10; 11:2; 13:6).”

⁸⁵ Martin Hengel, *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 A.D.*, trans. David Smith (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 147. See also von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:204–5.

⁸⁶ The focus or concern of jealousy is sometimes introduced by the preposition ל following the verb קנא (Piel), as in Ezek 39:25b: וקנאתי לשם קדשי (“and I will be jealous for my holy name”), or Zech 1:14: קנאתי לירושלם ולציון קנאה (“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).⁸⁷ 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.”⁸⁸ 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).⁸⁹ 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.”⁹⁰ 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.⁹¹ 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.”⁹²

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

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 (צדקה) 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 קָטַח 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).”⁹³ McBride presses this further, interpreting Yahweh’s reassertion of his קָטַח -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.”⁹⁴

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.⁹⁵ 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.⁹⁶

4.2.5. עַל ... פָּקַד , “Visiting-in-Punishment Against”

In Exod 20:5, the participle פָּקַד expresses a divine action that flows from Yahweh’s character as Israel’s “jealous God.” An extensive discussion is required regarding the multivalent root פָּקַד , 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 פָּקַד with the preposition עַל in contexts of iniquity. There I argue for the English rendering *visit-in-punishment*

⁹³ Freedman, “The Name of the God of Moses,” 155.

⁹⁴ McBride, “Essence of Orthodoxy,” 147.

⁹⁵ In contrast to this perspective, Kaminsky, *Corporate Responsibility*, 63–64, associates the expression אֵל קָנָא 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 על פקד 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 פשע (“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 *ḥt*’, 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—עון 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 *ḥt*’ and *ps*’ 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, “עון,” *NIDOTTE* 3:351.

⁹⁹ Cover, “Sin, Sinners (OT),” 6:32.

¹⁰⁰ Klaus Koch, “עון, *’āwōn*,” *TDOT* 10:551, cites 2 Kgs 7:9 as an example. See also Leon Morris, “The Punishment of Sin in the Old Testament,” *ABR* 6 (1958): 83, who cites other examples such as Ps 65:3 and Isa 64:6.

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 14x¹⁰² in the Hebrew Bible, usually with a plural pronominal suffix on אבות (“iniquity of our fathers,” “your fathers,” “their fathers”).¹⁰³ It is always עון rather than another sin term which is used in construct with plural “fathers.”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: בעון אביו, “because of the iniquity of his father” (Ezek 18:17), and בעון האב, “because of the iniquity of the father” (Ezek 18:19). The plea in Ps 79:8 that Yahweh not remember עונת ראשונים is often translated as “iniquities of forefathers” (cf. Jer 11:10: עונת אבותם הראשונים, “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 ראשונים as a substantive meaning “preceding ones,” that is, ancestors. It seems more natural, however, to take ראשונים 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”): חטאות 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.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 עון אבות passages, *the tendency is to explicitly indicate the corresponding iniquity of fathers and children.*¹⁰⁶ As typical examples:

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)

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:

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 (בעוונת אבתם) 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.

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.

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).¹⁰⁷ 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.”¹⁰⁸

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

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 אבותיו, “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*.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

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.¹¹⁰ 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.¹¹¹ However, such a rendering loses the emotional poignancy of the אבות...בנים (“fathers ... sons”) pairing.¹¹² “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 20:5.¹¹³

אבות (“fathers”) and בנים (“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

¹¹⁰ 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.

¹¹¹ This is the interpretation of Cornelis Houtman, *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.”

¹¹² 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!”

¹¹³ On the child in ancient Israel, see Martin Ebner, Paul D. Hanson, Marie-Theres Wacker, and Rudolf Weth, eds., *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, *The World of the Child in the Hebrew Bible*, HBM 51 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013).

in all activities, and thus for ensuring for generations to come the welfare of the community.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.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.”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.”¹¹⁷ In a general sense, the whole flow of Israel’s history is portrayed as

events carried forward by fathers and sons.... *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.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

¹¹⁴ William Johnstone, *Exodus*, 2 vols., SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2014), 2:26–27. For similar views, see Anthony Phillips, *Ancient Israel’s Criminal Law: A New Approach to the Decalogue* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), 14; David J. A. Clines, “The Ten Commandments, Reading from Left to Right,” in *Words Remembered, Texts Renewed: Essays in Honour of John F.A. Sawyer*, ed. Jon Davies, Graham Harvey, and Wilfred G. E. Watson, JSOTSup 195 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 32–37.

¹¹⁵ Kristine Garroway, *Children in the Ancient Near Eastern Household*, EANE 3 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 109.

¹¹⁶ Milton Eng, *The Days of Our Years: A Lexical Semantic Study of the Life Cycle in Biblical Israel*, LHB/OTS 464 (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 55.

¹¹⁷ Annemarie Ohler, *The Bible Looks at Fathers*, trans. Omar Kaste (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 90–91.

¹¹⁸ Ohler, *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.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 בָּנִים (“sons”) can be heard as threatening repercussions also for daughters and female descendants as well—themselves dear to and valued by fathers.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.”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

¹¹⁹ Laurel W. Koepf-Taylor, *Give Me Children or I Shall Die: Children and Communal Survival in Biblical Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013).

¹²⁰ Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:13, reads בָּנִים 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, *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 *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.

¹²¹ Johnstone, *Exodus*, 2:27.

corporate whole and to every individual within it.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.¹²³

4.2.8. על-שלישים ועל-רבעים, Against Members of the Third and Fourth Generations

The numerical roots שלש (three) and רבע (four) are employed here as plural nouns. The morphology of these nouns is unusual,¹²⁴ although they are clearly related to the ordinal numbers third and fourth in the sense of “a descendant of the third generation,”¹²⁵ “those belonging to the 3rd and 4th generations.”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

¹²² David L. Baker, “The Finger of God and the Forming of a Nation: The Origin and Purpose of the Decalogue,” *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, *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, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, 249, on the other hand, stresses the direct personal address of the Decalogue to each individual Israelite.

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.

¹²⁴ Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 172. The noun pattern exhibited here (רַבְעִים, שְׁלִישִׁים) is that usually used for bodily defects (עִוְר, blind; פֶּסֶח, lame), although these defect words do not generally maintain the *dagesh forte* when plural.

¹²⁵ HALOT, “שְׁלִישִׁים.”

¹²⁶ BDB, “רַבְעִי.”

have lived to see בְּנֵי שְׁלֹשִׁים (“third generation sons”) belonging to Ephraim.¹²⁷ Two passages in Kings (2 Kgs 10:30 and 15:12) use a similar expression, but employ the ordinal form: בְּנֵי רְבִיעִים (not רְבָעִים), “sons of the fourth (generation).” In 20:5 and parallels, שְׁלֹשִׁים and רְבִיעִים do not require a prefatory “sons of” because these unique forms carry the substantive meaning: “members of the third/fourth generation.”¹²⁸ Also, the addition of the Hebrew word דֹּר is unnecessary with these nouns, since שְׁלֹשִׁים and רְבִיעִים express “members of the third/fourth generation.”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.”¹³⁰ Archaeological 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.¹³¹ While this

¹²⁷ The parallelism with the descendants through Manasseh in the second half of Gen 50:23 favors reading the שְׁלֹשִׁים 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).

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.”

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 דֹּר (“generation”) with the number in attributive position: דֹּר שְׁלִישִׁי (“in the third generation,” Deut 23:8), דֹּר רְבִיעִי (“in the fourth generation,” Gen 15:16). See also ארבעה דורות (“four generations,” Job 42:16).

¹³⁰ Ian Cairns, *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.”

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.”¹³²

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.¹³³

Because the husband in a Mediterranean household was often a decade or more older than his wife,¹³⁴ 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.¹³⁵

to the Hebrew Bible, ed. Leo G. Perdue (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 169–85; John S. Holladay, Jr., “House, Israelite,” *ABD* 3:308–18; Lawrence E. Stager, “The Archaeology of the Family,” *BASOR* 260 (1985): 1–35; Assaf Yasur-Landau, Jennie R. Ebeling, and Laura B. Mazow, eds, *Household Archaeology in Ancient Israel and Beyond* (Leiden: Brill, 2011). On the *בית אב* (“house of the father”) in relation to sin, guilt, punishment, and confession, note the dynamics of the prayer in Neh 1:6: “Today I am praying before you, day and night, on behalf of the children of Israel, your servants, confessing the sins of the sons of Israel which we have sinned against you—I and my father’s house (*בית־אבי*) have sinned.”

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.”

¹³⁴ Martha T. Roth, “Age at Marriage and the Household: A Study of Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian Forms,” *CSSH* 29 (1987): 737, cited in Eng, *Days of Our Years*, 55.

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 (בית 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 *limitation*¹³⁸ upon Yahweh’s punishing visitation, as an *implied extermination*¹³⁹ of a family line (in the span of three or four generations), or as a *contrast*¹⁴⁰ with “steadfast love to

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

¹³⁷ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 454n35, who cites the usage of three and four in Amos 1:3, 6, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6; Prov 30:15, 18, 21, 29. See also Cole, *Exodus*, 156.

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 ἕως 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 ἕως, 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*).”

¹⁴⁰ Contra, e.g., Gottfried Vanoni, ‘*Du bist doch unser Vater*’ (Jes 63,16): *Zur Gottesvorstellung des Ersten Testaments*, SBS 159 (Stuttgart: Katolisches Bibelwerk, 1995), 73n240, who estimates the actual years contrasted between third and fourth and thousands of generations as “ein Zahlenverhältnis von mindestens 40,000 Jahren (Tausende im Plural sind mindestens zwei) gegenüber 80.” Vanoni holds that the intended sense of thousands is “unzählig viel.” Cited in 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.

thousands” in the following verse. Rather, according to this view, the “great number of descendants” indicated by the idiom “third or fourth” (x 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 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

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.”¹⁴⁴ It is significant that Roth later restates this as “a *slightly* indefinite numerical value.”¹⁴⁵ 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.”¹⁴⁶ 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 2:6–8.¹⁴⁷ 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 20:6.¹⁴⁸ The OT numerical parallels which he discusses

¹⁴⁴ W. M. W. Roth, “The Numerical Sequence X / X+1 in the Old Testament,” *VT* 12 (1962): 308.

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).

¹⁴⁷ See the excellent discussion in Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Amos*, AB 24A (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 207–10, 216–18, 230–31.

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 heightens 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.”¹⁴⁹ 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, שלשים and רבעים 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.¹⁵⁰ 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 (בנים), against the great-grandsons (שלשים) 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 ועל-בני בנים), against great-grandsons (שלשים) and great-great-grandsons (רבעים).” While some suggest that the listing in ch. 34 adds one generation to the series given in ch. 20,¹⁵¹ 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 שלשים and רבעים 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).”

¹⁵⁰ Jacob, *Second Book of the Bible*, 556. So also Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1900. Repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 1:116.

¹⁵¹ Leonhard Rost, “Die Schuld der Väter,” in *Studien zum Alten Testament*, BWANT 6/1 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1974), 66.

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 ו (“and”) in Deut 5:9 to indicate an earlier and inclusive way of numbering generations in which שלִשִׁים indicates grandsons rather than great-grandsons.¹⁵² Weinfeld rightly dismisses such a scheme as “highly hypothetical” and as an over-reading of the slight ו variation, which in fact is missing in the Qumran texts of Deuteronomy and in several other versions.¹⁵³ 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. עשה חסד ל, Acting in Lovingkindness To/For

חסד 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 חסד 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,

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 חסד related the term closely with the idea of covenant and stressed its obligatory and reciprocal dimensions.¹⁵⁴ “God’s *hesed* was not basically mercy, but loyalty to his covenant obligations, a loyalty which the Israelites should also show.”¹⁵⁵ The definitions for חסד 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.”¹⁵⁶ 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.”¹⁵⁷ 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 Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, initiated a partial shift away from Glueck. She stressed that acts of חסד are not obligatory, that the one performing חסד is “always quite free not to,” and that it refers to help rendered to those in great need or desperation.¹⁵⁸ Yet Sakenfeld also continued to speak of the “recognized responsibility” of the

¹⁵⁴ Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, trans. Alfred Gottschalk (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1967).

¹⁵⁵ R. Laird Harris, “חסד (*hsd*),” *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 חסד 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.

¹⁵⁷ Stuart, *Exodus* (2006), 454. Godfrey Ashby, *Go Out and Meet God: A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, ITC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 89–90, has a nearly identical explanation: “God rewards covenant loyalty and devotion with his own ‘covenant fidelity’—the sense of the Hebrew word *hesed*, often rendered ‘lovingkindness’ or ‘steadfast love.’”

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 חסד as free and unmerited but maintaining an emphasis on commitment: “The חסד 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. . . . חסד 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?”¹⁵⁹

Providing his own passage by passage analysis of the contextual meanings of חסד , Andersen locates it “outside the domain of duty and obligation.”¹⁶⁰ 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.”¹⁶¹ 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 .¹⁶² Raitt stresses the way in which the terms “gracious” and “merciful” in v. 6 shape the understanding of חסד in 34:6–7: “*Rahûm* 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.”¹⁶³

Harris distinguishes between the covenantal *context* of Exod 20 versus the presumed

of what humanity is or needs or desires or deserves.”

¹⁵⁹ 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), 81.

¹⁶⁰ Andersen, “Yahweh, the Kind,” 81. Brian Britt, “Unexpected Attachments: A Literary Approach to the Term חסד in the Hebrew Bible,” *JSOT* 27 (2003): 289–307, does not interact with Andersen, but reaches similar conclusions: חסד often depicts an “*unexpected, even excessive, kind of bond between parties*” (304, my emphasis).

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.

¹⁶³ Thomas M. Raitt, “Why Does God Forgive?” *HBT* 13 (1991): 54.

covenantal *motivation* of the divine חסד 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, חסד 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 חסד 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^eri^t* 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 חסד is often closely tied to his forgiveness of sin. The tie between חסד 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 חסד, Baer and Gordon note, “At times ... God's *hesed* exercises an ameliorating or limiting role upon his wrath.”¹⁶⁷ For this reason, Yahweh's חסד is the basis upon which sinners seek forgiveness, and “certain pleas for

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

¹⁶⁵ Hans-Jürgen Zobel, “חסד, *hesed*,” *TDOT* 6:63, 64.

¹⁶⁶ Timothy M. Willis, “‘So Great is His Steadfast Love’: A Rhetorical Analysis of Psalm 103,” *Bib* 72 (1991): 535.

¹⁶⁷ David A. Baer and Robert P. Gordon, “חסד,” *NIDOTTE* 2:214.

forgiveness encourage the view that God can choose to remember either sin or his *hesed*, but not both (Pss 25:7; 51:1[3]).¹⁶⁸

This does not mean, however, that חסד always indicates forgiveness, even when it is Yahweh's חסד. 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 חסד 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.¹⁶⁹

At the same time, while חסד is not earned or deserved by love or obedience, neither does חסד here address or imply the forgiveness of sins. Those experiencing Yahweh's חסד 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 חסד is the direct object of the verb עשה ("to do") and the preposition ל marks the recipient or beneficiary of the gracious act.

¹⁶⁸ Baer and Gordon, "חסד," 2:216.

¹⁶⁹ 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, Torbjörn Johansson, FfSk 13 (Gothenburg: Församlingsförlaget, 2013), 90, 92.

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 **חסד** 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: **חסד** can be something that Yahweh “gives” (**נתן**), “sends” (**שלח**), “remembers” (**זכר**), “continues” (**משך**), “commands” (**צוה**), “magnifies” (**גבר**), “guards” (**נצר**, **שמר**), “surrounds” with (**סבב**), “crowns” with (**עטר**), “satisfies” with (**שבע**), etc.¹⁷⁰ 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).¹⁷¹ 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.”¹⁷² However, it would be a misreading (or over-reading) of the prepositions to see a heightened sense of mutuality or reciprocity with **עם** 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 **עם חסד**

¹⁷⁰ Zobel, “חסד, *hesed*,” *TDOT* 6:54.

¹⁷¹ Zobel, “חסד, *hesed*,” *TDOT* 6:46, 54.

¹⁷² Clark, *Word Hesed*, 267.

within human-to-human contexts (25x with עם to 1x with ל) gives way to a more frequent occurrence of ל עשה חסד in divine-to-human contexts (8x עם to 5x ל). However, the single human-to-human use with ל—David’s death-bed charge to Solomon to ל עשה חסד 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 in ל עשה חסד לאלפים 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 עם חסד עשה. The sense is “acting in lovingkindness *to/for* thousands.”

Not only is ל עשה חסד 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 (שמר) this great חסד *for* David (1 Kgs 3:6), and so forth, all with ל. Thus, not only with ל עשה חסד לאלפים in Exod 20:6 but also with נצר חסד לאלפים 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 אלפים would seem to rule out the terminative reading. In the discussion of “thousands” which follows, the ל will be read as marking אלפים 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 אֶלֶף here in its common sense of “thousand”

¹⁷³ Williams, §268b; Arnold and Choi, §4.1.10(c).

¹⁷⁴ Williams, §266b.

(*HALOT* אלה-III), but others have suggested that the meaning of “family” or “clan” (*HALOT* אלה-III; cf. *DCH*, 1:299–300) is better suited to the contexts of Exod 20:6 and 34:7. According to Pedersen, אלה is the “old denomination of community” which was later replaced by משפחה (“family, clan”).¹⁷⁵ Lang posits this sense for לאלפים 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 אלה 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 לאלפים 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

¹⁷⁵ Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 2:50. Pedersen cites Num 10:36; Judg 6:15; and 1 Sam 10:19 as examples of this older usage.

¹⁷⁶ Bernard Lang, “The Number Ten and the Iniquity of the Fathers: A New Interpretation of the Decalogue,” *ZAW* 118 (2006): 236, 229.

¹⁷⁷ Johnstone, *Exodus*, 2:32. See also Pieter A. 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): 43.

¹⁷⁸ Paul R Raabe, “The Two ‘Faces’ of Yahweh: Divine Wrath and Mercy in the Old Testament,” in *And 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), 293.

OT “contrast between the *temporary* ‘penultimate’ wrath and the *eternal* mercy” of God.¹⁷⁹ In fact, Ps 103:8–11 emphasizes this contrast through allusion to Exod 34:6–7.

The question of the meaning of אלף in Exodus also extends to the literature discussing the very large numbers ascribed to Israel’s population throughout the Pentateuch.¹⁸⁰ Does the estimate of אלף כשש-מאות (Exod 12:37) indicate “about 600 *thousand*” or “about 600 *troops of*” men on foot?¹⁸¹ 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 אלף as a small family or military grouping.¹⁸²

However, even granting the possibility that אלף in Exod 12:37 may mean something like 600 “troops” or “clans,” this does not preclude reading אלפים 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 140,000.¹⁸³ Thus, whichever reading of אלף is adopted in 12:37, Exod 20:6 may employ אלפים to evoke Yahweh’s אלפים to the (numerical) thousands of *Israel* (cf. Exod 15:13). Furthermore, the

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.

¹⁸⁰ See Colin J. Humphreys, “The Number of People in the Exodus from Egypt: Decoding Mathematically the Very Large Numbers in Numbers I and XXVI,” *VT* 48 (1998): 196–213, for a summary of views on this question. Humphreys himself argues that אלף means “troop” in many of these numbering passages, and concludes that the texts claim an Exodus population of about 20,000 total Israelites. Also John Wenham, “Large Numbers in the Old Testament,” *TynBul* 18 (1967): 2–36.

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, “אלף,” *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,” *JTUI* 87 (1955): 82–92.

nearest Exodus use of אלה prior to ch. 20 comes when Moses appoints men to help him judge the people: שרי אלפים שרי מאות שרי חמשים ושרי עשרות, “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 אלה 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.”¹⁸⁴ English translations are divided on the question, with perhaps a slim majority translating אלפים as “to thousands.”¹⁸⁵ So also the LXX (εἰς χιλιάδας) and the Vulgate (*in milia*).¹⁸⁶ 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”¹⁸⁷
2. “to a thousand generations”¹⁸⁸

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 γενεᾶς 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”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 שלשים 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.”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.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.”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.

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.

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.

¹⁹⁰ Childs, *Exodus*, 388.

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).

¹⁹² W. Gunther Plaut, *Exodus*, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1983), 226.

The words שלשים and רבעים 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: אלה.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—לאלה 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 אלה 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

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 לאלים in Exod 20:6 as “to the thousandth generation” as follows: “Rashbam is saying that אלפים 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’) and רבעים (‘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 §134o.

¹⁹⁵ See previous note.

merely explicate Exod 20:5–6 or 34:6–7.¹⁹⁶ 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.”¹⁹⁷

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.¹⁹⁸ 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.¹⁹⁹ The second and third translational positions both press forward to resolve this interpretive question, each heeding

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.”

¹⁹⁷ Samuel R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 195.

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 לאלפים 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*.”²⁰⁰ 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 נצר חסד in 34:7, translating the latter as “prolongs benevolence.”²⁰¹ 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

²⁰⁰ Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 173, sees something similar in this verb, noting that “נצר in 34:7 arguably implies the passage of time.” For Propp, this serves to support his conclusion that “most likely, *’ālāpîm* 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.²⁰²

Reading אלפים 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 -ל עשה- or ל חסד. Nevertheless, these readings illustrate the point that אלפים 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 (לְאַלְפִים, "to *the* thousands"), which is lacking in 20:6 (לְאַלְפִים, "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.'"²⁰³ 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.²⁰⁴

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

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 אלפים, "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 לאהבי is very unlikely (see §4.2.11).

²⁰⁴ Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 261.

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. לשנאי...לאהבי, 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:

God introduces the law with highly personal statements regarding what God has done on behalf of the people (Exod 19:4; 20:2). Obedience to the law is thus seen to be a response within a relationship, not a response to the law as law. Moreover, in the narrative readers are confronted with a God who personally interacts with Israel through every stage of their journey.²⁰⁷

Since Moran illustrated the parallels between the rhetoric of Israel’s love for Yahweh and the ANE treaty language of love and hate, it has been common for scholars to characterize love for Yahweh in the Pentateuch as political loyalty and covenant obedience *rather than* personal affection.²⁰⁸ Stuart is typical, noting that these terms in Exod 20:5–6 refer “idiomatically to loyalty, not to emotional attitudes, feelings, or sentiments.”²⁰⁹ Levinson summarizes:

The Hebrew participles translated as ‘those who love’ and ‘those who reject’ are not affective but legal terms. Reflecting the terminology of Hittite, Neo-Assyrian, and Aramaic state treaties, *love* designates political loyalty to the suzerain, whereas *reject* denotes acts of treason.²¹⁰

²⁰⁶ 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), 99.

²⁰⁷ Terence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 148–49.

²⁰⁸ William L. Moran, “The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy,” *CBQ* 25 (1963): 77–87. Moran’s study was supplemented by two studies which accented the father-son metaphor within ANE suzerain-vassal treaties, further characterizing the “love” language in these treaties as filial reverence and obedience: Dennis J. McCarthy, “Notes on the Love of God in Deuteronomy and the Father-Son Relationship Between Israel and Yahweh,” *CBQ* 27 (1965): 144–47; John William McKay, “Man’s Love for God in Deuteronomy and the Father/Teacher—Son/Pupil Relationship,” *VT* 22 (1972): 426–35.

²⁰⁹ Stuart, *Exodus*, 454.

²¹⁰ Bernard M. Levinson, *Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 52.

More recent studies by Ackerman, Lapsley, Arnold, and Jauss have questioned this dichotomy.²¹¹ Arnold concludes that “the emotive significance of *’hb* 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.”²¹² 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).”²¹³ Dozeman also embraces Moran’s insights regarding love as

²¹¹ Susan Ackerman, “The Personal is Political: Covenantal and Affectionate Love (*āhēb, āhābā*) 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 אהב 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 W. 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 (לקח) Y for (ל) his wife” and “X took (לקח) 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.”²¹⁴

Dozeman’s assessment of “intermingled imagery of marriage and treaty relations” seems fitting for the Pentateuch’s use of שָׂנֵא (“hate,” “hater”) as well. Both Exod 1:10 and 23:5 use the participle of שָׂנֵא plus a pronoun suffix, the same construction used here in 20:5 (שָׂנְאִי, “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 (שָׂנְאֵינוּ, that is, our enemies) and fight against us.” In 23:5, Yahweh enjoins every Israelite to come alongside “your hater” (שָׂנְאֶיךָ, that is your enemy) to help him with his fallen donkey. This use of שָׂנֵא 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 אֵיב (“enemy,” Exod 23:4–5; Lev 26:17; Num 10:35; Deut 30:7; cf. Exod 15:6, 9), צַר (“foe, adversary,” Deut 32:41), or the substantive participle of קָוֵם (“one who arises against,” Deut 33:11; cf. Deut 19:11; cf. Exod 15:7). However, שָׂנֵא 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” (שָׂנְאָה), 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” (קָבַץ) is significant. Like אָהַב (“love”), קָבַץ (“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* (קָבַץ) 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

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 (רַחֲמֵי, see discussion above, §4.2.9).

²¹⁶ Wolfram Herrmann, “Jahwe und des Menschen Liebe zu ihm zu Dtn. VI 4,” *VT* 50 (2000): 54.

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 [בַּשֶּׁת = Baal]. They became detestable like the thing they *loved*.” Conversely, “proper Yhwh-worship” expresses love for him.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 וְלִשְׁמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתַי (“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,²¹⁹ so that “the reader perceives the entire legislation ... as an expression of a life which befits a ‘God-lover.’”²²⁰

Beyond the semantic content of loving and hating, the exegetical crux with these phrases involves whether שְׂנֵאִי 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

²¹⁸ Kürle, *Appeal of Exodus*, 49–50.

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” (מִשְׁפָּטִים, Exod 21:1; 24:3)—rather than as “commandments” (מִצְוֹת), their standing as “commandments” is made clear in other passages. Yahweh describes the stipulations on the stone tablets as “the law (תּוֹרָה) and the commandment (מִצְוָה) which I have written for their instruction” (Exod 24:12), and several passages use the verb “command” (צִוָּה) in describing the Decalogue and other Sinai instructions as that which Yahweh “commanded” (Exod 23:15; 32:8; 35:1; Deut 4:13).

²²⁰ Kürle, *Appeal of Exodus*, 50.

Yahweh? Less commonly discussed but also at issue is the implied referent of אהבי 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 לשנאי and לאהבי.

In Exod 20:5, most English translations render, “the fourth generation *of* those who hate me,” reading the ל as indicating a genitive relationship.²²¹ 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 שלשים. 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.²²² This is highly unlikely in v. 5, however, because the recipients of Yahweh’s act of פקד have already been indicated in the preceding context using the preposition על, and, as the next chapter will argue, the OT consistently uses על (and never ל) to mark the recipient of visitation-in-punishment (פקד). The third possibility is that ל has a specification function²²³ here, qualifying the dynamic of transgenerational punishment in the passage as taking place *with respect to* those who hate me.²²⁴ Such a use of ל is basically equivalent to a *casus pendens* at the beginning of a sentence.²²⁵ 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 ἀποδοῦς (“recompensing” = פקד), 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 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.

²²⁴ Thus Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:34; Scharbert, “Formgeschichte,” 146; Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1:116–17; Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 72n345.

²²⁵ GKC, §143e; cf. §119u.

visiting iniquity of fathers against sons, against members of the third and fourth generations.”²²⁶

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”),²²⁷ but here, unlike v. 5, the syntax would not have prevented the more usual construct chain (לאלפי אהבי). Gesenius offers the explanation that אלפים must keep its absolute form for the same reason that רבעים did in v. 5, to retain the formal parallel with שלשים (and now also רבעים). However, this is more plausible for the phrases in v. 5, as paired objects of the preposition על, than for אלפים 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, ל 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.²²⁸ 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 לשנאי and לאהבי are closely paired semantically and morphologically, it is attractive

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 und 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 ל 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 לשנאי in v.5 and לאהבי 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 לשנאי 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

²²⁹ Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1:116. Scharbert, “Formgeschichte,” 146.

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.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.

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).

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 (of descendants).

²³¹ Propp, *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

6 יהוה יהוה אל רחום וחנון ארך אפים ורב־חסד ואמת:

7 נצר חסד לאלפים נשא עון ופשע וחטאה

ונקה לא ינקה פקד עון אבות על־בנים ועל־בני בנים על־שלשים 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.²³² 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.”²³³ 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.”²³⁴ 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.”²³⁵ 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 ואמת is regarded as hendiadys. Cassuto, for

²³² On רחום and חנון, see Franz, *Barmherzige und gnädige Gott*, 116–21; Ruth Scoralick, *Gottes Güte und Gottes Zorn: Die Gottesprädikationen in Exodus 34, 6f und Ihre Intertextuellen Beziehungen zum Zwölfprophetenbuch*, HerdBS 33 (Freiburg: Herder, 2002), 47–53; Jerry R. Harmon, “Exodus 34:6–7: A Hermeneutical Key in the Open Theism Debate” (PhD diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005), 143–46; Michael Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer: A Study of Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14*, FAT 2/8 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 185–86; Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 31–71.

²³³ On אפים ארך, see Franz, *Barmherzige und gnädige Gott*, 121–24; Scoralick, *Gottes Güte und Gottes Zorn*, 53–55; Harmon, “Exodus 34:6–7: A Hermeneutical Key,” 146–47; Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics*, 186–87.

²³⁴ Carl J. Laney, “God’s Self-Revelation in Exodus 34:6–8,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (2001): 46.

²³⁵ Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics*, 187.

example, takes these two terms as “dual elements of a unitary quality,” that is, “true and faithful lovingkindness.”²³⁶

Several of the elements in v. 7 have already been discussed above under Exod 20:5–6: חסד (“lovingkindness”) in §4.2.9; לאלפים (“to thousands”) in §4.2.10; עון אבות and עון (“iniquity” and “iniquity of fathers”) in §4.2.6; “fathers and sons” or “parents and children” in §4.2.7; and שלשים...רבעים (“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.²³⁷ In what follows, then, attention will be given to the phrases נצר חסד (“preserving lovingkindness”), נשא עון ופשע וחטאה (“forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin”), and ונקה לא ינקה (“yet he will certainly not neglect punishment”).

4.3.2. נצר חסד, Preserving Lovingkindness

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

When considering what it means for Yahweh to נצר חסד, three senses of נצר might be suggested as possible within the Exod 34 context. First, נצר 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

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 בנים to the second בנים. 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 חסד 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 חסד is non-obligatory and gracious (cf. Exod 33:19b). It is true that שמר, a semantic equivalent to נצר,²³⁸ is used 14x in Exodus for Israel’s “observing or keeping” of feast days, Sabbaths, commands, statutes, and the covenant.²³⁹ While נצר likewise bears this meaning elsewhere in the OT (e.g., 10x in Ps 119), Exodus consistently uses שמר rather than נצר to indicate this sense of observance and fidelity. The fact, then, that Exod 34:7 employs the distinct root נצר rather than שמר—the only passage in Exodus where נצר occurs—may signal a distinction in meaning.²⁴⁰ For these reasons, the meaning of keep, observe, fulfill for נצר should be excluded in 34:7.²⁴¹

A second meaning for נצר in combination with חסד could be Yahweh’s *watching, guarding, protecting* his lovingkindness. Johnstone speaks of the “vigorous connotations” of the verb נצר here, and mentions specifically the image of a watchman guarding a city (e.g., Jer 31:6).²⁴²

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

²³⁹ See Exod 12:17(2x), 24, 25; 13:10; 15:26; 16:28; 19:5; 23:15; 31:13, 14, 16; 34:11, 18.

²⁴⁰ In contrast to this frequent use of שמר, the verb נצר 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 (שמר) my word” with “keeping (נצר) my covenant.” This final occurrence has the sense of fidelity to a command or obligation, but note that here it is paired with שמר, rather than replacing it. Jacob, *Second Book of the Bible*, 984, observes the distinction in usage between שמר and נצר in relation to חסד: “The verbs usually associated with *he-sed* are *a-sah* and *sha-mar*, and the stronger *na-tzar* is used only in poetry (Pss [40]:12; 61:8; Prov 20:28).” Even in these three cases, however, the syntactical relation between נצר and חסד is different than in Exod 34:7, where Yahweh preserves חסד for the people. In the three poetic verses, חסד is the subject of the verb נצר rather than its object: חסד (always paired with אמת, “faithfulness”) preserves the king.

²⁴¹ The present argument has assumed that שמר 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 שמר in such contexts. On the basis of the paradigmatic relation of שמר and זכר (“remember”) in the otherwise parallel Sabbath commands of Exod 20:8 and Deut 5:12, Bar-Asher proposes that שמר can mean to “remember.” If this understanding were adopted, the close semantic relation between שמר and נצר might then support the third possible meaning of נצר חסד discussed below: *maintaining* lovingkindness *over time*, that is, preserving and prolonging it. This would, however, leave the apparently distinct usage patterns of שמר and נצר 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, חסד נצר 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 חסד נצר 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* (שמר) the covenant and [his] lovingkindness (חסד) for those who love him and keep his commandments, for a thousand generations (לאֱלֹפֵי דוֹר). (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

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 (חסד), 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* (שמר) my lovingkindness (חסד) 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 שמר חסד 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 חסד נצר 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).²⁴⁸ It is this temporal dimension of נצר 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.”²⁴⁹

Both the second and third meanings for נצר 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 נצר 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

²⁴⁸ Baer and Gordon, “חסד,” *NIDOTTE* 2:215.

²⁴⁹ Robert C. Dentan, “The Literary Affinities of Exodus xxxiv 6f.,” *VT* 13 (1963): 45. See also Susan 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), 77.

²⁵⁰ In Prov 13:3a, these two senses of the synonyms שמר and נצר are set in parallel: “He who *guards* (נצר) his mouth / *prolongs* (שמר) his life.” Transposing the two verbal roots here would not change the meaning; the distinct senses of נצר/שמר here are determined by contextual factors rather than by a semantic distinction between verbs.

4.3.3. נִשָּׂא עוֹן וּפְשַׁע וַחֲטָאָה, Forgiving Iniquity and Rebellion and Sin

The participle נִשָּׂא 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 נִשָּׂא usually means to carry or lift (up).²⁵¹ The common construction נִשָּׂא עוֹן, “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, נִשָּׂא עוֹן 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 נִשָּׂא in each of these two uses of the phrase.” In the first case, נִשָּׂא 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 נִשָּׂא, 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.²⁵²

However, a number of scholars explain Yahweh’s נִשָּׂא עוֹן in Exod 34:7 in ways which ignore this distinction, describing Yahweh as “carrying” iniquity rather than as “removing” it. Some describe Yahweh’s נִשָּׂא עוֹן 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.”²⁵³ Knierim, too, stresses that the essential

²⁵¹ These are the first two definitions given in *HALOT*.

²⁵² Baruch J. Schwartz, “The Bearing of Sin in the Priestly Literature,” 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 N. Freedman and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 10.

²⁵³ G. Ernest Wright, “The Divine Name and the Divine Nature,” *Persp* 12 (1971): 181–82.

thing in this phrase is “daß Gott selbst den *’āwōn* von schuldigen Menschen an deren Stelle *trägt*.”²⁵⁴ 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.”²⁵⁵

A second approach sees Yahweh “carrying” iniquity in the sense of *bearing with, putting up with* sin and a sinful people.²⁵⁶ Widmer glosses Yahweh’s נשא 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 נשא any sin for an indefinitely long period (to thousands of generations).”²⁵⁷ Widmer sees this dynamic illustrated in the history of the wilderness generation. Describing the meaning of נשא עון 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 נשא is obviously compatible with YHWH’s forbearance. We shall see that this reading of נשא 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 נשא עון] reflects both YHWH’s loving patience and His moral demand.²⁵⁸

Yochanan Muffs has a similar view, reading נשא עון 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.”²⁵⁹ For Muffs, the language of Yahweh’s

²⁵⁴ Rolf Knierim, *Die Hauptbegriffe für Sünde im Alten Testament* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1965), 221. Cited in Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics*, 191.

²⁵⁵ Janzen, *Exodus*, 255.

²⁵⁶ Janzen, *Exodus*, 255. Janzen’s explanation of נשא עון 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 נשא in Exod 34:7. The purpose of the present argument is to untangle these.

²⁵⁷ Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics*, 306, 311, cf. 190.

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

While Widmer and Muffs set the dynamic of נשא 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*.²⁶⁰ This third sense of נשא 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 34.²⁶¹ 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 עון ופשע והטאה 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 נשא 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 נשא עון in Exod 34:7 is that Yahweh removes (*aufheben*) guilt, transgression, and sin—that is, he cancels

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.²⁶² 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.”²⁶³ Kleinig affirms this view of נָשָׂא עוֹן: “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).”²⁶⁴ 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).”²⁶⁵ Such descriptions of forgiveness are not uniquely derived from the Hebrew idiom of נָשָׂא עוֹן 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.”²⁶⁶

Some have attempted to fully fold both the senses—carrying and carrying away—into their explanation of נָשָׂא עוֹן. 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.”²⁶⁷ For Schenker, the phrase primarily means that God

²⁶² 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), 87.

²⁶³ Osborn and Hatton, *Handbook on Exodus*, 801.

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: Zondervan, 2005), 130. Cited in Célestin Musekura, *An Assessment of Contemporary Models of Forgiveness* (New 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, “נָשָׂא *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.”

“löst sie auf und vergibt 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, נָשָׂא עוֹן in Exod 34:7 indicates forgiving and taking away iniquity, and the attempts to invest Yahweh’s נָשָׂא עוֹן 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 נָשָׂא and the total set of OT meanings for נָשָׂא 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 נָשָׂא.

First, the verb נָשָׂא 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 (נָשָׂא) my sin, and pray to Yahweh your God so that he will just remove this death from

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.’”

²⁷¹ Eugene A. Nida, “Implications of Contemporary Linguistics for Biblical Scholarship,” *JBL* 91 (1972): 86.

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, *נשא עון* (or *נשא פשע*) occurs in synonymous²⁷³ 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 (*נשא*) my transgression (*פשע*),
and take away (*עבר* Hiphil) my iniquity (*עון*)? (Job 7:21)

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

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

Who is a God like you, forgiving (*נשא*) iniquity (*עון*)
and passing over (*עבר*) 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 *נשא 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 *נשא עון*, Ps 51:3b–4 separates the three terms for sin from Exod 34:7 (*עון* and *פשע* and *חטאה*), assigning each sin term its own verb: *מחה* (“blot out”), *כבס* Piel (“to wash, full”), and *טהר* Piel (“to clean, scour”). While *נשא* 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 (*נשא*, that is, ‘lift’) my sin..., remove (*סור*, Hiphil) this death from me.” So Moses prays, and v. 19 records that Yahweh turned the direction of the wind, and it “lifted” (*נשא*) 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 נשא, that is, each stands in for נשא.²⁷⁴ This is not to indicate that נשא 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 נשא עון more closely with the latter: carry off, take away, remove.

Third, apart from these direct parallels, OT usage situates נשא 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 נשא עון in Exod 34:7. This field of verbs includes לא זכר (“not remember”),²⁷⁵ כפר Piel (“cover, atone”), כסה (“cover”), סלה (“pardon, forgive”), מחה (“wipe away”), עבר Qal or Hiphil (“pass by” or “remove”), and סור Hiphil (“remove”).²⁷⁶ These terms are often interchangeable when used with terms for sin, being set in parallel or other close logical relation: סלה and נשא in Exod 34:6, 9; Num 14:19; כפר and סלה in Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 19:22; Num 15:25–28, etc.; סלה and לא זכר in Jer 31:34; סלה and מחה in Deut 29:19 [Eng 29:20]; כפר and מחה in Jer 18:23; כפר and סור in Isa 6:7; 27:9; סור and עבר in Zech 3:4; כסה and מחה in Neh 4:5; לא זכר and מחה in Isa 43:25 (and לא זכר and מחה in Ps 109:14); מחה and נשא in Ps 51:3 [Eng 51:1]; כסה and נשא in Pss 32:1; 85:3 [Eng 85:2]. Two such associations with נשא are found within the Exodus narrative. As discussed above, Pharaoh’s locust-inspired request for forgiveness and relief in 10:17 sets נשא alongside סור 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 (נשא). The other eleven passages use eight different verbs to depict forgiveness.

²⁷⁵ The tie between forgiving (נשא) and *not remembering* (לא זכר) is particularly significant in arguing against nuances of נשא עון as bearing, enduring, or storing up iniquity. Walter Kaiser, “נשא,” 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 נשא = *ns’* (‘lift up, bear’) and סלה = *slh* (‘forgive’) but also by numerous other expressions. In addition the verbs grouped above, Preuss includes רפא (“heal”) and לא חשב (“not take into account”).

atone for”) for your sin” (Exod 32:30). He then approaches Yahweh and prays, “And now, if only you will נשא (“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 עון נשא, but only to establish that the sense of נשא 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 נשא is followed not merely by עון but by the threefold sequence עון פשע והטאה (“iniquity, rebellion, and sin”). At first, reading עון נשא in 34:7 as “bearing the weight of iniquity” may appear natural, since the combination עון נשא 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.²⁷⁷ The formula עון נשא occurs in this sense mainly in Leviticus (10x), Numbers (6x), and Ezekiel (8x). However, עון נשא 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 עון נשא. In nine similar passages, נשא is followed by the noun הַטָּא (“sin”). These also occur mainly in Leviticus, Numbers, and Ezekiel.²⁷⁸ There are two problems with reading עון פשע והטאה 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 הַטָּא. It never occurs with פשע, nor does it ever occur with הטאה.²⁷⁹ Both of these terms are included in the Exod 34:7 construction: עון נשא

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 נשא is used with הַטָּא 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 עון נשא פשע 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* לַפְּשַׁעְכֶם נשא must mean that his angel will “not *forgive* your rebellion.” This passage stands in direct relation—and tension—with Exod 34:7. While

וּפָשַׁע וְחָטְאָה, “forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin.” Second, the “bearing iniquity” idiom is always used with a single direct object—either עוֹן or חָטָא but never with both, even in parallel expression. In contrast, נָשָׂא 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 פָּשַׁע and חָטְאָה). All this supports the traditional rendering of נָשָׂא עוֹן 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: עוֹן (“iniquity”), פָּשַׁע (“transgression” or “rebellion”), and חָטְאָה (“sin”). The first of these, עוֹן, 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 פָּשַׁע and חָטְאָה are particularly apt following the golden calf apostasy. Seebass concludes that “the noun [פָּשַׁע] means ‘offense, transgression,’ and is a general term for various offenses of outrage or indignation.”²⁸⁰ פָּשַׁע sometimes suggests a relationship-breaking act, that is, rebellion or revolt.²⁸¹ The noun חָטְאָה (“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 חָטְאָה and חָטְאָה (both also meaning “sin”) each occur three times in ch. 32, along with three occurrences of the verb חָטָא, as the chief terms for Israel’s “great sin (חָטְאָה) which they sinned (חָטָא)” in making gods for themselves (32:31).²⁸² While commentators often distinguish the semantic nuances of

the acting subject here is Yahweh’s angel rather than Yahweh himself, the further explanation “because my Name is in him” roots this *non-forgiveness* (לֹא יִשָּׂא לְפָשַׁעְכֶם) directly in the character/name of Yahweh, just as Exod 34:7 describes *forgiveness* (נָשָׂא עוֹן וּפָשַׁע וְחָטְאָה) as fundamental to the character/name of Yahweh.

²⁸⁰ Horst Seebass, “פָּשַׁע *pāša*,” *TDOT* 12:141.

²⁸¹ Seebass, “פָּשַׁע *pāša*,” 12:141, 138–39. *HALOT* glosses פָּשַׁע as “crime” or “criminal actions” and explains parenthetically, “acts which break relationships within the community and with God.” Under פָּשַׁע, the string of sin terms from Exod 34:7 is translated “wrongfulness, crime, and transgression.” William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 300, simply glosses פָּשַׁע as “rebellion, revolt.”

²⁸² The noun חָטְאָה in Exod 32:21, 30, 31. The noun חָטְאָה in 32:30, 32, 34. The verb חָטָא in 32:30, 31, 33.

עון, פשע, and חטאה,²⁸³ 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 *ḥt’* and *ps’* in simply designating ‘sins’.... We may suppose that the individual terms have lost some of their crisp distinctiveness, and are employed as virtual synonyms.”²⁸⁴

4.3.4. ונקה לא ינקה, Yet He Certainly Will Not Neglect Punishment

Franz notes that the root נקה 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*).²⁸⁵ 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 נקה 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.²⁸⁶ Exodus 34:7 is unusual in that here נקה lacks a direct object, but the previous context of iniquity (with the triple terminology of עון ופשע וחטאה) as well as the nature of the verb נקה clarify the sense: Yahweh will certainly not neglect to punish *sinner*s.²⁸⁷ Thus, most English

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.

²⁸⁶ Georg Warmuth, “נקה *nāqâ*,” *TDOT* 9:556.

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 ἔνοχον) 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 וַיִּנְקֶה לֹא יִנְקֶה 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.²⁸⁸ This reads the infinitive absolute construction וַיִּנְקֶה לֹא יִנְקֶה 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.”²⁸⁹ 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 [לֹא יִנְקֶה and פִּקֵּד] as over against seven positives. They are, however, weighty and severe. God will not acquit [יִנְקֶה *nqh*]. 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 ἔνοχον.” 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.

²⁹⁰ Brueggemann, “Book of Exodus,” 947.

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 נקה (release from punishment) cannot and should not be resolved on any level.”²⁹¹ Dozeman also takes וְנִקְהָ לֹא יִנְקְהָ 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.”²⁹²

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.”²⁹³ Softened²⁹⁴ renderings have been proposed which qualify but do not contradict the forgiving which has just been predicated of Yahweh:

Jacob: “without declaring completely innocent”²⁹⁵

Alter: “yet he does not wholly acquit”²⁹⁶

Muffs: “but does not entirely expunge the record”²⁹⁷

Garrett: “but he does not grant blanket amnesty”²⁹⁸

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”²⁹⁹

NJPS, Milgrom, Childs: “yet he does not remit all punishment”³⁰⁰

Warmuth: “but does not leave the guilty totally unpunished”³⁰¹

NEB, Knight: “not sweeping the guilty clean away”³⁰²

Fishbane: “but he will not acquit (guilt forever)”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 *הַיְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֵּה* which holds that God “remits punishment for the penitent, but not for the impenitent” (*Yoma* 61a)³⁰⁴—or, as Kugel puts it, for the “good sinners” but not for the truly wicked.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].”³⁰⁶ Both Muffs and Milgrom emphasize that the formula in Exod

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.

³⁰⁰ Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 111, 392–95. In his excursus, “Judgment and Mercy: Vertical Retribution and “Salah,” 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.

³⁰¹ Warmuth, “*נַקֵּה nāqâ*,” *TDOT* 9:556–57.

³⁰² Knight, *Theology as Narration*, 201.

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.

³⁰⁴ Sarna, *Exodus*, 216, 262n13.

³⁰⁵ Kugel, *Bible As It Was*, 433.

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 פקד in this context. Scharbert comments on 34:7:

Er ist auch bereit, Sünde zu vergeben, spricht aber den Sünder 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 dreinfährt.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.

³⁰⁸ Scharbert, *Exodus*, 128–29.

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.”³¹⁰ 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 (§123*e*) 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 וְנִקְהָ לֹא יִנְקָה. 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.”³¹¹

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 into play, one explicitly and the other implicitly. First, many discussions explicitly connect this interpretation of Exod 34:7 to the re-use of the וְנִקְהָ לֹא יִנְקָה 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

³¹⁰ Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics*, 193.

³¹¹ Waltke and O’Connor, §35.2.2*e*., 583 (emphasis in original).

leave you *completely* unpunished.”³¹² 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:

- | | |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| נקה ינקה | He certainly will acquit, or, He completely will acquit. |
| נקה לא ינקה | A) He certainly will <i>not</i> acquit, or, He completely will <i>not</i> acquit, or B) He <i>not</i> certainly will acquit, or, He <i>not</i> completely will acquit. |

Those proposing “softened” translations of נקה 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 נקה לא ינקה, and also that the Jer 30:11 connection mentioned above does not justify a “softened” translation in Exod 34:7.

To translate נקה 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).³¹³ The infinitive absolute + לא + finite cognate verb (*x*) occurs 27 times in the OT.³¹⁴ 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: נקה 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

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; 23:32; 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” (והוריש לא הורישו). 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 תמותן. Gesenius speculates that this

³¹⁵ In Judg 1, the following verse (v. 29) also states, bluntly, that “Ephraim *did not drive out* (לא הוריש) 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 familiar הלא or הלווא, 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 than 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 אֵל-first syntactical construction here. To examine this claim, one has only to try out the formula “not surely *x*” in translating the 27 אֵל-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 אֵל yields a predictable semantic shift. All modern versions along with the LXX are unanimous in offering a “softened” translation of כִּי לֹא הַשְׁמִיד אֶשְׁמִיד כִּי לֹא הַשְׁמִיד אֶשְׁמִיד: “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.’”³¹⁷

The interpretation of the final אֵל-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 אֵל (“surely”) for the initial אֵל (“a brother”) and suggests repositing the finite verb as a Niphal. The English translations vary in their navigation of these questions. However, whether the verse is

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 brother, the question at hand involves the syntactical sequence: לא־פדה יפדה. Modern versions either ignore³¹⁸ 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 אֵל-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).³¹⁹

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

One objection to this claim, however, remains. The phrase וּנְקָה לֹא יִנְקָה 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.”³²⁰ If this were the appropriate reading of Jer 30:11, this would indeed be persuasive

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 Conceits 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.”

³²⁰ Warmuth, “נָקָה nāqā,” *TDOT* 9:557; Sarna, *Exodus*, 216, 262n13.

for Exod 34:7, since they share not only a לֹא-intervening negative infinitive absolute construction but also the same verb, נָקָה 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

- | | |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| אֲנִי נִיְיָ אִתְּךָ לְהוֹשִׁיעֲךָ (a) | (a) For I am with you (declares Yahweh) to save you, |
| כִּי אֶעֱשֶׂה כָלָה בְּכָל־הַגּוֹיִם (b) | (b) for I will make an end of all the nations |
| אֲשֶׁר הִפְצֹתִיךָ שָׁמָּה (c) | (c) where I have scattered you, |
| אֲךָ אֲתֵּן לֹא־אֶעֱשֶׂה כָלָה (d) | (d) but I will not make an end of you. |
| וְיִסְרֹתִיךָ לְמִשְׁפָּט (e) | (e) I will chasten you according to justice, |
| וְנִקָּה לֹא אֲנִי (f) | (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 וְנִקָּה לֹא (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’ (עֲשֶׂה כָלָה) 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 לֹא- 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 $\text{לֹא נִקְהָה לֹא נִקְהָה}$ 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).

³²² John M. Bracke, *Jeremiah 30–52*, WestBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 5.

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, *Jeremiah*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 2:756, 2:1125, 2:1138, critiques the “softening” 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 לא-intervening construction וְנָקָה לֹא יִנְקָה 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 34:7.³²⁵ Still, the basic translation and starting point for interpreting וְנָקָה לֹא יִנְקָה must be its stark claim: “Yet he will certainly not neglect punishment.” This is what the construction וְנָקָה לֹא יִנְקָה 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

³²⁵ Matthias Franz, *Barmherzige und gnädige Gott*, 139, for example, takes the phrase in Exod 34:7; Jer 30:11; 46:28; and Nah 1:3 to mean that God certainly does not leave unpunished (*Gott lässt gewiss nicht straffrei*), even though in Exod 34 this leaves the phrase in definite opposition (*in gewissem Widerspruch*) to its own context. Still, Franz finds it interpretively useful to note that in the context of Jer 30:11 (and 46:28) also, “wird Israel grundsätzlich das Heil zugesprochen, wenngleich Jhwh es maßvoll züchtigen und nicht ungestraft lassen wird.” H. Van Dyke Parunak, “A Semantic Survey of נִחַם,” *Bib* 56 (1975): 522–23, is another example. Parunak makes a logical distinction between the sin and guilt which is forgiven and the natural consequences of the sin which remain, also referencing Jer 30 and 46: “That which God will by no means clear from the guilty is not their guilt, but the natural consequences of sin which may remain after the sin itself is forgiven, as a measure of discipline in the midst of forgiveness. Compare the similar use of *nqh* in Jer 30,11 and 46,28. Also, the consequences of *naqqēh lō’ y^enaqqeh* are a visitation upon the descendants. This is not guiltiness (which would be expressed by *ns’* as in Ezek 18,20), but the natural consequences of sin. *Naqqēh lō’ y^enaqqeh* thus does not contradict the first part of Exod 34,7, but merely shows what may accompany God’s forgiveness.” However, Parunak overlooks the direct correlation of וְנָקָה and וְנָשָׂא עוֹן in Num 5:31, and the pervasive association of וְנָקָה with clearing (or not clearing) from sin, guilt, and punishment (not just “consequences”). See Ps 19:14 [Eng 19:13]; Job 9:28; Jer 2:35; 49:12 (cf. 25:15–17).

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

³²⁶ Ernest W. Nicholson, “The Decalogue as the Direct Address of God,” *VT* 27 (1977): 422–33; Hamilton,

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

Exodus, 315–16. For a contrary position, see Dozeman, *Exodus*, 465–67, 475–79; Durham, *Exodus*, 267–70; John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 55–56, and *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 386–88. Sailhamer, along with the others, takes all of Exod 20:1–17 as the object of the verb אמר in Exod 19:25 and argues that “in the present shape of the Pentateuch, the Decalogue (Ex 20:1–17) is intended to be read as the content of what Moses spoke to the people upon his return from the mountain in 19:25.” In support, Sailhamer cites the targumim which place additional words in Moses’ mouth in 19:25: “Draw near and receive the ten words.” However, Sailhamer presses the significance of this targumic expansion beyond its merit; it weighs neither for nor against the status of Exod 20:17 as Yahweh’s direct speech to the people. Sailhamer also invokes the almost universal transitive use of אמר to rule out an intransitive sense in 19:25, such as the English versions give it: “So Moses went down to the people and spoke to/told them.” HALOT, s.v. אמר, qal 1., similarly: “אמר never means to say without indicating what is stated.” However, the exceptions to this—Exod 19:25; Judg 17:2; and 2 Chr 32:24—rather than indicating defective texts which are missing direct or indirect speech, might just as easily confirm that אמר is sometimes used in an intransitive sense of “speak, tell.” This is how the LXX takes Exod 19:25: κατέβη δὲ Μωσῆς πρὸς τὸν λαὸν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς. Sailhamer’s reading disregards the connection between Exod 19:25 and God’s command to Moses to go down and warn the people not to ascend the mountain in 19:21 and 19:24. Dozeman reads 19:20–25 as a Priestly modification of the story of Yahweh’s direct speech to the people, replacing this with a scene of mediated holiness, with Moses as the speaker of Exod 20:1–17. McBride, “Essence of Orthodoxy,” 137 n10, cites a number of Jewish interpreters who emphasize Moses’ mediation of the Decalogue. See esp. Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 363–66, for an overview of ancient Jewish interpretive tradition.

³²⁷ Christoph Dohmen, *Exodus 19–40*, HThKAT (Freiberg: Herder, 2004), 107, “So rahmt die Einleitung der nachfolgenden Begründung von V 5b durch die Wiederholung des ‘Ich bin JHWH, dein Gott’ . . . , aus V 2a den gesamten dazwischenliegenden Teil, so dass in jedem Fall eine sachliche Einheit besteht.” See also Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, 26; *The Law and the Prophets*, 57.

³²⁸ Here, I concur with Childs, *Exodus*, 405; Walther Zimmerli, *Gottes Offenbarung: gesammelte Aufsätze zum Alten Testament*, TB 19 (Munich: Kaiser, 1963), 234ff; and Patrick, *Old Testament Law*, 46. In contrast, Frank-Lothar Hossfeld, *Der Dekalog: Seine späten Fassungen, die originale Komposition und seine Vorstufen*, OBO 45

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)³²⁹

Second, further distinguishing vv. 2–6 within Exod 20:1–17 is Yahweh’s first person address.³³⁰ This unit opens with the word אֲנֹכִי, “I” (v. 2) and concludes with the first person singular pronoun suffix on מִצְוֹתַי, “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 לַהֵם 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 אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים 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 (יִהְיֶה). He explains that plurals of majesty can be modified by either singular or plural adjectives, in this case the plural אֲחֵרִים. This reading, which does not agree with the LXX or any major English version, has several problems. First, elsewhere in the OT, אֱלֹהִים 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 לַהֵם (v. 5) in the context. Third, Joüon seems to be addressing a problem which does not exist, since a singular form of הִיא can be used to introduce a statement about the possession of plural items (Gen 1:29; 26:14; etc.).

³²⁹ McBride, “Essence of Orthodoxy,” 142–43.

³³⁰ Walther Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline*, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978), 110.

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 Illeism 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 Second Kings

2017), 67–84.

³³² Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 225–26.

³³³ Pier Cesare Bori, *The Golden Calf and the Origins of the Anti-Jewish Controversy*, trans. D. Ward, SFSHJ 16 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 10.

³³⁴ Breuer, “Dividing the Decalogue,” 308.

17:35 is another example of an inner-biblical application³³⁵ 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

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 *המך*, “to covet,” uses a the synonym *ארה*, “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.

³³⁷ Michael H. Segal, “Biblical Exegesis in 4Q158: Techniques and Genre,” *Textus* 19 (1998): 56–58; cited in Sidnie White Crawford, “Exodus in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Book of Exodus: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Craig A. Evans, and Joel N. Lohr, VTSup 164 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 309.

God. This is followed by passages from Deuteronomy promising a prophet, and then that very prophet, Moses, narrates the rest of the Decalogue.”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.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 *atnach* and a *sillûq/sôph pāsûq*. The *atnach* system resists any separation of v. 2 from vv. 3–6. And even the system employing *sillûq/sôph pāsûq* can be read as unifying, rather than fragmenting, vv. 2–6. Breuer argues that the “lower cantillation” system (with *sillûq/sôph pāsûq* 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.”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

³³⁸ Crawford, “Exodus in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” 309.

³³⁹ Jordan S. Penkower, “Verse Divisions in the Hebrew Bible,” *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.

³⁴⁰ Breuer, “Dividing the Decalogue,” 307.

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 נקח, “leave unpunished.”³⁴¹ 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.³⁴² 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

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.”

³⁴² R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34*, JSOTSup 22 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), 128–31.

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-covenanting (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.³⁴³ 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.

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 על פקד

In this chapter, I will argue that the Hebrew collocation על פקד 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 פקד. From the outset, however, the phrase “visiting-in-punishment” or the term “visiting” will be used as glosses for על פקד, in anticipation of this conclusion.

5.1. Key Studies Regarding the Meaning of פקד

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 פקד 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,

¹ HALOT, 3:956, lists three possible root meanings: “to miss, worry about,” “to see something remarkable, or alternatively examinable, in someone or something,” or “to seek, seek out, visit.” Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, AB 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 277, cites Martin Buber’s proposal: “to set in order, organize.” Several studies concur with Ephraim A. Speiser, “Census and Ritual Expiation in Mari and Israel,” *BASOR* 149 (Feb. 1958): 21, seeing “to attend with care” as the original common denominator of the verb. These include Josef Scharbert, “Das Verbum PQD in der Theologie des Alten Testaments,” *BZ* 4 (1960): 283; Henry S. Gehman, “Ἐπισκέπτομαι, ἐπισκέπεις, ἐπίσκοπος, and ἐπισκοπή in the Septuagint in Relation to פקד and Other Hebrew Roots: A Case for Semantic Development Similar to that of Hebrew,” *VT* 22 (1972): 199; Thomas E. McComiskey, “Prophetic Irony in Hosea 1,4: A Study of the על פקד Collocation and Its Implications for the Fall of Jehu’s Dynasty,” *JSOT* 58 (1993): 94.

² John R. Spencer, “*PQD*, the Levites, and Numbers 1–4,” *ZAW* 110 (1998): 539–40.

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 פקד von einer Grundbedeutung herzuleiten, ist ein mühsames Unterfangen.”⁴

When Yahweh is the subject of פקד, the sense of Yahweh’s פקד-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 וַע (“iniquity”) and the preposition עַל (“upon, against”) in Exod 20:5 and 34:7, פקד carries this latter, negative sense of Yahweh visiting iniquity in punishment. Thus, most English versions render פקד 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 ἀποδιδούς, ἐπάγων;⁶ French NEG *punis*).

Studies on the verb פקד by Koch, Scharbert, André, and Lübke 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

³ Bernard Grossfeld, “The Translation of Biblical Hebrew פקד in the Targum, Peshitta, Vulgate and Septuagint,” ZAW 96 (1984): 93.

⁴ 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), 142.

⁵ This two-edged understanding of God’s “visitation” is evidenced across both the OT and NT, especially in the verbs פקד and ἐπισκέπτομαι and in the nouns הַפְקָדָה and ἐπισκοπή. Gehman, “Ἐπισκέπτομαι,” 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 פקד 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 פקד 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 פקד also in Exod 32:34 and in five passages in Isaiah. Elsewhere in the LXX, uses of פקד in punitive contexts are translated by ἐπισκέπτομαι (“visit,” here, in punishment) or, most frequently, by ἐκδικέω (“avenge, punish”). An excursus on LXX tendencies in translating the Hebrew idiom עַל פקד 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*)." ⁷ Focusing on the verbal actions of שלם Piel, שׁוּב Hiphil, and פָּקַד (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.*⁸

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."⁹ 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."¹⁰

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

⁷ Klaus Koch, "Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament?" in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp, ed. James L. Crenshaw, IRT 4 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 65, 67 (author's emphasis).

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'*.¹¹ 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 order¹²—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 Scharbert¹³ 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."¹⁴ 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,

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.

¹³ Josef Scharbert, "Das Verbum PQD in der Theologie des Alten Testaments," *BZ* 4 (1960): 2092–6; repr. in *Um das Prinzip der Vergeltung in Religion und Recht des Alten Testaments*, ed. Klaus Koch (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 278–99; and "Formgeschichte und Exegese von Ex 34,6f und seiner Parallelen," *Biblica* 38 (1957): 130–50.

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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶ Since there is no single German word which adequately captures all of this, Scharbert recommends the traditional translation of *heimsuchen* (“visit”).¹⁷ For Scharbert, then, the phrase פקד עון על 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.¹⁸

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 34:7.¹⁹ 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.”²⁰

Scharbert’s dual emphasis on פקד as investigation plus any appropriate punishing action is commonly echoed.²¹ Some, like Scharbert, are careful to stress both investigation and the

¹⁵ Scharbert, “Formgeschichte und Exegese von Ex 34,6f,” 139–40.

¹⁶ Scharbert, “Verbum PQD,” 291–92.

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 פקד to ‘test.’” For Scharbert, this root meaning is the primary meaning, but he clearly affirms the secondary sense of פקד as acting in punishment in these contexts as well.

¹⁹ Scharbert, “Verbum PQD,” 291, while describing Yahweh’s פקד עון על 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.”

²⁰ Scharbert, “Verbum PQD,” 291.

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 פקד 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 פקד 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 פקד 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 על פקד Collocation and Its Implications for the Fall of Jehu’s Dynasty,” *JSOT* 58 (1993): 95–96, notes, “We cannot, however, limit the sense of פקד 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, “פקד,” *NIDOTTE* 3:659, 661, suggests that “perception and response is implicit in the verb.”

²² 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), 156n85. So also 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), 146–47.

²³ Noel D. Osborn and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Exodus*, UBSHS (New York: UBS, 1999), 474.

²⁴ Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament*, TBS 7 (Leiden: Deo, 2005), 485.

²⁵ William Johnstone, *Exodus*, 2 vols., SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2014), 2:30.

²⁶ Christoph Dohmen, *Exodus 19–40*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 85, 319, 321.

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 פקד 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 פקד formula indicates that the children are “graciously judged on their own merits.”

Others follow Scharbert with regard to a basic meaning of the root פקד as the key to its sense in Exod 20:5 and 34:7, but differ slightly in the execution of this approach. Propp translates פקד 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 פקד 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

²⁷ Dohmen, *Exodus 19–40*, 355. Here, Dohmen cites Schenker, *Versöhnung*, 85–87.

²⁸ Annemarie Ohler, *The Bible Looks at Fathers*, trans. Omar Kaste (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 62.

²⁹ Ohler, *Bible Looks at Fathers*, 103n23.

³⁰ Michael Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer: A Study of Exodus 32–34 and Numbers 13–14*, FAT 2/8 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 201 (author’s emphasis).

³¹ William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, AB 2A (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 171.

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 פקד means "attend to, give heed to, observe, seek out with interest."³³ Buber and Rosenzweig highlight the meaning of פקד as "set in order, arrange, assign" (*zuordnen*) and translate Exod 20:5 and 34:7—along with all other occurrences of פקד in Exodus—accordingly.³⁴

5.1.3. Gunnel André

The most extensive treatment of the verb פקד to date is the 1980 monograph by Gunnel André, *Determining the Destiny: PQD in the Old Testament*.³⁵ She has also written the *TDOT* article on this verb.³⁶ 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.

³³ John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC 3 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 276–77.

³⁴ Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Die Fünf Bücher der Weisung* (Cologne: Jakob Hegner, 1954). In this translation, every occurrence of פקד 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. Knobloch, 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."

³⁵ Gunnel André, *Determining the Destiny: PQD in the Old Testament*, ConBOT 16 (Lund, Sweden: Gleerup, 1980).

³⁶ Gunnel André, "פקד *pāqqad*," *TDOT* 12:50–63.

negative contexts she regularly glosses the verb with “condemn” or “pronounce judgment.”³⁷

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.³⁸ In André’s view, the biblical texts with פקד 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 20:2–6,³⁹ 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 פקד in our passages. In his article on פקד, Williams criticizes André’s proposal because it “reads too much into the meaning of the verb.”⁴⁰ Spencer also questions the value of this work: “In spite of the length of André’s study, it remains unclear how

³⁷ See esp. André, *TDOT* 12:57–59.

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.”⁴¹

5.1.4. J. C. Lübbe

J. C. Lübbe investigates פקד according to componential analysis and semantic domains, grouping its occurrences into thirteen domains. He places the use of פקד 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.”⁴² 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 פקד 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 פקד 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 פקד carries the sense of “avenge, punish.”⁴³ Levinson, in his study of the inner-biblical transmutations of Exod 20:5, works with an understanding of פקד here as “punish,” criticizing Scharbert’s emphasis on פקד as

⁴¹ Spencer, “*PQD*, the Levites, and Numbers 1–4,” 541.

⁴² John Clifton Lübbe, “Hebrew Lexicography: A New Approach,” *JSem* 2 (1990): 9.

⁴³ Grossfeld, “Translation of the Biblical Hebrew פקד,” 84, 86.

“test.”⁴⁴

While much ground has been plowed regarding the meaning of פקד, significant disagreement and confusion remains regarding the sense of עון אבות על-בנים 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 פקד, but the idiomatic collocation על פקד. Thus, focused attention will be paid to outlining the usage and meaning of two specific uses of פקד: the construction על + פקד and certain uses of the noun פקדה (“visitation”) which are closely related to it.

5.2. The Collocation על פקד as an Idiom for Punishment

5.2.1. על פקד as a Standard Collocation

If the preposition על is to be ascribed its own meaning in על פקד passages which depict Yahweh dealing with iniquity, it must be an adversative על or an על of disadvantage.⁴⁵ The parallelism of Zech 10:3 suggests this: על-הרעים חרה אפי ועל-העתודים אפקוד (“Against the shepherds my anger burns, and against the he-goats I will visit”). While על is used with פקד 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 על.⁴⁶ On the other hand, passages which depict Yahweh’s פקד-acts as divine rescue never mark the recipient of such visitation with the preposition על. Viewed as an independent semantic unit then, על 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 על פקד is the normal idiom, Jeremiah perhaps switches to adversative ב in 9:8 because על was used at the head of the clause (העל-אלה לא-אפקד-בם). The prepositions ב and על are the most likely choices to convey an adversative force. Joüon and Muraoka, §133.f. (2:489–90), under על, write, “The pejorative meaning is highly developed: thus על often means *against* (but ב is more common).” Two passages use אל with פקד: Jer 46:25 and 50:18, the former using both על פקד and אל פקד synonymously in the same verse. These are instances of the occasional interchangeability of על 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 על, Jer 46:25 and 50:18 are not exceptions to, but rather examples of, the idiom על + פקד.

between its object and the subject's act of פקד: Yahweh visits iniquity in punishment *against* someone. This sense is likely in the LXX's consistent rendering of this idiom with the preposition ἐπι plus accusative.⁴⁷ The Vulgate almost exclusively translates על פקד as *visitare super* plus accusative, with *super* as the standard translational equivalent for על. The implied adversative sense in this construction is made explicit in the few passages which render על פקד as *visitare contra* (Isa 13:11; 26:21; and Jer 36:31) or *visitare adversum* (Jer 30:20).

While על can be seen to contribute an independent adversative meaning to these contexts, it may be more helpful to regard the syntagm על פקד as a single semantic unit.⁴⁸ 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.).”⁴⁹

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.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ On the one hand, ἐπι is a stock translational equivalent of על, and even with the accusative, ἐπι could simply mark that the Lord's (positive? negative?) visitation “reaches its goal completely” (BDAG, III.1.β). However, the consistent use of ἐπι in rendering על פקד 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, על פקד works as a set pairing in Hebrew usage, as seen by the infrequency of the expression פקד ב. While generally ב is more common than על as an adversative preposition, the idea of visiting-in-punishment against is expressed by על פקד 50 times in the OT and by ב פקד 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, *MIDOTTE* 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 על in these constructions is the recipient of divine sanction or punishment, not merely the object of divine displeasure.

⁵⁰ Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 96.

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 עזר ל (come to the aid of) which, when expressed by verbal nouns (עֲזָרָה or עֲזָרָה) forfeits the preposition ל, and this would apply directly to על פקד (visit-in-punishment against) and its verbal noun פקדה (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 על פקד, but the present study will demonstrate that it functions in this semantically unified sense. The regularity and frequency with which פקד is paired with על to express Yahweh’s dealing with unpunished iniquity⁵⁴ suggests that על פקד has become a common idiomatic⁵⁵ construction denoting punishment.

⁵¹ Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §11.2.e.

⁵² Takamitsu Muraoka, “On Verb Complementation in Biblical Hebrew,” *VT* (1979): 432–33.

⁵³ Muraoka, “On Verb Complementation,” 428.

⁵⁴ The preference in Hebrew usage for על פקד (50x) in these contexts rather than 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 נקם 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 על פקד does not need to be treated as a distinct lemma because פקד sometimes bears this punitive meaning without על.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷ 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 על פקד is clearly implied.⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁹ In five cases, the recipient of punishment is implied by a pronominal suffix on an iniquity term. For example, Yahweh will “visit *their* sins (הטאתם)” (Hos 8:13).⁶⁰ One additional passage, 1 Sam 15:2, functions in much

⁵⁶ Lübbe, “Hebrew Lexicography,” 9.

⁵⁷ The exclusion of a few passages from this group of fourteen deserves comment. Both על and adversative כ are used with פקד in Jer 9:8. Two passages mark the recipient of Yahweh’s punishing פקד with אל as an interchangeable equivalent with על (Jer 46:25; 50:18; the former using אל פקד and על פקד 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 פקדה, 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 הטאותם), “and he will punish their sins”) with Exod 32:34 (ופקדתי עליהם הטאתם), “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 על פקד, or even that it implies the prepositional phrase עליהם between פקד and its object, 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: יזכר עונם ויפקד הטאותם, “He will remember their iniquity, and he will visit their sins” (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 על-phrase: פקד עונך בת־אדום, “he will punish your iniquity, O daughter of Edom.” 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 על-phrase marking the recipient of punishment unstated and merely implied: ופקדתי בשבט פשעם 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.⁶¹ 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.⁶²

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 על פקד commonly indicates visiting-in-punishment-against.⁶³ The collocation על פקד 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־אשר עשה עמלק לישראל, “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 על פקד explicit here would have required the fuller expression פקדתי את־אשר עשה עמלק לישראל עליו, “I (now) visit-in-punishment that which Amalek did to Israel *against him*,” but עליו is unnecessary here and would even be grammatically ambiguous following לישראל.

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 על כל in the phrase הגוים (על ?) לפקד כל, under pressure of the expression כל־הגוים just three verses later in 59:9.

⁶³ For example, see Zeph 1:8: ופקדתי על־השרים, “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/ἐπισκεπτομαι/ἐπάγω/ἀποδίδωμι ἐπι 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 ἐκδικήσω ἐπι τοὺς ἄρχοντας.

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 34:7.⁶⁴ 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 כ) or substance of the punishment. Pattern 4 is rare; here the iniquity term itself is the object of על.

⁶⁴ על פקד 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 אל 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 ἐκδικέω (“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 Punished⁶⁵ as Object of על, *Iniquity-Word*.⁶⁶

Exod 34:7 פקד עון אבות על־בנים ועל־בני בנים
("visiting-in-punishment iniquity of fathers against sons and against sons of sons")

Isa 13:11 ופקדתי על־תבל רעה ועל־רשעים עונם
("And I will visit-in-punishment against the evil world and against the wicked their iniquity.")

Hos 2:15⁶⁷ ופקדתי עליה את־ימי הבעלים
("And I will visit-in-punishment against her the days of the Baals.")

Jer 21:14 ופקדתי עליכם כפרי מעלליכם
("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 ופקדתי על־השרים ועל־בני המלך
("And I will visit-in-punishment against the officials and the against the sons of the king.")

Isa 24:21 יפקד יהוה על־צבא המרום במרום ועל־מלכי האדמה על־האדמה
("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 51:47⁶⁹ ופקדתי על־פסילי בבל
("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, 14a; 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; Zech 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 ופקדתי על־מזבחות בית־אל
("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

Isa 27:1 יפקד יהוה בחרבו הקשה והבדולה והחזקה על לויתן
("Yahweh will visit-in-punishment with his hard, great, strong sword against Leviathan.")

Jer 27:8 בחרב וברעב ובדבר אפקד על־הגוי ההוא
("With sword and famine and pestilence I will visit-in-punishment against that nation.")

Lev 26:16 והפקדתי עליכם בהלה את־השחפת ואת־הקדחת
("And I will cause to visit-in-punishment against you sudden panic, wasting disease, and fever")
(Note: פקד here is *Hiphil*.)

Jer 15:3 ופקדתי עליהם ארבע משפחות
("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.

Jer 5:9 העל־אלה לוא־אפקד
("Against these [previously mentioned offenses] shall I not visit-in-punishment?")

Jer 9:8⁷¹ העל־אלה לא־אפקד־בם
("Against these [previously mentioned offenses] shall I not visit-in-punishment against them?")

Isa 10:12 אפקד על־פרי־גדל לבב מלך־אשור ועל־תפארת רום עיניו
("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.

⁷¹ Eng Jer 9:9.

recipients of harm from Yahweh's פקד 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.⁷² Whether or not Pattern 4 exists and whichever passages should be included in it, one thing does remain clear: Hebrew usage with על פקד 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 על פקד 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)

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 על פקד 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: הא-על-אלה לא-אפקד (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 על פקד, “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 על 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 על plus iniquity (that is, על 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 פקד (infrequently marked by את). 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, פקד has no direct object (there is no explicit iniquity term), and the על פקד construction 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 פקד. Syntactically, however, Hebrew usage with על פקד 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 פקד 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 על פקד as “visiting upon” (so, generally, ESV, ASV, KJV, NKJV, NASB, NJPS), and others adopting a more familiar English syntax and translating על פקד as “punishing” (so, generally, NIV, NRSV, GWN). Overwhelmingly, the LXX and the Vulgate mimic the Hebrew syntax in translating על פקד. The following chart compares these syntax structures, using Amos 3:2 as an example:

| Version | Subject | Verb of Punishment | Offense Eliciting Punishment | Recipient of Punishment |
|---------|----------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| MT | יהוה | פקד | את כל־עוונותיכם [acc.] | עליכם [prep. + acc.] |
| LXX | κύριος | ἐκδικέω | πάσας τὰς ἀμαρτίας ὑμῶν [acc.] | ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς [prep. + acc.] |
| Vulg. | <i>Dominus</i> | <i>visitare</i> | <i>omnes iniquitates vestras</i> [acc.] | <i>super vos</i> [prep. + acc.] |
| ASV | LORD | visit | all your iniquities [acc.] | upon you [prep. + obj.] |
| NIV | LORD | punish | for all your sins [prep. + obj.] | you [acc.] |

It is worth noting that the recipient of Yahweh’s punishing visitation (פקד) 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 את פקד, with את marking the recipient of Yahweh’s gracious visitation. Of the 15 passages which employ פקד in this gracious sense, 11 have את פקד, and three others have פקד with an object suffix (excluding the possibility of the object marker את).⁷⁵ 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 את פקד to

⁷⁵ את פקד appears in Gen 21:1; 50:24–25; Exod 3:16; 4:31; 13:19; 1 Sam 2:21; Isa 23:17; Jer 27:22; 29:10; 32:5; and Ruth 1:6. The three passages with an object suffix on the verb פקד are Jer 15:15; Zeph 2:7; and Ps 106:4.

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 אתם). Behold, I am about to *visit against you* (פקד עליכם) the evil of your deeds.” Here again, פקד with אה 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.⁷⁶ 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 פקדה

In what follows, the Biblical passages containing קפד 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 ἐπεσκέψασθε (“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 על פקד and several occurrences of the cognate noun פְּקִדָּה.

While על פקד means “to visit against, to punish” in fifty passages, in twenty-two other passages, the collocation פקד + על means “to appoint (someone) over” or “to assign or entrust (something) unto.”⁷⁷ An example is Potiphar’s appointment of Joseph in Gen 39:4: ויפקדהו, “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 בירושלם, “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 על פקד with the visiting/punishing sense of the expression, glossing the “punitive” sense of פקד as “assign (usu. of Y.) guilt (עוֹן *sin*, etc.) or the punishment for guilt to someone, thus perh. punish.”⁷⁸ 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 on them, a certain authority over the sinner, gives them the power to effect disaster upon the sinner.⁷⁹ Hamilton translates פקד as “assigns (the consequences of) the fathers’ iniquity

⁷⁷ על פקד 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 על פקד passage unassigned: Jer 13:21. On this, and on the assignment of four marginal passages to the punishment category, see footnote 64 above.

⁷⁸ David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 9 vols. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993–2016), 6:740.

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 פקד gibt dem Betrauten zwar ein gewiss Verfügungsrecht über die Dinge oder Personen, über die er ihn bestellt, behält sich aber auch die Kontrolle vor. פקד על עוֹן könnte man dann so verstehen: Gott gibt der Sünde und dem auf ihr ruhenden Fluch eine gewisse Verfügungsgewalt 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 פקד which leads to it; his critique of Koch is that Koch limits himself to this aspect of Yahweh’s על פקד עוֹן, without acknowledging the aspect which Scharbert tends to accent, derived from a different aspect of the “root meaning” of פקד: to inspect and to take appropriate action. See Scharbert, 141–44.

upon children and upon grandchildren.”⁸⁰ 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”).⁸¹ 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.⁸² Second, “appoint, assign” פקד על passages prefer the Hiphil of פקד, whereas the use of פקד על in situations of punishment is overwhelmingly Qal.⁸³ 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

⁸⁰ Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 572. Hamilton renders the same expression in Exod 20:5 as “reckoning the ancestors’ iniquity to the sons” (p. 322).

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: ותפקד עלי עון האשה היום. 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 (אֵצֶל־חַסֵּד) 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 על פקד 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 על פקד in Pattern 1 than it carries in Patterns 2–4; in fact, Amos 3:14 uses על פקד as a punitive expression twice in the same verse, first using Pattern 1, then Pattern 2. Fourth, the assign and the punish senses of על פקד 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.⁸⁴ Finally, the use of על פקד 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.⁸⁵ Therefore, על פקד 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.⁸⁶

It is also important to note at this point that the collocation על פקד as a punitive idiom has a

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 (עלי).” §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 (עליו).”

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, constituere, ponere, praeponere, tradere, praeficere, praecipere*, etc., but never *visitare*).

close relation to many occurrences of a cognate noun, פְּקֻדָּה. This noun has several meanings, corresponding to the varied meanings of the verb פָּקַד, with 12 of its 31 occurrences depicting a visitation-in-punishment.⁸⁷ 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., פָּקַדָה in the sense of *punishment* (Num 16:29; Jer 10:15 etc.) refers to פָּקַד על *to punish* (Isa 24:21 etc.).”⁸⁸ While the noun פָּקַדָה and the verb-preposition פָּקַד על appear together in a single verse only in Num 16:29, several other passages describe Yahweh’s punitive act of פָּקַד על in the near context as the day/year/time of (your, their) “visitation” (פָּקַדָה).⁸⁹ Therefore, the lengthy investigation of פָּקַד על which follows will encompass not only the 49 passages containing Yahweh’s פָּקַד על acts in contexts of iniquity and punishment, but also the 12 associated passages containing the noun פָּקַדָה employed in this same sense.

The present approach might be criticized as circular, since it appears to gather all “punitive” instances of פָּקַד על and פָּקַדָה and then analyze them in order to demonstrate the hypothesis that פָּקַד 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 פָּקַד על occurrences analyzed include all instances of פָּקַד 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-על-פָּקַד” and “punishing-על-פָּקַד” passages, this classification was, methodologically, merely a way to set aside the “appointing”

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 פָּקַדָה refers to Yahweh’s positive life-preserving visitation in one passage: Job 10:12. In 14 other occurrences, פָּקַדָה 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, פָּקַדָה 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 על פקד in these contexts. “The punitive idiom על פקד” is a way of identifying and distinguishing the uses of על פקד which are *not* referring to appointing/entrusting. Second, as will be demonstrated below, all of these punitive/non-appointing על פקד passages clearly express a concern with iniquity under various terms and descriptions, if not in the same clause as על פקד then in the near context, so that this collection of passages can also be categorized as “uses of על פקד in contexts of iniquity.”

Methodologically, I remained non-committal regarding the semantic content of על פקד while analyzing the regular features of its context. Having said that, I often substitute “visit-in-punishment against” for על פקד 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 על פקד.

5.2.4. Contextual Analysis of Relevant Passages with על פקד or פקדה

The present study focuses on the 49 of 50 occurrences of the punitive על פקד idiom which have Yahweh as subject. In addition, 12 occurrences of the noun פקדה are closely related to this idiom, also depicting Yahweh’s visiting-in-punishment. Because Amos 3:14 contains two occurrences of על פקד, and Num 16:29 contains both על פקד and the noun פקדה, this yields 59 passages which speak of Yahweh visiting-in-punishment against iniquity. These 59 passages were investigated to 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 על פקד passages, the discreet set of related divine acts extends across several verses or even an entire chapter: e.g., for the על פקד occurrence in Jer 44:13, Yahweh’s actions in Jer 44:1–14 were inventoried; for the על 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 על פקד, 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 על פקד? (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 על פקד 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 על פקד? (See Table H.) Are there expressions in these passages which indicate Yahweh's acts of על פקד 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 על פקד. These verbs can be

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, בוא*), and, as he visits, he brings (forth), sends, causes to fall, or gives (*בוא על* Hiphil, *יצא* Hiphil, *נפל על* Hiphil, *נתן על, נתן ב, נתן ל* 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 (*נטה על*) and strikes (*נגף, נכה* Hiphil) the recipients of his *פקד על*. He slays them (*הרג*), bereaves them (*שכל* Piel), and draws the sword after them (*ריק אחר* Hiphil). 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 (*תמם, שבת, עשה...כלה, סוף* Hiphil, *כרת* Hiphil, *כלה* Piel, *דמה*). In 21 passages, using almost a dozen different expressions, Yahweh destroys, desolates, and lays low (*אכד* Piel, *אכל, חבל* Piel, *ירד* Hiphil, *שפל* Hiphil, *שמם* Hiphil, *שמד* Hiphil, *שחת, שדד, שבר, שים...לשממה* Hiphil, *ירד* Hiphil, *שחר, שחב, נדה* Hiphil, *זרח* Qal and Piel, *זרח, בער, אכל*). Some associated actions are expressed with harm-bringing metaphors such as feeding with bitter food, giving poisonous water to drink, making drunk,⁹¹ and "drying up" (*יבש, הרב*, both Hiphil) their sea, their fountain, or their streets. Clearly,

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 (*שכר* Hiphil). "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 (קבץ, אסף) for judgment, judging (שפט) and performing justice (עשה משפט), bringing justice to light (נתן משפט 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 (גְּמִלוֹת). He recompenses (שלם Piel) people according to their deeds. Hosea twice uses *פקד על* in syntactic parallelism with "repaying" (שוב ל) Hiphil). "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 *שפט* and *משפט* 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 *על פקד* 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 *פקד*, *גמל*, *השיב*, *שלם*; antonyms are: e.g., *נקה* and *נשא*.”⁹⁴

Twice, Yahweh’s act of *על פקד* is associated with his disciplining (*יטר* 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 *על פקד* passages, Yahweh is also the subject of verbs that can be translated as test (*בחר*, *צרך*) or search thoroughly (*חפש* 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 *על פקד* 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 *על פקד* with inspecting or testing in these contexts. First, both *בחר* and *צרך*, the verbs for “test” which appear

⁹³ H. G. L. Peels, *The Vengeance of God: The Meaning of the Root NQM and the Function of the NQM-Texts in the Context of Divine Revelation in the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 265, “In general, the root NQM can be paraphrased as punishing, justified retribution.”

⁹⁴ Peels, *Vengeance of God*, 266. As will be discussed below, the antonyms for *נקם* mentioned by Peels (*נקה* and *נשא*) are also employed in the OT as contrasting alternatives to *על פקד*.

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 בהן and צרה in Jer 9:6 [Eng 9:7] with פקד על and נקם (Hithpael, “avenge oneself”) in 9:8 [Eng 9:9]. A second observation deals with Zeph 1:12, the single occurrence of הפש (Piel, “search thoroughly”) alongside פקד על. 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 (הפש) is *not equated with* פקד על. 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 על). 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 על 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 על.

Table B also includes two occurrences of verbs that often indicate acts of perception or attention: “to remember” (זכר) and “to watch over” (שקד). Because another common proposal for a basic meaning of פקד underlying פקד על 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 φθλάγματα 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 (זכר) their iniquity; he will visit-in-punishment (פקד)¹⁰⁰ 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.”¹⁰¹ 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 (שקד) 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 על פקד 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 על פקד is not associated with the bare action על שקד (“watch over”), but with the fuller expression על שקד עליהם לרעה ולא לטובה (“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 על פדד is implied, the על being omitted to preserve poetic parallelism and the recipient of punishment indicated by the pronoun suffix on “their sins” (הטאתם). 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 (שָׁלֵם) have come.”

¹⁰³ The passage echoes the imagery of Jer 5:6, which pictures “a leopard watching over (שקד) their cities” so that all who go out are torn to pieces.

good”). Even this fuller expression is not equated with the Yahweh’s על פקד in the passage; rather, על פקד 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 על פקד really or literally means “to attend to, look after (iniquity)” in this passage and elsewhere, note that the OT never places על פקד into the formula in which שקד is found in v. 27, nor could it. To say that Yahweh פקד עליהם לרעה (“visits-in-punishment against them for harm”) would be noticeably redundant, in a way in which שקד עליהם 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 על פקד 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 (שפך...זעם, געל). He stands in “direct opposition to” (הגני אליך);¹⁰⁴ his very being is “not towards” them (אין נפשי אל); he will set his face against them (נתן...פני ב). They have walked contrary to Yahweh, so he will walk contrary to them (הלך...בקררי). Yahweh has rejected them (מאס) and cast them off (נטש) and will no longer smell (לא ריח Hiphil) the aroma of their sacrifices. He will utterly forget them (נשכה, נשח).

Not all of the verbal actions in the preceding sections are precise or even general synonyms with על פקד. They are simply actions of Yahweh which take place alongside of and in some relation to על פקד. They serve as a broad contextual field for evaluating the hypothesis that על פקד 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, אל functions as an equivalent to the adversative preposition על (“against”).

were the syntactic parallels to על פקד: “slaying” (הרג, Isa 27:1), “remembering” iniquity¹⁰⁵ (זכר, Hos 9:9); “repaying” (שוב 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 על פקד are illuminating, at the same time, the *contrasting* actions expressed in these contexts are also helpful in distilling the precise sense of על פקד. 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 (נשא, סלח), leaving unpunished (נקה), relenting (נחם Niphal), and guarding from harm (נצר).

In Exod 20:5–6 (= Deut 5:9), Yahweh’s על עון פקד (“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 ופשע וחטאה (“forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin”)—which also stands in direct parallel contrast to על עון פקד, “visiting iniquity against” (cf. Num 14:18). Within this passage, על פקד modifies the statement which precedes it: “yet he will certainly not neglect punishment” (ונקה לא ינקה). Since על פקד 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 with יזכור עונם (“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 **נקה** 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 (**נשא**) iniquity and who visits iniquity in punishment (**פקד על**), Moses bows low and prays that God will forgive (**סלה**) 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 (**סלה**) 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 unmistakable¹⁰⁶—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 (נצר) 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 (עשה חסד, נצר חסד), forgiving iniquity (נשא), leaving unpunished (נקה Piel), guarding against punishment (נצר...פן יפקד עליהם 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.”

¹⁰⁶ Hans Wildeberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp, CC (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 583, lays out the many commonalities binding Isa 5:1–7 with 27:2–6. He judges 27:2–6 to be “the antithesis of 5:1ff.”

¹⁰⁷ Without suggesting any intended allusion, the note of Yahweh watchfully preserving his gracious disposition against punishment, which is sounded by the use of נצר here, resonates with the shift from עשה חסד (“performing steadfast love,” Exod 20:6) to נצר 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” (היה שוממה) (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

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”), נוד Hithpael (“move to and fro”), נוע (“totter”), לא עמד (“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 בוש ("be ashamed"), בוש Hiphil ("be put to shame"),¹⁰⁹ and הפך ("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 על פקד-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: לא כסה Piel and גלה ("reveal" and "not cover"), referring to the coming to light of bloodshed and murder. While this verbal association with Yahweh's על פקד might be marshalled as evidence of a "basic meaning" of "investigate, examine" underlying על פקד, 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 על פקד refers to the awaited moment of its decisive execution .

Lastly, Subgroup 12 notes two passages in which Yahweh's על פקד is associated with the result of people "knowing" (ידע). In Num 16:29–30, because of the unusual visitation to be visited (על פקד 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

¹⁰⁹ The Hiphil of בוש 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 (פקד 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 על פקד. When Yahweh acts to על פקד, people see this and draw certain conclusions. This association seems to fit על פקד 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 על פקד

The 59 passages examined also contain a number of nouns which create a field of association for Yahweh’s על פקד (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 (כשד משדי), sudden and complete destruction (כלה אף-נבהלה), great shattering (שבר גדול), vengeance (נקמה), reprisal (גמול), recompense (שלום), something new and unparalleled (בריאה),¹¹⁰ a work (מלאכה), calamity (שואה, איד), darkness (אפלה), disaster/evil (רעה), “no good” (אין טוב).¹¹¹ Of particular note is the term “recompense” (שלום), which stands in precise parallel with פקדה 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 (שממה), complete desolation (שממה כלה), or everlasting desolation (שממות עולם); heaps (גלים), 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 בריאה which Yahweh will ברא. 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 פקדה often captures the sense of the verbal construction על פקד. They express nominally the following six verbs, respectively: שדד (“devastate”), כלה (“be complete, finished”), שבר (“break”), נקם (“avenge”), גמל (“deal with, repay”), שלם (Piel, “repay”), ברא (“create”).

תנינים), a waste (חרבה). Their goods will become plunder (משסה). Some results are emotional or existential: recipients of Yahweh's על פקד experience terror(s) (בהליות, בעתה), anguish (עיר), and confusion (מבוכה). Their fate will be an object of horror (שמה) to others, and they will become a curse (קללה), a reproach (חרפה), and an oath (אלה), the object of everlasting reproach and shame (כלמות עולם, חרפה עולם). These nouns expressing the nature and result of Yahweh's על פקד are inventoried in Table F, second column, with further notes in the fourth column. Clearly these support a consistent sense of על פקד as visit-in-punishment.

5.2.4.g. Instruments and Agents of Yahweh's על פקד

In our passages, Yahweh often employs agents or instruments in carrying out his acts of על פקד (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 (בחרב), with famine (ברעב), and with pestilence (בדבר).”¹¹² Instruments of Yahweh's על פקד include sudden panic (בהלה), wasting disease (שחפת), fever (קדחת), pestilence (דבר), sword (חרב), famine (רעב), fire (אש), captivity (שבי), 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 על פקד.¹¹³) These are instruments employed in acts of

¹¹² Cf. Jer 27:8.

¹¹³ This is in stark contrast to the many times in which “eyes” (עינים) 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 ראה and הוזה (“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 *פקד על*. 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 *פקד על* 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 על* and *פקדה* passages, with supporting notes in the fourth column.

In demonstrating that the idiom *פקד על* means to visit-in-punishment, the consistent

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 על פקד 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 על פקד 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 על פקד is clearly established by grammatical constructions such as על אשר (“because of”), על (“because”), בגלל (“because of”), מפני (“because of”), יען (“because of”), כי (“for”), לכן (“therefore”), למען (“so that”). These are listed and detailed in the third column of Table G. Some passages depict Yahweh’s על פקד as “according to” the (evil) deeds of the recipient, using the preposition כ or כאשר.¹¹⁵ 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* (מפני) the evil of your¹¹⁶ deeds”) and 21:14 (“I will visit-in-punishment against you *according to* the fruit of your deeds”). One passage situates Yahweh’s על פקד 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 (על פקד, Lev 26:14–16). This clear, direct causal relationship between human iniquity and the divine activity of על פקד precisely suits an understanding of על פקד 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 מעלליהם (“their deeds”).

less sense.

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*, 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 (*אש 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 (*אש קנאה*) the whole earth will be consumed.” Both of these passages follow explicit

expressions of Yahweh's על פקד (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 על פקד passages. These associations are detailed in Table H, found in Appendix 2 at the end of this chapter. The vocabulary here includes wrath (קצף, חמה), 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 על פקד (Jer 21:12–14; cf. Jer 30:23–24; Isa 26:20–21). His על פקד 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: על-הרעים חרה אפי ועל-העֹתוּדִים אֶפְקֹד, "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 על פקד/פקדה 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 על פקד, a relationship which corresponds naturally to על פקד 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 על פקד, his anger is already in place. Yahweh acts to על פקד because people have "provoked him to anger" (כעס Hiphil, Jer 44:8; cf. 44:13). Divine wrath is

sometimes the *cause*, sometimes the *instrument*, but never the *result* of Yahweh's על פקד.

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 על פקד, 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 על פקד 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 על פקד, or other temporal references which serve to characterize Yahweh's על פקד 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 על פקד 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 על פקד as well, as Jacob, commenting on this passage, observes: “Punishment ... would definitely come. That thought was included in the word *po-qed*, through which God maintained His right to future action.”¹¹⁷

In the Prophets, this time language is standard alongside על פקד: “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 על פקד the king of Assyria (Isa 10:12), or, “When seventy years are completed,” he will על פקד Babylon (Jer 25:12). In some instances, the time of Yahweh's visitation-in-punishment is spoken of as an imminent and

¹¹⁷ Jacob, *Second Book of the Bible*, 555.

extraordinary day, again evoking Exod 32:34: “on the day of my visiting” (ביום פקדי...על), with infinitive construct), “on the day of visitation” (ליום פקדה), “the year of their visitation” (שנת פקדתם), “at the time of their visitation” (בעת פקדתם). “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 פקדה examined here stand in construct with the temporal nouns “day(s),” “time,” or “year.”

Surrounding the three references to Yahweh’s על פקד 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 על פקד.” 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 על פקד “this people” in multiple ways in 15:3. In Jer 23:26, Yahweh laments, querying, “*How long* (עד־מתאי) shall there be false prophecies in the hearts of the prophets?”¹¹⁹ In Jer 44:13, Yahweh threatens to על פקד the Judean fugitives in Egypt, just as he had על פקד Jerusalem; Jeremiah further explains this previous visitation: “Yahweh *was not able* (לא יכל) *to bear/forgive* (נשא) 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 פקדה: “*Shall I forget* (נשח) / *forgive* (נשא) any longer (עוד) the wicked treasure in the house of the wicked, and the accursedly scant measure? *Acquit* (זכה) a man with wicked scales and a bag of

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 על פקד the man—and his household—who presumes to claim falsely “the burden of Yahweh.”

dishonest weights?”—although there are textual difficulties here.¹²⁰

Many interpreters note some relation between Yahweh’s slowness to anger and his forgiving yet visiting against (פקד על) 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 פקד על 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 פקד על. The prophets warn of Yahweh’s growing provocation and coming visitation. This likely explains the preponderance of פקד על and פקדה passages within the prophetic corpus.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 פקד על:

When 70 years are completed, I will visit-in-punishment against (פקד על) the king of Babylon and against (על) that nation, declares Yahweh, for their iniquity, and against

¹²⁰ Here, reading Mic 6:10–11 with the emendations suggested by BHS note. Leslie C. Allen, *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’eššā*, “can I bear” (Duhm), or for *ha’eshsheh*, “can I forget” (Wellhausen), which thus secures an expected parallelism with the next line.” Thus also ESV, NIV, and Bruce K. Waltke, *A Commentary on Micah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 394, 397–98.

¹²¹ In the Pentateuch, punitive פקד על and פקדה appear 8x and 1x, respectively. The Writings contain one use (פקד על in Job 36:23). All other occurrences are in the Prophets (52x), the majority of these in Jeremiah (29x).

(על) the land of the Chaldeans, and I will make it an everlasting desolation. And I will bring against that land *all my words* (דברי) *which I threatened* (דבר) against it, *everything which is written in this scroll, which Jeremiah prophesied* (נבא) *against all the nations.* (Jer 25:12–13)

Thus, Micah can place the day of Yahweh’s punishing visitation (יום פקדה) appositionally alongside “the day of [Israel’s] watchmen” (יום מצפיה, Mic 7:4), since it is “Yahweh’s prophets [the watchmen] who have declared the very disaster which is ‘now’ taking place.”¹²²

Just as the prophets assume and point forward to Yahweh’s act of על פקד 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 על פקד 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.¹²³ 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).¹²⁴

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 MT מצפיה (“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 (על פקד) 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 על פקד*. 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 על פקד, 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 על פקד and Exodus 20:5 and 34:7

Before offering concluding proposals regarding the meaning and use of על פקד, it will be useful to pause and briefly relate the foregoing contextual analysis to the studies of Koch, Scharbert, André, and Lübke 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 על פקד and פקדה. 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 על פקד overwhelmingly portray a

was interpreted as divine indifference or even approbation, so that they could say to themselves, 'Calamity shall not even come close, much less confront us' (9:10) and even have high hopes for the Day of the Lord (5:18)."

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.¹²⁶ Third, in particular, the association of Yahweh’s על פקד 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.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.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.

¹²⁶ The rejection of Koch’s position here is focused solely on this misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the meaning of על פקד. 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).

¹²⁷ In support of this claim, consider the reflections on the relation between divine wrath and historical disasters in C. H. Dodd, *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, *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 *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 150.

¹²⁸ Patrick Miller, *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 *corresponds* to the offending act, but that does not necessarily mean that it grows automatically from the act as its *consequence*.

durch andere vollziehen läßt.”¹²⁹ Fifth, the instrumental expressions contained in these contexts do not match with Yahweh’s act of *פקד על* 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*.¹³⁰ Finally, the way in which Yahweh’s *פקד על* is tied to a temporal framework in which a decisive, sudden,¹³¹ future act of Yahweh is envisioned (“the day of *פקדה*”) 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 *פקד על* Babylon.”

The contextual analysis above weighs firmly against Koch’s framework, at least as an interpretation of the expression *פקד על*. It likewise stands against the Koch-like “natural process” explanations of Exod 20:5 and 34:7 found in many commentaries.¹³² It also indicates that Koch overlooked at least one verbal construction and at least one noun—*קפד על* and *פקדה*—in his claim that the OT has no words for punish or punishment.¹³³

Over against Koch, Scharbert consistently affirms at least the *implication* of Yahweh’s

¹²⁹ Scharbert, “Verbum PQD,” 283–84.

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 their 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 *פקד* itself; it is “ein zeitlich begrenzter Vorgang ... welche die Situation plötzlich verändert.” Again on p. 145: “Das Wort *פקד* 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 *פקד על*. 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 *נקם* (“avenge, punish”) and the noun *נקמה* (“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 *פקד* and *פקדה* (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 *פקד על* and *נקם* with *ἐκδικέω* in the LXX further attests their close semantic association.

punishing acts as a component part of על פקד in contexts of iniquity. However, the contextual analysis presented above also serves to qualify the influential approach of Scharbert. By advocating the *Grundbedeutung* of פקד as the key to unlocking its sense in these passages, Scharbert speaks as if על פקד “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 על פקד does not identify as present in these contexts. Scharbert’s way of describing על פקד 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 על פקד which is active in these contexts. Yahweh’s על פקד 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 על פקד 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 על פקד never means to forgive but always to take

¹³⁴ James Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language*, 100. See also Christopher Mitchell, “The Use of Lexicons and Word Studies in Exegesis,” *Concordia Journal* 11 (1985): 129.

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 על פקד (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 על פקד 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 על פקד 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 על פקד, the searching is prior to the על פקד; the searching serves to locate those who will then be punished (פקד על). In the two passages (Jer 9:6 [Eng 9:7]; 11:20) which set Yahweh's "testing" alongside his על פקד, 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 offense¹³⁵ 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

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 פקד על is a misrepresentation or inappropriate constriction of this “pragnant” verb, which contains in its bones notes of inspection and investigation.¹³⁶ 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 “Nachprufen.”¹³⁷ 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 פקד על in the passages examined above.

Gunnel Andre’s thesis that פקד expresses Yahweh’s act of “determining the destiny” must be severely qualified or rejected in light of the preceding contextual analysis. The action of פקד על in these passages does not merely declare or determine the fate of those affected (that is, to “pronounce judgment on”¹³⁸ them); rather, it actually effects this fate.

Finally, contextual analysis of פקד על strongly supports the existence of the third semantic domain which Lubbe assigns to פקד: “Events of punishment and reward,” with the possible

¹³⁶ Scharbert, “Verbum PQD,” 292.

¹³⁷ Scharbert, “Verbum PQD,” 292.

¹³⁸ Andre, *TDOT* 12:57–58, repeatedly translates פקד על as “pronounce judgment on” or “pronounce judgment over.” Andre’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” (פקד על) Babylon and his “visiting-in-salvation” on behalf of his people (פקד). In some sense, Andre 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 Andre associates פקד with pronouncing or declaring in these contexts at all, rather than associating it with these concrete acts of punishment and rescue.

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 על פקד than Lübbe recognizes.

5.2.6. Concluding Observations: על פקד as Visit-in-Punishment

In the preceding, I have suggested that על פקד 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 על פקד 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 על פקד 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 על פקד 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 על פקד 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 על פקד is used. However, the regular contextual use of על פקד 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 פקד 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 על פקד. 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-visitation in the OT is its radical polarity: visiting (פקד) to graciously rescue his people in need or visiting (על פקד) 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* פקד and yields the following observations.¹³⁹ 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 (זכר, compare 1 Sam 1:17–20 and 2:20–21) or verbs of “turning toward, regarding, and seeing” (ראה, גבט, שוב). 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

¹³⁹ The fifteen saving-פקד passages are: Gen 21:1–2; 50:24–25; Exod 3:16; 4:31; 13:19; 1 Sam 2:20–21; Isa 23:17; Jer 15:15; 27:22; 29:10; 32:5; Zeph 2:7; Pss 80:15 [Eng 80:14]; 106:4; and Ruth 1:6

“visitation” is portrayed in terms of remembering after seventy years of forgetting:

In that day, Tyre will be forgotten (שכח) 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 (שכח) harlot! Play it well! Sing many songs—so that you may be remembered (זכר)!” 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 על פקד 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 (פקד) his estranged wife by going to her father’s house, intending to go in (בוא) to where she is, so also Yahweh arises (קום, Zeph 3:8), goes forth (יצא, Isa 26:21), and comes (בוא, Isa 13:5) as he visits against (פקד על) people in punishment. Weinfeld notes that personal presence is one of the most pervasive semantic components of פקד: “The vast majority of the usages of *pqd* ... involve attention bestowed on someone *in his presence*.”¹⁴⁰ Even Koch speaks of פקד as “God’s chastening *advent*” and as his “*theophanic chastisement*.”¹⁴¹

In support of the root פקד connoting divine presence in על פקד contexts, it is interesting that both Scharbert and André associate Yahweh’s פקד with the metaphor of a great king’s punitive military expedition (*Strafexpedition*).¹⁴² 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, “עון ‘āwōn,” *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 *p^equddah*” (author’s emphasis). Oddly, while affirming this metaphor, neither Scharbert nor André accent personal presence as a key connotation from the root פקד in punitive על פקד 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 פקד, particularly in texts which speak of Yahweh’s *rescuing* visitation. Lübbe groups his first two semantic domains for פקד 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 פקד 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 פקד, ‘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 פקד 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 קפד should not be squeezed into the meaning of על פקד, the contextual characteristics of על פקד discussed above are well-matched with the פקד 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 על פקד in other respects. As

¹⁴³ Lübbe, “Hebrew Lexicography,” 8.

with the dynamic of על פקד discussed above, the word “visit” connotes a momentary intervention into the regular, ongoing state of affairs.¹⁴⁴ 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 על פקד for the punitive acts of Yahweh in the OT. Thus, I have generally rendered על פקד 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 על פקד, 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 על פקד 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 על פקד in the Septuagint

The translation of the collocation על פקד in the LXX generally supports the conclusion that על פקד 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,

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 פקד in the LXX

Within the LXX, four Greek verbs occur more than once as renderings of פקד in such contexts: ἀποδίδωμι, ἐπάγω, ἐκδικέω, and ἐπισκέπτομαι.¹⁴⁵ 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 על פקד as an idiomatic expression and sometimes woodenly maintained this Hebrew idiom in the Greek by rendering it with its standard translational stereotypes (ἐπισκέπτομαι for פקד, plus ἐπι for על).

5.3.1.a. Ἀποδίδωμι

The LXX translates על פקד with ἀποδίδωμι three times, all in the Pentateuch and each representing a nearly identical phrase: פקד עון אב(ו)ת על-בנים (ו)על-שלשים ועל-רבעים (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*.”¹⁴⁶ In Lev 18:25, the LXX renders על פקד

¹⁴⁵ The LXX uses five other verbs one time each to render the expression על פקד in contexts concerning iniquity. Ἀνταποδίδωμι (“repay, requite,” Lev 18:25) is close in form and sense to the more frequent ἀποδίδωμι, discussed below. Ἐπισυνίστημι (“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 על פקד 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 על פקד here as “punish”; NJPS has “requite”). In Job 36:23, the question is posed: “Who *visits upon* (על פקד) God his way, and who says, You have done wrong?” Here, the LXX translates with ἐτάζω (“examine, test”), which concurs 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 על פקד suggest a stronger, more hyperbolic translation than any of these: “Who visits-God-in-punishment for his ways?” Finally, על פקד is translated ἐπιζητέω (“seek after”) in 2 Sam 3:8. This passage is the only instance of punitive על פקד 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.

¹⁴⁶ BDAG, 110, definition 4. The entries in BDAG offer a paraphrased definition, followed by short glosses as translational equivalents, the latter in italics. On the distinction between definitions and glosses, and the lack of attention to such distinction in Hebrew lexicons, see James Barr, “Hebrew Lexicography: Informal Thoughts,” 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), 719.

with the closely related verb ἀνταποδίδωμι (“repay, requite”). Ἀποδίδωμι and ἀνταποδίδωμι are the most common renderings for על פקד in the Pentateuch; that the LXX employs them for על פקד 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.¹⁴⁷ The common LXX association of ἀποδίδωμι/ἀνταποδίδωμι with the verb ἐκδικέω (“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.¹⁴⁸

5.3.1.b. Ἐπάγω

While the LXX renders על פקד in Exod 20:5 and its echoes in Num 14:18 and Deut 5:9 with ἀποδίδωμι, it translates על פקד in Exod 34:7 (the nearest echo of the Exod 20:5 phrase) with ἐπάγω (“bring upon,” implying harm or punishment).¹⁴⁹ This alteration is likely occasioned not by a concern to differentiate the meaning of על פקד in 34:7 from that in 20:5, but rather by the LXX rendering of על פקד 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 בוט.¹⁵⁰ The LXX employs ἐπάγω for

¹⁴⁷ 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.

¹⁴⁸ The LXX has the construction ἀποδίδωμι ἐκδίκησιν (“execute/inflict vengeance”) in Num 31:3; Sir 12:6; and Isa 66:15. Ἀνταποδίδωμι is closely associated or paralleled with ἐκδικέω or ἐκδίκησις 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.

¹⁴⁹ BDAG, 356, defines ἐπάγω as “to cause a state or condition to be or occur, *bring on, bring something upon someone*, mostly something bad.”

¹⁵⁰ 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 פקד for the first case but not for the second where he uses ἐπάξω; for the latter note its occurrence in a similar context but with a different subject in v. 21.” Grossfeld, “Translation of Biblical Hebrew פקד,” 95, suggests that the LXX variance of Exod 34:7 (ἐπάγω) from Exod 20:5, Deut 5:9, and Num 14:18 (ἀποδίδωμι) “may be attributed to

פקד על 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 בוא (55x). While the translator of Jeremiah never glosses פקד על with ἐπάγω, a number of Jeremiah passages closely relate בוא (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 נקם (27x). Its use for פקד (22x) is restricted to the “punitive” collocation פקד על.¹⁵³ Similarly, when the cognate noun פקדה is

more than one translator than to anything else.” While such an assertion cannot be disproven, it bears pointing out that the variation among these four parallel texts takes place between two occurrences in the same book.

¹⁵¹ Henry St. John Thackeray, *A Grammar of the Old Testament in Greek according to the Septuagint* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1987), 13. See also Tov, “Impact of the Septuagint,” 102.

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 שפט).

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” (חטאותם). In addition to translating נקם and פקד,

employed in the sense of a visitation-in-punishment, the LXX most often translates with ἐκδίκησις (“punishment, vengeance”).¹⁵⁴ 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 ἐξάνιστημι ἐκδίκησιν (“raise up vengeance”).¹⁵⁵ 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.”¹⁵⁶ 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 על פקד with the verb ἐκδικέω, the standard verb for translating נקם, the LXX closely associates על פקד 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 נקם ב (“take vengeance

ἐκδικέω in the LXX is used ten times to render the verb שפש, seven of these by the translator of Ezekiel, always in contexts involving not merely a general or evaluative judging, but acts of punishing judgment (1 Sam 3:13; 2 Chr 22:8; Obad 1:21; Ezek 7:7, 27; 16:38; 19:12; 20:4; 23:24, 45. In Obad 1:21, שפש is sometimes read more broadly as ruling or governing: see Raabe, *Obadiah*, 270. However, this is not the understanding of שפש conveyed by the LXX’s ἐκδικέω here. The only other occurrence of ἐκδικέω in the LXX translates the verb שרר, which often simply means “seek” or “inquire” but in this passage (Deut 18:19) expresses the divine warning that God will require satisfaction from, or punish.

¹⁵⁴ Jer 26:21LXX=46:21MT; 27:27LXX=50:27MT; Ezek 9:1; Hos 9:7; and Mic 7:4. In two other passages, פקד 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=99:8MT; Jer 5:9, 29; 9:9LXX=9:8MT; 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 ἐξάνιστημι 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 נקה), 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=44:17MT). 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 על קרפ (“to visit-in-punishment against”) in v. 18. In the LXX, these differing expressions are translated identically (ἐκδικέω ἐπί in each case) and thus equated.

5.3.1.d. Ἐπισκέπτομαι

The final verb frequently used in the LXX to render על קרפ is ἐπισκέπτομαι (13x: 11 in Jeremiah and once each in Hosea and Zechariah). While only 13 of the 50 occurrences of the collocation על קרפ are translated with ἐπισκέπτομαι, this verb is a standard translational equivalent (stereotype) for the Hebrew verb קרפ in general: 112 of the 127 LXX instances of ἐπισκέπτομαι translate קרפ, and Grossfeld notes that the LXX employs forms of ἐπισκέπτομαι as equivalencies for words in the קרפ group in 56% of their occurrences.¹⁵⁷ It appears that, by the time of the LXX, the translation of קרפ by ἐπισκέπτομαι “has become a cliché.”¹⁵⁸

It is further illustrative here to observe the broad use of ἐπισκέπ- terms in translating the noun form of קרפ. The multivalent noun קרפ 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”).¹⁵⁹ In addition to these, however, the LXX employs a broad array of words all related to ἐπισκέπτομαι in order to convey meanings of קרפ: 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 קרפ,” 85, “The *Septuagint* ... employs ἐπισκέπτεσθαι in the forms of ἐπισκέπτομαι, ἐπίσκεψις, ἐπισκοπέω, ἐπίσκοπος, 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 קרפ 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; as 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 ἐπίσκοπος¹⁶⁰ 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.”¹⁶¹ These meanings account for the rendering of פקד 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 פקד passages with ἐπισκέπτομαι), but the BDAG definitions do not account for the selection of ἐπισκέπτομαι for פקד in passages of divine punishment. That is, none of the BDAG meanings apply to the passages with the collocation על פקד 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.”¹⁶² This supplemental definition for ἐπισκέπτομαι coheres with the meanings of the other Greek translational equivalents for על פקד 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.¹⁶³ 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 על פקד which underlies it and toward which it is

¹⁶⁰ And, more frequently, the Greek noun ἐπίσκοπος is employed to render another פקד noun: פקיד, “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. LSJ, 656–57 has only positive meanings (the visiting done by a friend, helper, or physician) or neutral meanings (regarding, inspecting, mustering) for ἐπισκοπέω 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 על פקד 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 פקד.

A common solution has been to take the translation of פקד by punitive verbs such as ἀποδίδωμι, ἐπάγω, ἐκδικέω as an extension or interpretation of the pure and basic meaning of פקד, whose “original common denominator” is giving attention or care to something.¹⁶⁴ In this view, the rendering of פקד with ἐκδικέω (“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 פקד, 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, “*Pāqad* ... 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 על פקד pursue two different strategies, both of which could be characterized as strict, but in different senses. The rendering ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπί seeks to strictly/literally represent the form of the Hebrew idiom על פקד, using the standard, stereotyped equivalents for each Hebrew word. The renderings ἀποδίδωμι ἐπί, ἐπάγω ἐπί, and ἐκδικέω ἐπί, likewise strictly represent the Hebrew syntactical structure, yet in contrast to ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπί, these other renderings seek to strictly reproduce the semantic content of על פקד 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 ἐπί 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 על פקד behind it.

Hebrew text assert that in Exod 20:5, for example, פקד “bedeutet nicht ‘strafen’, sondern prüfen, untersuchen, nachsehen,”¹⁶⁶ so also Greek lexicons limit the definitions of ἐπισκέπτομαι (even in its LXX renderings of punitive על פקד) 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 על פקד.¹⁶⁸ As a result, the denotative sense which they cobble together for פקד/ἐπισκέπτομαι sits awkwardly in these punitive passages. As demonstrated previously in this chapter by the contextual analysis of 59 passages with על פקד or the noun פקדה, the activity described by פקד 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 פקד and the LXX renders the first with ἐπισκέπτομαι, the sense of פקד/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.

¹⁶⁷ T. Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 279.

¹⁶⁸ *Ad hoc* observations are sometimes made regarding the function of על פקד 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 פקד or ἐπισκέπτομαι have consistently failed to note the character of על פקד as a distinct idiom. See, for example, Grossfeld, “Translation of Biblical Hebrew פקד,” 84, who speaks of a “theological use” of פקד meaning “to punish, avenge, accuse” but makes no mention of the construction על פקד in such passages, instead postulating developments in the meanings of the verb פקד 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 פקד/ἐπισκέπτομαι* 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* (MT *על פקד*, LXX *ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπι*) 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 פקד/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 פקד/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 פקד* 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.

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.¹⁶⁹ 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) ἐπι (= 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.”¹⁷⁰ 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.¹⁷¹

Commenting on the translator of LXX Exodus, Perkins adds:

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.”

¹⁷⁰ Chamberlain, *Greek of the Septuagint*, xxii–xxiii.

¹⁷¹ Chaim Rabin, “The Translation Process and the Character of the Septuagint,” *Textus* 6 (1968): 8.

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.¹⁷²

In the LXX, then, such stereotyping was “from the outset ... the rule rather than the exception.”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.¹⁷⁴ The strong stereotypical (Wevers: clichéd) relationship between \aleph and $\epsilon\pi\iota\sigma\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\pi\tau\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$, discussed above, is present throughout the Greek OT, beginning in the LXX Pentateuch, most prominently in Numbers.¹⁷⁵

In the case of the LXX renderings of punitive $\epsilon\aleph$ 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

¹⁷² Larry J. Perkins, “Exodus: To the Reader,” in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 43, 45.

¹⁷³ Emanuel Tov, “Did the Septuagint Translators Always Understand Their Hebrew Text?” in *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.”

¹⁷⁴ Tov, “Impact of the Septuagint,” 184.

¹⁷⁵ Within the LXX Pentateuch, $\epsilon\pi\iota\sigma\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\pi\tau\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$ renders \aleph 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 \aleph ,” 86, discusses the LXX translation of the many passages in Numbers in which \aleph is used in the sense of counting. He observes that in 4 of 114 such passages, the LXX translator uses $\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\theta\mu\acute{\epsilon}\omega/\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\theta\mu\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$, while in 105 of 114 passages the LXX renders $\epsilon\pi\iota\sigma\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\pi\tau\omicron\mu\alpha\iota/\epsilon\pi\iota\sigma\kappa\epsilon\upsilon\iota\varsigma/\epsilon\pi\iota\sigma\kappa\omicron\pi\acute{\epsilon}\omega$. From this, Grossfeld concludes that the translator does not understand \aleph to mean “count” in most of these passages, since he is aware of a precise way to express counting in Greek ($\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\theta\mu\acute{\epsilon}\omega$, etc.) but most commonly renders these passages with a Greek word which does not bear this meaning ($\epsilon\pi\iota\sigma\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\pi\tau\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$, 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 $\epsilon\pi\iota\sigma\kappa\acute{\epsilon}\pi\tau\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$ not for its semantic precision in rendering \aleph in these passages but simply because it was the ordinary translational stereotype for \aleph generally.

that he had no choice but to render the strange phrase woodenly.¹⁷⁶ 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.”¹⁷⁷ This tension in translation is always debated, especially for traditional, authoritative texts such as the Bible¹⁷⁸—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.¹⁷⁹

The presence of Semitisms in the LXX and their labeling as such has been a matter of

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.”

¹⁷⁷ Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, “To the Reader of NETS,” in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), xiv. The editors lay out three reasons for this presupposition on pp. xiv–xv.

¹⁷⁸ Tremper Longman III, “Accuracy and Readability: Warring Impulses in Evangelical Translation Tradition,” in *Biblical Translation in Context*, ed. Frederick W. Knobloch, STJHC 10 (Potomac: University Press of Maryland, 2002), 165–75.

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.”¹⁸⁰ 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.¹⁸¹

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.”¹⁸² There are, for example, some scattered indications in the LXX manuscript tradition that the expression ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπί became increasingly familiar as a biblical idiom for punitive divine visitation during the Christian era.¹⁸³

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 papyrii (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).

¹⁸¹ Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 107.

¹⁸² Jobes and Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 108.

¹⁸³ A quick perusal of the volumes of the Göttingen Septuagint indicates no variants shifting away from ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπί as a reading in punitive עַל קִרְבַּי passages. In contrast, there does seem to have been some modest shifting toward the Hebraicism ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπί. Some LXX manuscripts as early as the 6th century substitute ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπί for ἀποδίδωμι ἐπί (Deut 5:9), for ἀνταποδίδωμι ἐπί (Lev 18:25), for ἐπισυνίστημι (Lev 26:16), and especially for ἐπάγω ἐπί (Isa 10:12; 26:21).

Similarly, the renderings of punitive על פקד 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 פקד 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 ל, 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 על פקד (rather than, say, פקד ב) 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 על פקד is rendered by ἐκδικέω or ἀποδίδωμι, which is syntactically unusual in each case. Greek usage indicates the recipient of vengeance with ἐκδικέω plus ἐκ,¹⁸⁶ but the translators of

¹⁸⁴ Albrecht Pietersma and Marc Saunders, "Jeremias: To the Reader," in *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 876. Emanuel Tov, "The Nature and Study of the Translation Technique of the Septuagint," in *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 245, similarly stresses, "The conclusion cannot be avoided that the grammatical categories of the Hebrew influenced the translation to a great extent," and Tov speaks of "the translators' dependence upon the Hebrew in such *minutiae* as prepositions."

¹⁸⁵ There are only four exceptions to this use of ἐπί in the passages rendered with ἀποδίδωμι, ἐπάγω, ἐκδικέω, and ἐπισκέπτομαι. Three times על פקד is translated with accusative of recipient of punishment, rather than with ἐπί plus recipient (with ἐκδικέω 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 (ב = κατά, "according to his ways"), again freeing the accusative to be used to mark the recipient of punishment (τὸν Ἰακωβ).

¹⁸⁶ BDAG, 301, notes, under the second definition of ἐκδικέω ("punish, take vengeance"), "with the person

these על פקד passages retain some feel of the Hebrew idiom by translating with ἐκδικέω *plus ἐπί*. In his study on Hebraic influence in the syntax of the Septuagint, Helbing regards the use of ἐπί with ἐκδικεῖν when rendering פקד 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.¹⁸⁷ In the same way, each of the three LXX instances of ἀποδίδωμι for על פקד 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 על פקד, 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, על פקד. 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 (= על) 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 פקד 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 על פקד 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

on whom vengeance is taken, or who is punished, designated by ἐκ.”

¹⁸⁷ Robert Helbing, *Die Kasussyntax der Verba bei den Septuaginta: Ein Beitrag zur Hebraismenfrage und zur Syntax der Koivῆ* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1928), 38.

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 ἐπισκέπτομαι.¹⁸⁸ Passages occurring in Chapters 15–28 are translated by ἐκδικέω.¹⁸⁹ The distribution in LXX Jeremiah of ἐπίσκεψις/ἐπισκοπή and ἐκδίκησις for the Hebrew noun פקד matches this pattern roughly, but not precisely.¹⁹⁰ Multiple explanations for this grouping of translation choices are possible. Different translators may be responsible for different portions of Jeremiah.¹⁹¹ Or, the same translator may have hit upon one equivalency for על פקד 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 ἐπισκέπτομαι 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 על פקד: Both Visiting and Punishing

The above discussion has sought to establish that the translators of the LXX consistently read על פקד 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

¹⁸⁸ These include: Jer 5:9, 29; 9:9LXX=9:8MT; 9:25LXX=9:24MT; 11:22; 34:8LXX=27:8MT; 36:32LXX=29:32MT; 37:20LXX=30:20MT; 43:31LXX=36:31MT; 51:13, 29LXX=44:13, 29MT.

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.

¹⁹⁰ LXX Jeremiah has ἐπισκοπή in 10:15 and ἐπίσκεψις in 11:23 and 31:44LXX=48:44MT. It uses ἐκδίκησις 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 על פקד as ἐκδικέω.

¹⁹¹ The rendering distribution of ἐπισκέπτομαι (Chapters 5–11 and 34–51) and ἐκδικέω (15–28) bears some correspondence to the two translator theory developed by Thackeray for LXX Jeremiah, and the closely related translator-redactor theory proposed by Tov, which bifurcate the book in its LXX sequence into Chapters 1–28/29 and 29/30–51. See Henry St. John Thackeray, “The Greek Translators of Jeremiah,” *JTS* 4 (1903): 398–411; Emanuel Tov, *The Septuagint Translation of Jeremiah and Baruch: A Discussion of an Early Revision of the LXX of Jeremiah 29–2 and Baruch 1:1–3:8*, HSM (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1973). Thackeray, *Grammar of the Old Testament in Greek*, 13, characterizes Jer 1–28 as somewhat more indifferent than “good κοινή Greek,” but relegates Jer 29–51 to the category of “literal or unintelligent versions.” For a recent review and critique of the Thackeray-Tov theory see Albert Pietersema, “An Excursus on Bisectioning Ieremias,” 1–9. Online: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/ieremias-excursus.pdf>.

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 = פקד, ἐπί = על), 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 על פקד 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 על פקד 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 פקד, connoting something in these contexts beyond the bare sense of acting-in-punishment. Above, I have argued against the assumption that פקד “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,” Osborn 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 על 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* ἐκδικέω 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 על elsewhere in the LXX and the rarity of non-*visitare* renderings of פקד על in the Vulgate, this distinction seems to be more than a translational penchant for introducing variety into repeated words.¹⁹⁵

MT: וביום פקדי ופקדתי עליהם הטאתם

(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: ἢ δ' ἂν ἡμέρα ἐπισκέπτομαι ἐπάξω ἐπ' αὐτοὺς τὴν ἁμαρτίαν αὐτῶν

(but in the day when I visit, I will bring upon them their sin)¹⁹⁶

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 פקד as an act of punishment, while the other more explicitly conveys the note of “visitation,” thus preserving the broader connotation of the Hebrew על פקד idiom. The Greek and the Latin differ in which occurrence of פקד 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 פקד על 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 ופקדת...פקדי as “ἐπισκέπτομαι...ἐπάξω,” the use of ἐπισκέπτομαι (=פקד) 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 על פקד 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 אנכי יהוה אלהיך אל קנא פקד עון אבת על-בנים
 (“[I am Yahweh, your God, a jealous God,] visiting-in-punishment iniquity of fathers against sons.”)

Exod 34:7 פקד עון אבות על-בנים ועל-בני בנים
 (“visiting-in-punishment iniquity of fathers against sons and against sons of sons”)

Lev 18:25 ותטמא הארץ ואפקד עונה עליה
 (“And the land became unclean, and so I visited-in-punishment its iniquity against it.”)

Num 14:18 פקד עון אבות על-בנים
 (“visiting-in-punishment iniquity of fathers against sons”)

Deut 5:9 פקד עון אבות על-בנים
 (“visiting-in-punishment iniquity of fathers against sons”)

Isa 26:21 לפקד עון ישב-הארץ עליו
 (“in order to visit-in-punishment the iniquity of the inhabitant of the earth against him”)

Hos 1:4 ופקדתי את-דמי יזרעאל על-בית יהוא
 (“And I will visit-in-punishment the bloodshed of Jezreel against the house of Jehu.”)

Amos 3:14a ביום פקדי פשעי-ישראל עליו ופקדתי על-מזבחות בית-אל
 (“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 וביום פקדי ופקדתי עליהם חטאתם
 (“In the day when I visit-in-punishment, I will visit-in-punishment against them their sin.”)

2 Sam 3:8 ותפקד עלי עון האשה היום
 (“And do you visit-in-punishment against me the iniquity of this woman today?”)

Isa 13:11 ופקדתי על-תבל רעה ועל-רשעים עונם
 (“And I will visit-in-punishment against the evil world and against the wicked their iniquity.”)

Hos 4:9 ופקדתי עליו דרכיו
 (“And I will visit-in-punishment against him [them] his [their] ways.”)

Job 36:23 מי־פקד עליו דרכו
("Who visits-in-punishment against him his ways?")

Pattern 1B2: Verb פקד + על-Person Punished + אַת-Iniquity-Word

Jer 23:2 הגני פקד עליכם את־רע מעלליכם
("Behold, I am about to visit-in-punishment against you the evil of your deeds.")

Jer 25:12 אפקד על־מלך־בבל ועל־הגוי ההוא נא־מִיהוּה את־עוֹנָם ועל־אֶרֶץ כַּשְׁדִּים
("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.")

Jer 36:31 ופקדתי עליו ועל־זרעו ועל־עבדיו את־עוֹנָם
("And I will visit-in-punishment against him and against his offspring and against his servants their iniquity.")

Hos 2:15¹⁹⁷ ופקדתי עליה את־ימי הבעלים
("And I will visit-in-punishment against her the days of the Baals.")

Amos 3:2 אפקד עליכם את כל־עוֹנֹתֵיכֶם
("I will visit-in-punishment against you all your iniquities.")

Pattern 1B3: Verb פקד + על-Person Punished + ךְ-Iniquity-Word

Jer 21:14 ופקדתי עליכם כפרי מעלליכם
("And I will visit-in-punishment against you according to the fruit of your deeds.")

Hos 12:3¹⁹⁸ וריב ליהוה עם־יהודה ולפקד על־יעקב כדרכיו
("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 יפקד יהוה על־צבא המרום במרום ועל־מלכי האדמה על־האדמה
("Yahweh will visit-in-punishment against the host of the heights in the heights,
and against the kings of the earth upon the earth.")

Isa 27:3 פן יפקד עליה
("lest anyone should visit-in-punishment against [the vineyard]")

Jer 11:22 הנני פקד עליהם
("Behold, I am about to visit-in-punishment against them.")

Jer 23:34 ופקדתי על־האיש ההוא ועל־ביתו
("And I will visit-in-punishment against that man and against his house.")

Jer 29:32 הנני פקד על־שמעיה הנלמי ועל־זרעו
("Behold, I am about to visit-in-punishment against Shemaiah the Nehelamite and against his offspring.")

Jer 30:20 ופקדתי על כל־לחציו
("And I will visit-in-punishment against all who oppress him.")

Jer 44:29 פקד אני עליכם במקום הזה
("I will visit-in-punishment against you in that place.")

Jer 46:25
הנני פוקד אל־אמון מנא ועל־פרעה ועל־מצרים ועל־אלהיה ועל־מלכיה ועל־פרעה ועל־הבטחים בו
("Behold, I am about to visit-in-punishment against Amon of No'¹⁹⁹ 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 הנני פקד אל־מלך בבל ואל־ארצו כאשר פקדתי אל־מלך אשור
("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 ופקדתי על־בל בבבל
("And I will visit-in-punishment against Bel²⁰⁰ in Babylon.")

Jer 51:47 ופקדתי על־פסילי בבל
("And I will visit-in-punishment against the idols of Babylon.")

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: מְרֹדֵךְ). Theodore Laetsch, *Jeremiah*, ConcCC (St. Louis: Concordia, 1952), 365, notes the word play with the verb בלע which follows in Jer 51:44b.

Jer 51:52 ופקדתי על־פסיליהּ
("And I will visit-in-punishment against her idols.")

Amos 3:14b כי ביום פקדי פשעי־ישראל עליו ופקדתי על־מזבחות בית־אל
("And I will visit-in-punishment against the altars of Bethel.")

Zeph 1:8 ופקדתי על־השרים ועל־בני המלך ועל כל־הלבשים מלבוש נכרי
("And I will visit-in-punishment against the officials and the against the sons of the king
and against all who wear foreign clothes.")

Zeph 1:9 ופקדתי על כל־הדולג על־המפתן
("And I will visit-in-punishment against all who leap over the threshold.")

Zeph 1:12 ופקדתי על־האנשים הקפאים
("And I will visit-in-punishment against all the men who are 'thickening on the lees' [complacent].")

Zeph 3:7 כל אשר־פקדתי עליהּ
("all which I have visited-in-punishment against her")

Zech 10:3 על־הרעים חרה אפי ועל־העתודים אפקוד
("Against the shepherds my anger burns, and against the he-goats [leaders] I will visit-in-punishment.")

Hos 4:14 לא־אפקוד על־בנותיכם כי תזנינה ועל־כלותיכם כי תנאפנה
("I will not visit-in-punishment against your daughters when they play the whore
nor against your wives when they commit adultery.")

Jer 9:24²⁰¹ ופקדתי על־כל־מול בערלה
("And I will visit-in-punishment against all those circumcised [merely] in the flesh.")

²⁰¹ 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 + ך-Punishment/Mean of Punishment

Jer 44:13 ופקדתי על היושבים בארץ מצרים כאשר פקדתי על־ירושלם בחרב ברעב ובדבר
("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 + ך-Punishment/Mean of Punishment + על-Person Punished

Isa 27:1 יפקד יהוה בחרבו הקשה והבדולה והחזקה על לויתן
("Yahweh will visit-in-punishment with his hard, great, strong sword against Leviathan.")

Pattern 3C: ך-Punishment/Mean 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/Mean of Punishment (without ך)

Lev 26:16 והפקדתי עליכם בהלה את־השחפת ואת־הקדחת
("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 ופקדתי עליהם ארבע משפחות
("And I will visit-in-punishment against them [with] four kinds [of punishments].")

Num 16:29 ופקדת כל־האדם יפקד עליהם
("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 *without* על, but uses *instrumental* ך after פקד to describe the means of punishment (with the rod, with stripes) and expresses iniquity (עון, פשע):

Ps 89: 33 ופקדתי בשבט פשעם ובנגעים עונם
("And I will visit-in-punishment with the rod their rebellion, and with blows their iniquity.")

Pattern 4 (1x or 4x): Verb פקד, Iniquity-Word as Object of על.

Pattern 4A: Verb פקד + על-Iniquity-Word

על אפקד על-פרייגדל לבב מלך-אשור ועל-תפארת רום עיניו **Isa 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: על-Iniquity-Word + Verb פקד

העל-אלה לוא-אפקד נאם-יהוה **Jer 5:9**
("Against these [previously mentioned offenses] shall I not visit-in-punishment? says Yahweh.")

העל-אלה לוא-אפקד נאם-יהוה **Jer 5:29**
("Against these [previously mentioned offenses] shall I not visit-in-punishment? says Yahweh.")

(?) Pattern 4C: על-Iniquity-Word + Verb פקד + כּ-Person Punished

העל-אלה לא-אפקד-בם נאם-יהוה **Jer 9:8**²⁰²
("Against these [previously described offenses] shall I not visit-in-punishment against them? says Yahweh.")

²⁰² Eng Jer 9:9.

5.5. Appendix 2: Contextual Analysis Tables for על פקד and פקדה as Punitive Expressions

The idiom על פקד 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 פקדה. Within many of these passages, other acts of Yahweh are mentioned alongside his act of על פקד. Tables A–D below list verbs and verbal constructions which Yahweh performs in such contexts in association with his acts of על פקד.

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 על פקד acts (Table D).

Some of the associated actions occur in the same verse as Yahweh’s act of על פקד. 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 על פקד act of Yahweh with which is it closely associated. Passages in which the associated verb not only occurs in the same verse but also stands as a precise syntactic parallel to על פקד 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 על פקד. While Tables A–E inventory related *verbs*, Table F inventories *nouns* expressing the nature, content, or instruments of Yahweh’s על פקד 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 על פקד as “because of” or “according to” the recipients’ iniquity. Table H documents the frequent association of Yahweh’s על פקד 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 פקדה, 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.

Table A. Associated Acts of Yahweh: Bringing Ruin

| Meaning Subgroup | Specific Verb Construction | Translation | Verse(s) Reference | Associated Verse פקד על | Notes |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A1. Bring or Send Harm | יצא...ל | come forth to... | Isa 26:21 | same verse | “come forth <i>to punish</i> (לפקד)” |
| | בוא...ל | come to... | Isa 13:5 | Isa 13:11 | “come <i>to destroy</i> (להבל Piel) the whole earth” |
| | קום...ל | arise for... | Zeph 3:8 | Zeph 3:7 | “arise for the prey” (taking עד as booty/prey, with ESV, NKJV; contra LXX; cf. Table B., B.1. below) ²⁰³ |
| | בוא על (H) | bring against | Lev 26:25 | Lev 26:16 | “bring the sword” |
| | | | Jer 5:15 | Jer 5:9, 29 | “bring a nation from afar” |
| | | | Jer 11:11,23 | Jer 11:22 | “bring disaster” |
| | | | Jer 15:8 | Jer 15:3 | “bring a destroyer” |
| | | | Jer 23:12 | same verse (פקדה) | “bring disaster” |
| | | | Jer 25:13 | Jer 25:12 | “bring all the words I have spoken” |
| | | | Jer 36:31 | same verse | “bring all the evil I have spoken” |
| | | | Jer 48:44 | same verse (פקדה) | “bring upon Moab the year of their visitation” |
| | יצא (H) | bring forth | Jer 50:25 | Jer 50:27 (פקדה) | “has brought forth the instruments of his indignation” |
| | נפל על (H) | cause to fall upon | Jer 15:8 | Jer 15:3 | “make anguish and terror fall upon” |
| | נתן על | bring upon | Jer 23:40 | Jer 23:34 | “bring everlasting reproach upon” |
| | נתן ב | give into | Jer 27:8 | same verse | “give them into [enemy’s] hand,” if read as נתן with <i>BHS</i> note (c) |
| | | | Jer 46:26 | Jer 46:25 | “give into hand of those seeking life” |

²⁰³ In Zeph 3:8, Yahweh speaks of a day when he will “arise לעד.” Most modern versions read ל here as expressing purpose, but they part ways in reading עד as עד “witness, testimony” (so ESV and NKJV, following the LXX) or as “prey, plunder” (that is K-B עד II: booty, much less common than ועד; so NIV, following the MT). Adele Berlin, *Zephaniah*, AB 25A (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 133, represents a third possibility, reading לעד in a temporal sense as לעד (that is, K-B עד 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 לעד 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.

| Meaning Subgroup | Specific Verb Construction | Translation | Verse(s) Reference | Associated פקד על Verse | Notes |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| | נתן ל | give over to | Jer 15:9 | Jer 15:3 | “give to the sword” |
| | צרר (H) | cause distress to | Zeph 1:17 | Zeph 1:8,9,12 | |
| | שלח | send | Lev 26:22 | Lev 26:16 | “send wild beasts” |
| | | | Lev 26:25 | Lev 26:16 | “send pestilence” |
| | | | Isa 10:16 | Isa 10:12 | “send wasting sickness” |
| | | | Jer 9:15MT | Jer 9:24MT | “send the sword” |
| <i>Total verses</i> | | | 23 | | |
| A2. Stretch out, strike against | נגף | strike, plague | Ex 32:35 ²⁰⁴ | Exod 32:34 | |
| | נטה על | stretch out | Jer 15:6 | Jer 15:3 | “stretch out hand against” |
| | | | Zeph 1:4 | Zeph 1:8,9,12 | “stretch out hand against” |
| | נכה (H) | strike, kill | Lev 26:21, 24 | Lev 26:16 | |
| | | | Amos 3:15 | Amos 3:14 | |
| <i>Total verses</i> | | | 6 | | |
| A3. Kill | הרג | slay | Jer 15:3 | same verse | |
| | | | Isa 27:1* | same verse | (*) close syntactic parallel to פקד על in this verse |
| | ריק אחר (H) | draw (sword) after | Lev 26:33 | Lev 26:16 | “draw the sword after” |
| | שכל (D) | bereave | Jer 15:7 | Jer 15:3 | “bereave of children” |
| <i>Total verses</i> | | | 4 | | |
| A4. Bring to an End | דמה | cause to cease, cut off | Hos 4:5 | Hos 4:9 | |
| | כלה (D) | bring to an end | Isa 10:18 | Isa 10:12 | |
| | | | Jer 9:15MT | Jer 9:24MT | |
| | | | Jer 5:10,18 | Jer 5:9,29 | Here, Yahweh will |

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 נגף as a manifestation of Yahweh’s פקד announced in the previous verse. In contrast, Dohmen, *Exodus 19–40*, 328, asserts that נגף 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 נגף 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.”

| Meaning Subgroup | Specific Verb Construction | Translation | Verse(s) Reference | Associated Verse פקד על | Notes |
|---------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | | | | <i>not</i> make a full end of Judah, yet the prospect is still thereby raised. |
| | כרת (H) | cut off, exterminate | Lev 26:20 | Lev 26:16 | |
| | | | Jer 44:11 | Jer 44:13 | |
| | | | Zeph 1:3–4 | Zeph 1:8,9,12 | |
| | | | Zeph 3:6 | Zeph 3:7 | |
| | סוף (H) | put an end to, sweep away | Zeph 1:2–3 | Zeph 1:8,9,12 | |
| | עשה...כלה | make an end of | Zeph 1:18 | Zeph 1:8,9,12 | |
| | שבט (H) | bring to an end | Isa 13:11 | same verse | |
| | | | Hos 1:4 | same verse | |
| | | | Hos 2:13MT | Hos 2:15MT | |
| | תמם | finish off | Jer 27:8 | same verse | Codex L reads תמם; <i>BHS</i> note (c) suggests reading נתן with the Syriac and the targumim. |
| <i>Total verses</i> | | | 17 | | |
| A5. Destroy | אבד (D) | cause to perish, destroy | Jer 51:55 | Jer 51:44,47,52 | |
| | | | Jer 15:8 | Jer 15:3 | |
| | אכל | devour | Jer 15:3 | same verse | (as predator) |
| | חבל (D) | destroy, ruin | Isa 13:5 | Isa 13:11 | |
| | ירד (H) | bring down | Jer 51:40 | Jer 51:44,47,52 | |
| | נתן | make into... | Lev 26:31 | Lev 26:16 | “make into ruins” |
| | | | Jer 9:10MT | Jer 9:8MT | “make into heaps, make a desolation” |
| | | | Jer 15:4 | Jer 15:3 | “make a horror,” reading with <i>Qere</i> |
| | שים...לשממה | make a desolation | Isa 13:11 | same verse | |
| | | | Jer 25:12 | same verse | |
| | שבר | break | Lev 26:19 | Lev 26:16 | |
| | | | Hos 1:5 | Hos 1:4 | |
| | שדד | devastate, destroy | Jer 15:8 | Jer 15:3 | |
| | | | Jer 51:55 | Jer 51:44,47,52 | |
| | שחת (D or H) | destroy | Jer 5:10 | Jer 5:9 | |
| | | | Jer 15:3 | same verse | |
| | שמד (H) | destroy | Lev 26:30 | Lev 26:16 | |
| | | | Isa 13:11 | same verse | |
| | שמם (H) | make desolate | Lev 26:31,32 | Lev 26:16 | |
| | | | Hos 2:14MT | Hos 2:15MT | |
| | שפל (H) | lay low | Isa 13:11 | same verse | |
| <i>Total verses</i> | | | 22 | | |

| Meaning Subgroup | Specific Verb Construction | Translation | Verse(s) Reference | Associated פקד על Verse | Notes |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| A6. Drive Out, Scatter | זרח (Q or D) | scatter | Lev 26:33 | Lev 26:16 | |
| | | | Jer 15:7 | Jer 15:3 | |
| | נדה (H) | drive out | Jer 27:10,15 | Jer 27:8 | |
| | סחב | drag away | Jer 15:3 | same verse | |
| | | | Jer 15:6 | Jer 15:3 | |
| | פוז (H) | scatter | Jer 9:15MT | Jer 9:24MT | |
| | שלה (D) | drive out | Lev 18:24 | Lev 18:25 | |
| <i>Total verses</i> | | | 8 | | |
| A7. Kindle, Burn, Consume | אכל | consume (as fire) | Isa 10:17 | Isa 10:12 | |
| | | | Jer 5:14 | Jer 5:9 | |
| | בער | burn | Isa 10:17 | Isa 10:12 | |
| | חרה | burn | Jer 44:6 | Jer 44:13 | “my anger burned against the cities of Judah...” |
| | | | Zech 10:3 | same verse | |
| | יצת (H) | kindle | Jer 21:14 | same verse | |
| | נתן...לאש | make ... a fire | Jer 5:14 | Jer 5:9 | |
| <i>Total verses</i> | | | 7 | | |
| A8. Metaphors of Destruction | אכל (H) | feed | Jer 9:14MT | Jer 9:24MT | “feed with bitter food” |
| | חרב (H) | dry up | Jer 51:36 | Jer 51:44,47,52 | “dry up her sea” |
| | | | Zeph 3:6 | Zeph 3:7 | “dried up/laid waste her streets” |
| | יבש (H) | make dry | Jer 51:36 | Jer 51:44,47,52 | “make her fountain dry” |
| | שכר (H) | make drunk | Jer 51:39,57 | Jer 51:44,47,52 | “make them drunk” |
| | שקה | give to drink | Jer 9:14MT | Jer 9:24MT | “give poisonous water to drink” |
| <i>Total verses</i> | | | 7 | | |
| TOTAL “BRING RUIN” VERBS | | | 94 | | |

Table B. Associated Acts of Yahweh: Judgment, Vengeance, or Discipline

| Meaning Group | Specific Verb Construction | Translation | Verse(s) Reference | Associated Verse על פקד | Notes | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B1. Contend, Have Suit Against | ריב...ריב | prosecute a legal dispute | Jer 51:36 | Jer 51:44,47,52 | Yahweh pledges to prosecute Judah's complaint against Babylon. | |
| | [ריב ליהוה עם] | [have] a dispute with | Hos 4:1 | Hos 4:9 | "Y. has a dispute with the inhabitants of the land" | |
| | | | Hos 12:3MT | same verse | "...with Judah" | |
| | קום...לעד | arise to testify | Zeph 3:8 | Zeph 3:7 | "arise to testify" (עד as witness; so LXX, NIV; see note 203 above) | |
| <i>Total verses</i> | | | 4 | | | |
| B2. Judge | עשה משפט | do (justice) | Jer 9:23MT | Jer 9:24MT | Don't boast in riches, God warns, but boast in knowing Yahweh, who <i>does</i> חסד, משפט, and צדקה in the earth. Then, his acts of judgment against Israel and the nations are threatened, highlighting the latter two terms. | |
| | שפט | judge | Jer 11:20 | Jer 11:22 | | |
| | נתן משפט לאור | bring justice to light | Zeph 3:5 | Zeph 3:7 | | |
| | לא עשה עֲוֹלָה | not do injustice | Zeph 3:5 | Zeph 3:7 | Zeph 3:5 asserts: "Yahweh is righteous (צדיק) within her." | |
| | אסף | gather (for judgment) | Zeph 3:8 | Zeph 3:7 | "My משפט (justice, decision) is to gather nations." | |
| | קבץ | assemble (for judgment) | Zeph 3:8 | Zeph 3:7 | "My משפט (justice, decision) is ... to assemble kingdoms." | |
| | <i>Total verses</i> | | | 6 | | |
| | B3. Refine, Test, Examine | בחן | test (lit.: by smelting) | Jer 9:6MT | Jer 9:8MT | The testing here is with a presumption of guilt and due punishment. |
| | | | Jer 11:20 | Jer 11:22 | The testing here is with a presumption of guilt and due punishment. | |

| Meaning Group | Specific Verb Construction | Translation | Verse(s) Reference | Associated Verse פקד על | Notes |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | הפש (D) | search thoroughly | Zeph 1:12 | same verse | “search thoroughly with lamps”—this act is not parallel to or a part of על פקד, but rather precedes Yahweh’s act of על פקד. |
| | צרף | refine, smelt | Jer 9:6MT | Jer 9:8MT | The sense here is a judicial testing, with a presumption of guilt and due punishment. |
| | <i>Total verses</i> | | 4 | | |
| B4. Watch over (for Harm), Take Notice | זכר | remember | Hos 9:9 | Hos 9:7 (פקדה) | “remember their iniquity” (*) In v.9, זכר is in parallel with פקד: “He will remember their iniquity..., visit their sins.” In v. 7, פקדה is in parallel with שלום: “days of visitation have come ... days of recompense have come.” |
| | שקד | watch over | Jer 44:27 | Jer 44:29 | “watch over for harm, not for good” (Cf. Jer 5:6, “a leopard watching over (שקד) cities” so all who go out are torn to pieces |
| | <i>Total verses</i> | | 2 | | |
| B5. Repay | גמל | render, treat | Jer 51:56 | Jer 51:44,47,52 | אל גמלות Yahweh is, a God of reprisals. |
| | שוב (H) | repay | Hos 4:9* | same verse | “repay to him his deeds” (*) close syntactic parallel to על פקד |
| | | | Hos 12:3MT* | same verse | “repay according to deeds” (*) close syntactic parallel to על פקד |
| | שלם (D) | repay | Jer 25:14 | Jer 25:12 | “repay according to deeds” |
| | | | Jer 50:29 | Jer 50:27 (פקדה) | “repay according to her deeds” |
| | | | Jer 51:56 | Jer 51:44,47,52 | |
| | <i>Total verses</i> | | 6 | | |

| Meaning Group | Specific Verb Construction | Translation | Verse(s) Reference | Associated פקד על Verse | Notes |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| B6. Avenge | נקם (D or HtD) | avenge | Jer 51:36 | Jer 51:44,47,52 | (D) |
| | | | Jer 5:9* | same verse | (HtD) (* close syntactic parallel to על פקד in this verse |
| | | | Jer 5:29* | same verse | (HtD) (* close syntactic parallel to על פקד in this verse |
| | | | Jer 9:8MT* | same verse | (HtD) (* close syntactic parallel to על פקד in this verse |
| | | | Jer 11:20 | Jer 11:22 | “let me see your vengeance (נקמה) upon them” |
| | | | Jer 50:15 | Jer 50:18 | כי נקמת יהוה היא, “for this is the vengeance of Yahweh” |
| <i>Total verses</i> | | | 6 | | |
| | | | | | |
| B7. Discipline | יסר (D) | discipline | Lev 26:18,28 | Lev 26:16 | 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.). |
| <i>Total verses</i> | | | 2 | | |
| | | | | | |
| TOTAL “JUDGMENT, VENGEANCE, ETC.” VERBS | | | 30 | | |

Table C. Associated Acts of Yahweh: Verbs Expressing Negative Personal Regard

| Meaning Group | Specific Verb Construction | Translation | Verse(s) Reference | Associated Verse פקד על | Notes |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| C1. Forget | נשה | forget | Jer 23:39 | Jer 23:34 | “Utterly forget” with inf. absolute (so Codex L). |
| | שכח | forget | Hos 4:6 | Hos 4:9 | |
| <i>Total verses</i> | | | 2 | | |
| C2. Be weary of | לאה (N) | be(come) weary | Jer 15:6 | Jer 15:3 | “I am weary of relenting (הִנָּחַם).” Cf. Jer 6:11,15 where Yahweh’s visitation (פְּקֻדָּה) is coming: “he is weary of holding back his anger.” |
| | | | | | |
| <i>Total verses</i> | | | 1 | | |
| C3. Loathe | געל | loathe, abhor | Lev 26:30 | Lev 26:16 | “pour out on them my indignation” |
| | שפך זעם | pour out indignation | Zeph 3:8 | Zeph 3:7 | |
| <i>Total verses</i> | | | 2 | | |
| C4. Oppose | אין נפשי אל | not be “towards” | Jer 15:1 | Jer 15:3 | “my נפש would not be toward this people” |
| | הנני אליך | be against | Jer 21:13 | Jer 21:14 | “Behold, I am against you” |
| | נתן פני בכם | set face against | Lev 26:17 | Lev 26:16 | “I will set my face against you” |
| | שים פני בכם | set face against | Jer 44:11 | Jer 44:13 | “I will set my face against you” |
| | הלך עמכם בקרי | walk contrary to | Lev 26:24,28 | Lev 26:16 | “I will walk contrary to you” |
| | <i>Total verses</i> | | | 6 | |
| C5. Reject | מאס | reject | Hos 4:6 | Hos 4:9 | Classified here as a metaphor of Yahweh’s rejection of his people. |
| | נטש | cast off, abandon | Jer 23:33,39 | Jer 23:34 | |
| | לא ריח (H) | not smell (the aroma of your sacrifices) | Lev 26:31 | Lev 26:16 | |
| <i>Total verses</i> | | | 4 | | |
| TOT. VERBS OF NEGATIVE PERSONAL REGARD | | | 15 | | |

Table D. Associated Acts of Yahweh: Verbal Opposites or Antitheses

| Verb Construction | Translation | Verse(s) Reference | Associated Verse על פקד | Notes |
|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| עשה חסד | show lovingkindness | Exod 20:5 | same verse | |
| | | Deut 5:9 | same verse | |
| נצר חסד | preserve lovingkindness | Exod 34:7 | same verse | |
| נצר | watch over | Isa 27:3 (2x) | same verse | Yahweh is the “watcher/keeper” of his vineyard. He watches over it day and night <i>lest anyone should visit/punish it</i> . 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 נצר stands as an alternative and an antithesis to the prospect that he would על פקד the vineyard. |
| נחם (N) | relent | Jer 15:6 | Jer 15:3 | “I am weary of relenting” (15:6) explains why Yahweh will punish them with four destroyers (15:3). If Yahweh <i>relents</i> , he forestalls <i>visiting</i> ; when He grows weary of <i>relenting</i> , then he <i>visits/punishes</i> . Cf. Exod 32:12,14. |
| נקה (D) | leave unpunished | Exod 20:7 | Exod 20:5 | |
| | | Exod 34:7 | same verse | |
| | | Num 14:18 | same verse | |
| | | Deut 5:11 | Deut 5:9 | |
| נשא | forgive, bear | Exod 34:7 | same verse | |
| | | Num 14:18 | same verse | |
| סלה | forgive | Exod 34:9 | Exod 34:7 | |
| | | Jer 5:7 | Jer 5:9 | |

Table E. Verbs Describing the Impact of Yahweh's Acts of פקד על

| Meaning Subgroup | Verb Construction | Translation (with context) | Verse(s) Reference | Associated Verse פקד על | Notes | |
|---------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Coming of Harm | בוא | (ruin) will come (from afar) | Isa 10:3 | same verse (פקדה) | | |
| | | (death) has entered (our palaces) | Jer 9:20MT | Jer 9:24MT | | |
| | | (the day of their calamity) has come | Jer 46:21 | same verse (פקדה) | | |
| | | (their day) has come | Jer 50:27 | same verse (פקדה) | | |
| | | (the day of your watchmen, of your visitation) has come | Mic 7:4 | same verse (פקדה) | | |
| | | נתן ביד (N) | be given into the hand (of a people from the north) | Jer 46:24 | Jer 46:25 | |
| | | עלה | (death) has come up (into windows) | Jer 9:20MT | Jer 9:24MT | |
| 2. Strike | נכה | (a lion) shall strike (them) | Jer 5:6 | Jer 5:9 | | |
| 3. Kill | חרב | Kill (the inhabitants)! Kill (their bulls)! | Jer 50:21,27 | Jer 50:27 (פקדה) | | |
| | מות | (the young men) shall die (by the sword) | Jer 11:22 | same verse | | |
| | | (sons/daughters) shall die (by famine) | Jer 11:22 | same verse | | |
| | | (those who go to Egypt) will die (by sword and famine) | Jer 44:12 | Jer 44:13 | | |
| 4. Bring to an End | דמה (N) | (my people) are destroyed | Hos 4:6 | Hos 4:9 | | |
| | | (people of Canaan (?)) are no more | Zeph 1:11 | Zeph 1:8,9,12 | There are textual questions regarding the subject noun here. | |
| | כלה | (until they) come to an end | Jer 44:27 | Jer 44:29 | | |
| | כרת (N) | (silver-laden) will be cut off | Zeph 1:11 | Zeph 1:8,9,12 | | |
| | | (your dwelling would not) be cut off | Zeph 3:7 | same verse | | |
| | | כרת (H) | (death) cutting off (children) | Jer 9:20MT | Jer 9:24MT | |

| Meaning Subgroup | Verb Construction | Translation (with context) | Verse(s) Reference | Associated Verse על פקד | Notes |
|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| | כרת (H) | (do evil ... against yourselves) so that you cut off man and woman | Jer 44:7 | Jer 44:13 | |
| | סוף | (great houses) will come to an end | Amos 3:15 | Amos 3:14 | |
| | תמם | (those who go to Egypt) will be finished off (by sword and famine) | Jer 44:12 | Jer 44:13 | |
| | | (men of Judah in Egypt) will be finished off (by sword and famine) | Jer 44:27 | Jer 44:29 | |
| | | | | | |
| 5. Destroy | אבד | (you) will perish | Lev 26:38 | Lev 26:16 | |
| | | (the land) is ruined | Jer 9:11MT | Jer 9:24MT | |
| | | (they) will perish | Jer 10:15 | same verse (פקדה) | |
| | | (you) will perish | Jer 27:10 | Jer 27:8 | |
| | | (they) will perish | Jer 51:18 | same verse (פקדה) | |
| | | (houses of ivory) will perish | Amos 3:15 | Amos 3:14 | |
| | אכל | (land of your enemies) will consume (you) | Lev 26:38 | Lev 26:16 | |
| | | (nation from afar) will eat up (food, sons, flocks, etc.) | Jer 5:17 (4x) | Jer 5:9,29 | |
| | גדע (N) | (Babylon, the hammer of the whole earth) is hewed off | Jer 50:23 | Jer 50:27 (פקדה) | |
| | | (horns of the altar) will be hewed off | Amos 3:14 | same verse | |
| | דמם (N) | (let us) be silenced / perish (there) | Jer 8:14 | Jer 8:12 (פקדה) | |
| | | be silenced / destroyed | Jer 50:30 | Jer 50:27 (פקדה) | |
| | היה שממה | become a desolation | Jer 50:13 | Jer 50:18 | |
| | לא היה... לו איש | (Shemaiah) will have no one (dwelling) | Jer 29:32 | same verse | |
| | לא היה... שארית | there will not be a remnant (for you) | Jer 11:23 | Jer 11:22 | |
| | חרם (H) | devote (them, her) to destruction | Jer 50:21,26 | Jer 50:27 (פקדה) | |
| | חרס (N) | (her walls) are thrown down | Jer 50:15 | Jer 50:18 | |
| | טרף (N) | (everyone who goes out) will be torn to pieces | Jer 5:6 | Jer 5:9 | |

| Meaning Subgroup | Verb Construction | Translation (with context) | Verse(s) Reference | Associated Verse על פקד | Notes |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| | מבלי איש מאין יושב | for there is no one, for there is no inhabitant | Zeph 3:6 | Zeph 3:7 | |
| | צדה (N) | (their cities) are laid waste | Zeph 3:6 | Zeph 3:7 | |
| | רשש (D) | (nation from afar) will beat down (fortified cities) | Jer 5:17 | Jer 5:9,29 | |
| | שבר (N) | (Babylon, hammer of whole earth) is broken | Jer 50:23 | Jer 50:27 | |
| | שדד | (a wolf) shall devastate (them, Jerusalem) | Jer 5:6 | Jer 5:9 | |
| | שדד (Dp) | (Zion's wailing: we) are ruined! | Jer 9:18MT | Jer 9:24MT | |
| | שמד (N) | (Moab) will be destroyed | Jer 48:42 | Jer 48:44 (פקדה) | |
| | שמם (N) | (their towers) are desolate | Zeph 3:6 | Zeph 3:7 | |
| | | | | | |
| 6. Drive out, scatter | דחה (N) | be driven (into slippery paths) | Jer 23:12 | same verse (פקדה) | |
| | פנה...נוס | turn and flee | Jer 46:21 | same verse (פקדה) | |
| | רחק (H) | (in order to) remove you far (from your land) | Jer 27:10 | Jer 27:8 | |
| | | | | | |
| 7. Kindle, burn, consume | אכל | (God's words will become a fire and) will consume (this people) | Jer 5:14 | Jer 5:9 | |
| | | (Yahweh will kindle a fire and it) will consume | Jer 21:14 | same verse | |
| | אכל (N) | (all earth) will be consumed (in fire of God's jealousy) | Zeph 1:18 | Zeph 1:8,9,12 | |
| | | (all earth) will be consumed (in fire of God's jealousy) | Zeph 3:8 | Zeph 3:7 | |
| | יצת (N) | be burned up | Jer 9:9MT | Jer 9:8MT | |
| | | | Jer 9:11MT | Jer 9:24MT | |
| | | | | | |
| 8. Stumble, totter, fall | כשל | (you and the prophet) shall stumble | Hos 4:5 | Hos 4:9 | |
| | כשל (N) | (they) shall be overthrown | Jer 8:12 | same verse (פקדה) | Cf. Jer 6:15. |
| | נוד (HtD) | (the earth) moves to and fro | Isa 24:20 | Isa 24:21 | |
| | נוע | (the earth) totters | Isa 24:20 | Isa 24:21 | |

| Meaning Subgroup | Verb Construction | Translation (with context) | Verse(s) Reference | Associated Verse על פקד | Notes |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| | נפל | (altar horn) shall fall (to the ground) | Amos 3:14 | Amos 3:15 | |
| | | (they) fall (among the slain) | Isa 10:4 | Isa 10:3 (פקדה) | |
| | | (the earth) falls | Isa 24:20 | Isa 24:21 | |
| | | (they) shall fall (among the fallen) | Jer 8:12 | same verse (פקדה) | |
| | | (dead bodies of men) shall fall | Jer 9:21MT | Jer 9:24MT | |
| | | (they) will fall (in slippery paths) | Jer 23:12 | same verse (פקדה) | |
| | | (remnant of Judah in Egypt) shall fall | Jer 44:12 | Jer 44:13 | |
| | | (one fleeing) will fall (into the pit) | Jer 48:44 | same verse (פקדה) | |
| | | (her bulwarks) have fallen | Jer 50:15 | Jer 50:18 | |
| | | (her young men) will fall (in streets) | Jer 50:30 | Jer 50:27 (פקדה) | |
| | | (Babylon's wall, her slain, Babylon) will fall | Jer 51:44,47,49 | Jer 51:44,47,51 | |
| | לא...עמד | (they) did not stand | Jer 46:21 | same verse (פקדה) | |
| | לא...קום | (earth) will not rise (again) | Isa 24:20 | Isa 24:21 | |
| | | | | | |
| 9. Be Found, Caught, Shut In, Gathered | אסף (Dp) | be gathered (in prison) | Isa 24:22 | Isa 24:21 | |
| | לכד (N) | be captured (in a snare) | Jer 48:44 | same verse (פקדה) | |
| | | be captured (in a snare) | Jer 50:24 | Jer 50:27 (פקדה) | |
| | מצא (N) | be found | Jer 50:24 | Jer 50:27 (פקדה) | |
| | סגר (Dp) | be shut in | Isa 24:22 | Isa 24:21 | |
| | תפש | be caught | Jer 50:24 | Jer 50:27 (פקדה) | |
| | | | | | |
| 10. Disgrace | בוש | be ashamed | Jer 9:18MT | Jer 9:24MT | |
| | | | Jer 15:9 | Jer 15:3 | |
| | | | Jer 51:47, 51 | Jer 51:44,47,52 | |
| | בוש (H) | be put to shame | Jer 46:24 | Jer 46:25 | The Hiphil of בוש often has a passive-causative sense. |
| | חפר | be disgraced | Jer 15:9 | Jer 15:3 | |
| | | | | | |
| 11. Reveal, uncover | גלה (D) | (earth) will reveal (the blood shed) | Isa 26:21 | same verse | |
| | לא כסה | (earth) will not cover (its slain) | Isa 26:21 | same verse | |
| | | | | | |

| Meaning Subgroup | Verb Construction | Translation (with context) | Verse(s) Reference | Associated פקד על Verse | Notes |
|------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 12. Know | ידע | (you) shall know (these men have despised Yahweh) | Num 16:30 | Num 16:29 | פקד על in v.29 is passive (Niphal), with Yahweh as unexpressed agent. |
| | | (and the remnant of Judah) will know (whose word will stand, mine or theirs) | Jer 44:28 | Jer 44:29 | The knowing in v. 28 comes from Yahweh's visitation against them in Egypt, which will force their return to Judah. "Knowing" is also described in v. 29, a result of the sign which Yahweh will give them: the capture of Pharaoh Hophra. |

Table F. The Nature and Results, the Instruments and Agents, of Yahweh's על פקד Acts

| Verse על פקד על Verse (*) פקדה | Nouns expressing the nature, content, or result of Yahweh's על פקד על | Agents, instruments or instrumental phrases associated with Yahweh's על פקד על | Notes |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Exod 20:5 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Exod 32:34 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Exod 34:7 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Lev 18:25 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Lev 26:16 | ∅ | בחלה, sudden panic (v.16) שחפת, wasting disease (v.16) קדחת, fever (v.16) חרב, a sword (agent) (vv.25,33) דבר, pestilence (v.25) | The sword in v. 25 is described with נקם and its cognate accusative: "I will bring upon you a sword which avenges the vengeance of the covenant." |
| Num 14:18 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Num 16:29 | בריאה, a new thing, creation (v.30) | ∅ | "If Yahweh creates a new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them..." |
| Deut 5:9 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Isa 10:3 (*) | שואה, calamity, destruction (v.3) | ∅ | |
| Isa 10:12 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Isa 13:11 | כשד משדי, as devastation from the Almighty (v.6) שממה, desolation (v.9) | ∅ | |
| Isa 24:21 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Isa 26:21 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Isa 27:1,3 | ∅ | בהרבו, with his sword (v.1) | (lit: with his hard, big, strong sword) |
| Jer 5:9,29 | ∅ | גוי ממרחק, a nation from afar (agent) (v.15) בהרב, with the sword (v.17) | 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)." |
| Jer 8:12 (*) | אין טוב, no good (v. 15) בעתה, terrors (v. 15) | ∅ | |
| Jer 9:8MT | גלים, heaps (v.10MT) מעון תנים, lair of jackals (v.10MT) שממה, desolation (v.10MT) | ∅ | |
| Jer 9:24MT | ∅ | מות, death (agent) (v.20MT) | |
| Jer 10:15 (*) | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Jer 11:22 Jer 11:23 (*) | רעה, disaster (vv.11,12,23) נקמה, vengeance (v.20) | בהרב, by the sword ברעב, by famine | |
| Jer 15:3 | עיר, anguish (v.8) בהלות, terrors (v.8) | מות, death (v.2) חרב, sword (v.2,9) רעב, famine (v.2) שבי, captivity (v.2) חרב, sword (v.3) (agent) כלבים, dogs (v.3) (agent) עוף השמים, birds of the heavens (v.3) (agent) | 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 |

| Verse פקד על Verse פקדה (*) | Nouns expressing the nature, content, or result of Yahweh's פקד על | Agents, instruments or instrumental phrases associated with Yahweh's פקד על | Notes |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | בהמת הארץ, beasts of the earth (v.3) (agent) שדד, a destroyer (v.8) (agent) | should we go?): "to death, to sword," etc. |
| Jer 21:14 | ∅ | אש, fire (agent) | |
| Jer 23:2 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Jer 23:12 (*) | אפלה, darkness, calamity (v.12) רעה, disaster (v.12) | ∅ | At the end of 23:12, רעה (disaster) is in apposition with שנת פקדתם (the year of their visitation). |
| Jer 23:34 | חרפת עולם, everlasting reproach (v.40) כלמות עולם, everlasting shame (v.40) | ∅ | |
| Jer 25:12 | שממות עולם, everlasting desolation | ∅ | |
| Jer 27:8 | ∅ | בחרב, by the sword (v.8) ברעב, by famine (v.8) בדבר, by pestilence (v.8) בידו, by his [Nebuchadnezzar's] hand (v.8, see note) | "By his hand" as an instrumental phrase depends upon reading "until I consume (תמי) from them" with the MT in v.8. The <i>BHS</i> note suggests reading תמי from נתן here (so the Syriac and targumim), so that בידו would have the sense of "until I give them into his hand." |
| Jer 29:32 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Jer 30:20 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Jer 36:31 | רעה, disaster | ∅ | |
| Jer 44:13 | חרבה, a waste (v.6) שממה, desolation (v.6) קללה, a curse (v.8,12) חרפה, a reproach (v.8,12) רעה, disaster (v.11) אלה, oath (v.12) שמה, appalment, horror (v.12) | בחרב, by the sword (vv.12,13) ברעב, by famine (vv.12,13) בדבר, by pestilence (v.13) | |
| Jer 44:29 | רעה, disaster (v.27) | בחרב, by the sword (v.27) ברעב, by famine (v.27) | |
| Jer 46:21 (*) Jer 46:25 | איד, distress, calamity (v.21) | ∅ | |
| Jer 48:44 (*) | ∅ | פחד ופחת ופח, terror, pit, and snare (v.43) | |
| Jer 50:18 Jer 50:27 (*) | שממה כלה, utter desolation (v.13) נקמה, vengeance (v.15, 28) שמה, appalment, terror (v.23) מלאכה, a work (v.25) | כלי זעמו, the weapons of his indignation (v.25) (cf. Isa 13:5) | In v.25, Yahweh brings forth weapons of his indignation for (כי) he "has a work (מלאכה) in the land of the Chaldeans." |
| Jer 51:18 (*) | נקמה, vengeance (v.6, 11) גמול, reprisal (v.6) | ∅ | |
| Jer 51:44,47,52 | שמה, object of horror (v.41, 43) שבר גדול, great shattering (v.54) | שודדים, destroyers (v.48,53) (agent) | On the "destroyers" as agents of Yahweh, |

| Verse על פקד Verse (*) על פקדה | Nouns expressing the nature, content, or result of Yahweh's על פקד על | Agents, instruments or instrumental phrases associated with Yahweh's על פקד על באש, with fire (v.58) | Notes |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | | note that v.55 predicates שׁדד of Yahweh. |
| Hos 1:4 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Hos 2:15MT | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Hos 4:9 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Hos 4:14 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Hos 9:7 (*) | שָׁלֵם, recompense | ∅ | Precise parallel with פקדה here: "The days of visitation have come; the days of recompense have come." |
| Hos 12:3MT | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Amos 3:2 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Amos 3:14 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Micah 7:4 (*) | מבוכה, confusion, confounding | ∅ | |
| Zeph 1:8,9,12 | משסה, plunder (v.13) שממה, desolation (v.13) כלה אר־נבהלה, sudden and complete destruction (v.18) | באש, by fire (v.18) | |
| Zeph 3:7 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Zech 10:3 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Job 36:23 | ∅ | ∅ | |

Table G. Iniquity in the Context of Yahweh's פקד על

| Verse פקד על Verse פקדה (*) | Terms for Iniquity | Markers that פקד על is "Because of" Iniquity | Notes |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Exod 20:5 | עון, iniquity | | "iniquity of fathers" |
| Exod 32:34 | חטא/החטא, sin (v. and n.) אלהי זהב, gods of gold העגל, the calf | על אשר עשו את-העגל, because they made the calf | The verb and noun forms of חטא are used 8x in Exod 32:30–34. |
| Exod 34:7 | עון, iniquity | | "iniquity of fathers" |
| Lev 18:25 | עון, iniquity טמא, be unclean | | "the land became unclean, and (so) I punished" |
| Lev 26:16 | [not listening to Yahweh, n, breaking his covenant, etc.] | אם לא תשמעו לי, if you will not listen to me, etc. (vv. 14–15) | |
| Num 14:18 | עון, iniquity | | "iniquity of fathers" |
| Num 16:29 | רשעים, wicked (adj., v. 26) חטאה, sin (v. 26) | | |
| Deut 5:9 | עון, iniquity | | "iniquity of fathers" |
| Isa 10:3 (*) | חקק חקיי-און, decree iniquitous decrees (v. 1) נטה מדין, turn from justice (v.2) גזל משפט, rob of justice (v. 2) | | |
| Isa 10:12 | פרי-גדל לבב, the fruit of the arrogance of [the king's] heart תפארת רום עיניו, the splendor of the exaltation of his eyes | | The boasts of the king of Assyria are rebuked in vv. 13–15. |
| Isa 13:11 | רעה, evil | | MT has רעה as an adj. ("evil world"). BHS suggests רעה or רעתה ("punish against the world its evil") |
| Isa 24:21 | פשע, transgression (v. 20) | | |
| Isa 26:21 | דמים, bloodshed | | |
| Isa 27:1,3 | | | [Leviathan the dragon] |
| Jer 5:9,29 | מאן לשוב, refuse to repent (v. 3) פשעים, transgressions (v. 6) משבות, apostasies (v. 6) לב סורר ומורה, a stubborn and rebellious heart (v. 23) עון, iniquity (v. 25) חטאה, sin (v. 25) רשעים, wicked (adj., v. 26) | | They have forsaken Yahweh and sworn by those who were no gods, played the whore, see v. 7. |
| Jer 8:12 (*) | עשה תועבה, do abomination | לכן יפלו בנפלים בעת פקדתם [They were not ashamed when they did abomination;] therefore they will fall among the fallen, at the time of their visitation. | |
| Jer 9:8MT | עוה, commit iniquity (Hiph verb), v. 4MT מאן דעת אותי, refuse to know me, v. 5MT | | |
| Jer 9:24MT | | עק, 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) | |

| Verse על פקד Verse (*) פקדה | Terms for Iniquity | Markers that על פקד is “Because of” Iniquity | Notes |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Jer 10:15 (*) | שקר, false (v. 14) חבל, vanity/worthless מעשה תעתעים, work of delusion/derision | | |
| Jer 11:22 Jer 11:23 (*) | עון, iniquity | שבו על-עונת אבותם הראשנים... לכן...הנני מביא אליהם רעה They have returned to the iniquities of their forefathers ... therefore ... I am bringing disaster upon them (vv.10–11) | 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. |
| Jer 15:3 | דרכים, ways (v. 7) | בגלל, because of Manasseh (v. 4) על אשר, because of what he did (v. 4) | |
| Jer 21:14 | פרי מעלליכם, fruit of your deeds רע מעלליהם, evil of their deeds (v.12) | כפרי מעלליכם, according to the fruit of your deeds מפני רע מעלליהם, because of the evil of their deeds (v.12) | |
| Jer 23:2 | רע מעלליכם, evil of your deeds | | |
| Jer 23:12 (*) | מנאפים, adulterers (v. 10) מרוצתם רעה, their course is evil (v. 10) לא-יכן, not right (v. 10) חנף, be godless, profane (v. 11) רעתם, their evil (v. 11) | לכן...אביא עליהם רעה שנת פקדתם, therefore ... I will bring disaster upon them, the year of their visitation. | |
| Jer 23:34 | [false prophecy] | יען, because you have said [false prophecy] (v.38) | |
| Jer 25:12 | עון, iniquity פעל, doing, deed (v.14) מעשה, work (v.14) | כפעלים, according to their deeds כמעשה ידיהם, according to the work of their hands | |
| Jer 27:8 | | | Warning against those who refuse to submit to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. |
| Jer 29:32 | [false prophecy] | יען, because Shemaiah [falsely prophesied] | |
| Jer 30:20 | “against all who oppress (לחץ) Jacob” | | |
| Jer 36:31 | עון, iniquity | | |
| Jer 44:13 | רעה, evil (v. 3) | מפני רעתם אשר עשו, because of their evil which they did (v. 3) | Specifically includes provoking Yahweh to anger by serving other gods (see 44:3, 8, 15–19). |
| Jer 44:29 | [trust in own word above word of Yahweh] | | |
| Jer 46:21 (*) Jer 46:25 | [against false gods of Egypt, Pharaoh, and all who trust in them] | | |
| Jer 48:44 (*) | עלייהוה הגדיל, he magnified himself above Yahweh (v. 42) | כי עלייהוה הגדיל, because he magnified himself above Yahweh (v. 42) | |
| Jer 50:18 | חטא, sin (verb, v. 14) | כי ליהוה חטאה, for she [Babylon] sinned against Yahweh (v. 14) כאשר עשתה, just as she has done (v. 15) | Babylon is “plunderer of Yahweh’s heritage” (v. 11), and their king is accused of devouring the |

| Verse על פקד Verse (*) פקדה | Terms for Iniquity | Markers that על פקד is “Because of” Iniquity | Notes |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | | 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). |
| Jer 50:27 (*) | | כי ביהוה התגריה, <i>because you challenged Yahweh (v.24)</i> | |
| Jer 51:18 (*) | שקר, false (v. 17) הבל, vanity/worthless מעשה תעתעים, work of delusion/derision | | |
| Jer 51:44,47,52 | [mistreatment of Yahweh’s people, cf. 51:34–35] | | |
| Hos 1:4 | דמים, bloodshed | | “bloodshed of Jezreel” |
| Hos 2:15MT | ימי הבעלים, days of the Baals | | |
| Hos 4:9 | דרכים, ways מעללים, deeds | כי אתה הדעת מאסת, <i>because you have rejected knowledge (v.6)</i> כי-את-יהוה עזבו, <i>because they have abandoned Yahweh (v.10)</i> | “Ways, deeds” are neutral terms, but in this context sinful (see catalog of sins in 4:1b-2, 6, 7, 8). |
| Hos 4:14 | [the men go off with prostitutes and offer sacrifices with temple prostitutes] | | Here, as punishment, against these men, Yahweh threatens that he will <i>not</i> visit against their daughters / brides when they play the whore. |
| Hos 9:7 (*) | | על רב עונך ורבה משטמה, <i>because of the greatness of your iniquity and the greatness of your enmity</i> | |
| Hos 12:3MT | דרכים, ways מעללים, deeds | קדרכיו, <i>according to his ways</i> כמעלליו, <i>according to his deeds</i> | |
| Amos 3:2 | עון, iniquity | | |
| Amos 3:14 | פשעים, transgressions מזבחות, altars | | “transgressions of Israel” “altars of Bethel” |
| Mic 7:4 (*) | על-הרע כפים להיטיב, hands are upon evil, to do it well | על-חטאתך, <i>because of your sin (6:13)</i> למען תתי אתך לשמה, [you walked in their counsels] <i>so that I make you a desolation (6:16)</i> | |
| Zeph 1:8,9,12 | חטא, sin (verb, v. 17) | כי ליהוה חטאו, <i>for they have sinned against Yahweh (v.17)</i> | Sins are catalogued in vv. 4–6, 8b–9, 12b: idolatry, forsaking Yahweh, doubting Y’s power. |
| Zeph 3:7 | עוול, unjust one (v. 5) עלילות, wanton deeds | | “The arose early to corrupt their wanton deeds” (v. 7). |
| Zech 10:3 | [false prophecy] | | Punishment declared against shepherds who tell false dreams and give empty consolation, v.2. |
| Job 36:23 | דרך, way עוולה, wrong, injustice | | Here, “way” is understood alongside “wrong” in the second clause. The sense |

| פקד על Verse פקדה Verse (*) | Terms for Iniquity | Markers that פקד על is "Because of" Iniquity | Notes |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | | is hypothetical: if Yahweh <i>had</i> done עולה, who could punish (פקד על) his way against him and rebuke him, saying "You have done wrong"? |

Table H. Yahweh's על פקד and Yahweh's Anger, Jealousy

| על פקד Verse פקדה Verse (*) | Terms for Anger, Passion | Translation in context | Notes |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Exod 20:5 | קנא, jealous | "a <i>jealous</i> God" | |
| Exod 32:34 | ∅ | | |
| Exod 34:7 | ∅ | | |
| Lev 18:25 | ∅ | | |
| Lev 26:16 | חמה, wrath (v.28) | "I will walk with you in opposing <i>wrath</i> " (v.28) | |
| Num 14:18 | ∅ | | |
| Num 16:29 | ∅ | | |
| Deut 5:9 | קנא, jealous | "a <i>jealous</i> God" | |
| Isa 10:3 (*) | אף, anger (v.4) שבט אפי, rod of my anger (v.5) זעם, indignation (v.5) | "his <i>anger</i> has not turned back" (v.4) "Assyria is the rod of my <i>anger</i> ; the staff in their hands is my <i>indignation</i> " (v.5) | |
| Isa 10:12 | ∅ | | |
| Isa 13:11 | אכזרי, cruel (v.9) עברה, fury (v.9,13) חרון אף, burning anger (v.9,13) | "the day of Yahweh comes, <i>cruel</i> , with <i>fury</i> and <i>burning anger</i> " (v.9) "at the <i>fury</i> of Yahweh of hosts in the day of his <i>burning anger</i> " (v.13) | |
| Isa 24:21 | ∅ | | |
| Isa 26:21 | זעם, indignation (v.20) | "hide yourselves until <i>fury</i> / <i>indignation</i> passes by" (v.20) | |
| Isa 27:1,3 | חמה, wrath (v.3) | "I have no <i>wrath</i> " (v.3) | Context is Yahweh's resolution <i>not</i> to על פקד his vineyard, nor let anyone else על פקד it. |
| Jer 5:9,29 | ∅ | | Although see Jer 6:11, "I am full of the <i>wrath</i> (חמה) of Yahweh." |
| Jer 8:12 (*) | ∅ | | |
| Jer 9:8MT | ∅ | | |
| Jer 9:24MT | ∅ | | |
| Jer 10:15 (*) | קצה, wrath (v. 10) זעם, indignation (v. 10) | | |
| Jer 11:22 | ∅ | | |
| Jer 11:23 (*) | ∅ | | |
| Jer 15:3 | ∅ | | |
| Jer 21:14 | חמה, wrath (v.12) | "lest my <i>wrath</i> go forth like fire" (v.12) | |
| Jer 23:2 | ∅ | | |
| Jer 23:12 (*) | ∅ | | |
| Jer 23:34 | חמה, wrath (v. 19) אף-יהוה, anger (v. 20) | | |
| Jer 25:12 | ∅ | | |
| Jer 27:8 | ∅ | | |
| Jer 29:32 | ∅ | | |
| Jer 30:20 | חמה, wrath (v.23) חרון אף, burning anger (v.24) | " <i>wrath</i> has gone forth" (v.23) "the <i>burning anger</i> of Yahweh | |

| Verse על פקד Verse (*) פקדה | Terms for Anger, Passion | Translation in context | Notes |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| | | will not turn back until he has acted and established the intentions of his heart” (v.24) | |
| Jer 36:31 | ∅ | | |
| Jer 44:13 | חַמָּה, wrath (v.6) אף, anger (v.6) כעס (H, v.8) | “my <i>wrath</i> and my <i>anger</i> poured forth and burned against” (v.6) “Why do you <i>provoke me to anger</i> by the works of your hands” (v.8) | |
| Jer 44:29 | ∅ | | |
| Jer 46:21 (*) Jer 46:25 | ∅ | | |
| Jer 48:44 | ∅ | | |
| Jer 50:18 | קצף, wrath (v.13) | “because of the <i>wrath</i> of Yahweh she will not be inhabited” (v.13) | |
| Jer 50:27 (*) | כלי־זעמו, weapons of his wrath (v.25) | | |
| Jer 51:18 (*) | ∅ | | |
| Jer 51:44,47,52 | חרון אף, burning anger (v.45) | “save your lives from the <i>burning anger</i> of Yahweh” (v.45) | |
| Hos 1:4 | ∅ | | |
| Hos 2:15MT | ∅ | | |
| Hos 4:9 | ∅ | | |
| Hos 4:14 | ∅ | | |
| Hos 9:7 (*) | ∅ | | |
| Hos 12:3MT | ∅ | | |
| Amos 3:2 | ∅ | | |
| Amos 3:14 | ∅ | | |
| Mic 7:4 (*) | זעומה, causing indignation (6:10) זעף, rage (7:9) | | |
| Zeph 1:8,9,12 | עֲבָרָה, wrath (vv.15,18) אש קנאתו (v.18) | “a day of <i>wrath</i> ” (v.15) “on the day of the <i>wrath</i> of Yahweh” (v.18) “consumed ... in the <i>fire of his jealousy</i> ” (v.18) | |
| Zeph 3:7 | זעם, indignation (v.8) חרון אף, burning anger (v.8) אש קנאה, fire of jealousy (v.8) | “to pour out upon them my <i>indignation</i> , all my <i>burning anger</i> , for in the <i>fire of my jealousy</i> all the earth will be consumed” (v.8) | |
| Zech 10:3 | אף, anger | “my <i>anger</i> burns against the shepherds” | |
| Job 36:23 | ∅ | | |

Table I. Yahweh's על פקד Acts Come after Period of Delay, in Fulfillment of Yahweh's Words of Warning

| על פקד Verse פקדה Verse (*) | References to a Coming Day or Time of Yahweh's על פקד | Yahweh's על פקד as Fulfillment of His Words of Warning | Notes |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Exod 20:5 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Exod 32:34 | ביום פקדי, in the day when I visit (v.34) | ∅ | |
| Exod 34:7 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Lev 18:25 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Lev 26:16 | ∅ | [words of warning which Yahweh's על פקד will fulfill] ²⁰⁵ | |
| Num 14:18 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Num 16:29 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Deut 5:9 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Isa 10:3 (*) | ליום פקדה, on the day of visitation (v.3) | ∅ | |
| Isa 10:12 | כִּי־יִבְצַע אֲדֹנָי אֶת־כָּל־מַעֲשָׂהוּ בְהָר צִיּוֹן, when Adonay has finished all his work against Mount Zion... | ∅ | ...he will visit-in- punishment ... the king of Assyria |
| Isa 13:11 | יום יהוה, the day of Yahweh (vv.6,9) | ∅ | |
| Isa 24:21 | ביום ההוא, in that day (v.21) ומרב ימים, after many days (v.22) | ∅ | |
| Isa 26:21 | ביום ההוא, in that day (27:1) | ∅ | |
| Isa 27:1,3 | ביום ההוא, in that day (vv.1,2) | ∅ | |
| Jer 5:9,29 | בימים ההמה, in those days (v.18) לאחריתה, when its end comes (v.31) | ∅ | The referent of "its/her end" in v.31 is not immediately clear: the present corrupt leadership? the land (cf. v.29)? |
| Jer 8:12 (*) | בעת פקדתם, at the time of their visitation (v.12) | ∅ | |
| Jer 9:8MT | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Jer 9:24MT | ימים באים, the days are coming (v.24MT) | ∅ | |
| Jer 10:15 (*) | בעת פקדתם, at the time of their visitation (v.15) | ∅ | |
| Jer 11:22 Jer 11:23 (*) | שנת פקדתם, the year of their visitation (v.23) | ∅ | |
| Jer 15:3 | נלאיתי הנחם, I am weary of relenting (v.6) | ∅ | |
| Jer 21:14 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Jer 23:2 | ימים באים, the days are coming (vv.5,7) | ∅ | |
| Jer 23:12 (*) | שנת פקדתם, the year of their visitation (v.12) | ∅ | |

²⁰⁵ This passage, like many of the later prophetic oracles which echo it, does not mention Yahweh's "words" in connection with his על פקד; however, this passage and such oracles function as the words of Yahweh's warning which his "visitation-in-punishment" will bring about.

| Verse על פקד Verse (*) על פקדה | References to a Coming Day or Time of Yahweh's על פקד | Yahweh's על פקד as Fulfillment of His Words of Warning | Notes |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Jer 23:34 | עד־מתי, how long? (v. 26) | ∅ | In v.26, Yahweh asks, "How long will there be false prophecies in the hearts of the prophets?" In v. 34, he then threatens to על פקד the prophets and priests who falsely speak in his name. |
| Jer 25:12 | כמלאות שבעים שנה, when seventy years are completed (v.12) | "I will bring against this land <i>all the words</i> which I have threatened against it, all which are written in this scroll, which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations." (v.13) | |
| Jer 27:8 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Jer 29:32 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Jer 30:20 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Jer 36:31 | ∅ | "I will bring against them and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and against the men of Judah all the disaster <i>which I threatened</i> against them, but they would not listen." (v.31) | |
| Jer 44:13 | ולא־יוכל יהוה עוד לשא, Yahweh was no longer able to bear (v.22) | ∅ | Between two threats of another "visitation" on fugitives of Judah in Egypt (v.13, 29), this explains the prior visitation: "Yahweh was no longer able to bear up/forgive (גִּישָׁא) because of the evil of your deeds..." (v.22) |
| Jer 44:29 | ולא־יוכל יהוה עוד לשא, Yahweh was no longer able to bear (v.22) | "and the remnant of Judah [in Egypt] shall know <i>whose word will stand, mine or theirs</i> " (v.28) "in order that you may know that <i>my words</i> will surely stand against you for harm." (v.28–29) | 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. |
| Jer 46:21 (*) Jer 46:25 | היום ההוא לאדני יהוה צבאות belongs to the Lord Yahweh of hosts (v.10) יום נקמה להנקם, a day of vengeance for avenging (v.10) יום אידם, the day of their calamity (v.21) עת פקדתם, the time of their visitation (v.21) | ∅ | |
| Jer 48:44 (*) | שנת פקדתם, the year of their visitation (v.44) | ∅ | |
| Jer 50:18 Jer 50:27 (*) | בא יומם, their day has come (v.27) עת פקדתם, the time of their | ∅ | Jer 50:31 uses a similar construction: |

| Verse על פקד Verse על פקדה (*) | References to a Coming Day or Time of Yahweh's על פקד פקד על | Yahweh's על פקד as Fulfillment of His Words of Warning | Notes |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | visitation (v.27) | | "your <i>day</i> (יום) has come, the <i>time</i> (עת) when I have visited you." |
| Jer 51:18 (*) | עת נקמה...ליהוה, the time of Yahweh's vengeance (v.6) עת פקדתם, the time of their visitation (v.18) | ∅ | |
| Jer 51:44,47,52 | ימים באים, the days are coming (vv.47,52) | ∅ | |
| Hos 1:4 | עוד מעט, yet a little while (v.4) ביום ההוא, in that day (v.5) יום יזרעאל, the day of Jezreel (2:2MT; cf. 1:5) | ∅ | |
| Hos 2:15MT | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Hos 4:9 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Hos 4:14 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Hos 9:7 (*) | ימי הפקדה, the days of the visitation [have come] (v.7) ימי השלם, the days of the recompense [have come] (v.7) | ∅ | |
| Hos 12:3MT | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Amos 3:2 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Amos 3:14 | ביום פקדי...על, on the day when I visit against (v.14) | ∅ | |
| Micah 7:4 (*) | יום מצפיק, the day of your watchmen יום...פקדתך, the day of your visitation עוד, "forget/forgive any longer the wicked?" (6:10–11) ²⁰⁶ | יום מצפיק, the day of your watchmen (i.e., day of disaster foretold by your prophets) ²⁰⁷ | |
| Zeph 1:8,9,12 | קרוב יום יהוה, day of Y is near (v.7) יום זבח יהוה, the day of the sacrifice of Yahweh (v.8) ביום ההוא, on that day (vv.9,10) קרוב יום יהוה הגדול, the great day of Yahweh is near (v.14) יום יהוה, the day of Yahweh (v.14) היום ההוא, that day (v.15) יום, a day of (7x in vv.15,16) ביום עברת יהוה, on the day of the wrath of Yahweh (v.18) בעת ההיא, at that time (v.12) | ∅ | יום occurs 14 times in Zeph 1:7–18; עת once in 1:12. |
| Zeph 3:7 | יום קומי לעד, the day when I arise | ∅ | |

²⁰⁶ Reading with the emendations suggested by *BHS*, Mic 6:10–11 prefaces this visitation with Yahweh's query: "Shall I forget (נשח) / forgive (נשא) any longer (עוד) the wicked treasure in the house of the wicked, and the accurdely scant measure? Acquit (זכה) 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 (באה)." On יהוה 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.

| Verse על פקד Verse (*) פקדה | References to a Coming Day or Time of Yahweh's על פקד | Yahweh's על פקד as Fulfillment of His Words of Warning | Notes |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| | to the prey/booty (v.8) | | |
| Zech 10:3 | ∅ | ∅ | |
| Job 36:23 | ∅ | ∅ | |

Table J. Verbs Associated with Yahweh's Positive, Saving פקד-Actions

| Subgroup | Verb | Translation (with context) | Verse(s) Reference | Notes |
|--------------------|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Verbs of Action | הרה & ילד | (Sarah) conceived and bore (a son) | Gen 21:1–2 | While Sarah is the subject of these verbs, the context implies a close relation between these verbs and Yahweh's visitation. Not only is Sarah barren and old, but the previous verse (Gen 20:18) mentions that Yahweh "had closed all the wombs in the house of Abimelech." |
| | | (Hannah) conceived and bore (three sons and two daughters) | 1 Sam 2:21 | As with Sarah in Gen 21, here also, the direct relation between Yahweh's visitation and Hannah's conception is implied. In 1 Sam 1:5–6, it is twice stated that Yahweh had closed Hannah's womb. |
| | ישע (H) | (visit me with) your salvation , (or:) (visit me when) you save | Ps 106:4 | Verse 4 uses the noun form ישועה, but note the use of Hiphil ישע in vv. 8, 10, 21, and 47. |
| | נקם (N) | take vengeance (for me against my persecutors) | Jer 15:15 | At first, vengeance may not seem to fit with Yahweh's positive, saving visitation, but this passage reveals the two-edged nature of Yahweh's פקד. The saving visitation for which the prophet appeals would include vengeance upon those persecuting God's servant. |
| | נתן | (Yahweh had visited his people) by giving (food to them) | Ruth 1:6 | Here the infinitive construct of נתן with a prefixed ל could specify the nature of the visitation (as translated here) or could indicate the purpose of the visitation: "in order to give them food." |
| | עלה (H) | (God will surely visit you and) bring you up (from this land to the land...) | Gen 50:24 | |
| | | (I will) bring you up (from the affliction of Egypt to the land...) | Exod 3:16–17 | |
| | | (They will be brought to Babylon and remain there until the day I visit them, declares Yahweh, and I) will bring them up (and return them to this place) | Jer 27:22 | |
| | | עשה | (Yahweh) did (for Sarah just as he had | Gen 21:1–2 |

| Subgroup | Verb | Translation (with context) | Verse(s) Reference | Notes |
|-------------------------------|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | promised) | | |
| | קום (H) | (I will visit and I) will uphold my good word concerning you, by returning you to this place) | Jer 29:10 | |
| | שוב | (Yahweh ... will visit them and) return (their fortunes) | Zeph 2:7 | |
| | שוב (H) | (I will bring them up and) return (them to this place) | Jer 27:22 | |
| | | (by) returning (you to this place) | Jer 29:10 | |
| | | | | |
| 2. Verbs of Speech | אמר | (Yahweh visited Sarah just as he) had said | Gen 21:1–2 | |
| | | (And I) have said , (“I will bring you up from the affliction of Egypt”) | Exod 3:16–17 | |
| | | (And Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and) say , (“May Yahweh give you offspring from this woman”) | 1 Sam 2:20–21 | Though Yahweh is not the speaker here, Eli’s priestly word has the character of a divine blessing or oracle. |
| | ברך (D) | (And Eli would) bless (Elkanah and his wife, and say, “May Yahweh give you offspring from this woman”) | 1 Sam 2:20–21 | Though Yahweh is not the speaker here, Eli’s priestly word has the character of a divine blessing or oracle. |
| | דבר (D) | (Yahweh did for Sarah just as he) had promised | Gen 21:1 | |
| | | (Sarah ... bore for Abraham a son at the appointed time which God) had promised (him) | Gen 21:2 | |
| | | (I will visit and I) will uphold my good word concerning you, by returning you to this place) | Jer 29:10 | Yahweh’s reference to “my good word (דברי הטוב) concerning you” evokes a previous promising act of Yahweh. |
| | שבוע (N) | (God will surely visit you and bring you up from this land to the land which he) swore (to Abraham) | Gen 50:24 | |
| | | | | |
| 3. Verbs of Perception | זכר | (Yahweh) remembered | 1 Sam 1:19–20 | This verse closely parallels 1 Sam 2:21 (“Yahweh visited Hannah ... |

| Subgroup | Verb | Translation (with context) | Verse(s) Reference | Notes |
|----------|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | (Hannah ... and she conceived) | | and she conceived”), with זכר (1:19) and פקד (2:21) standing in paradigmatic relationship. |
| | | Remember (me and visit me and take vengeance for me against my persecutors) | Jer 15:15 | |
| | | Remember (me, O Yahweh, with the favor you show your people) | Ps 106:4 | |
| | זכר (N) | (...in order that you (Tyre) may) be remembered . (At the end of 70 years, Yahweh will visit Tyre.) | Isa 23:16–17 | Verse 15 announces that Tyre “will be forgotten (N of שכח) for 70 years.” Verse 16 ends with the hope that she may be remembered, and v. 17 announces that “at the end of 70 years, Yahweh will visit Tyre.” This binds פקד and זכר as closely related concepts in this context. |
| | ראה | (when they heard that Yahweh had visited the sons of Israel and that he had) seen (their affliction) | Exod 4:31 | |
| | ראה, נבט | (O God of hosts, turn, look from heaven,) see , (and visit this vine!) | Ps 80:15MT | |
| | שוב | (O God of hosts,) turn , (look from heaven, see, and visit this vine!) | Ps 80:15MT | In this context, Yahweh’s turning (toward his people in attention) can be considered a verb of perception. |

CHAPTER SIX

METHODOLOGY 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 על פקד. 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 על פקד 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 Wellhausian 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,

¹ Jan P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 26 (author’s emphasis).

² 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), 193.

³ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*; Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, trans. Dorothea Shefer-Vanson, JSOTSup 70 (Sheffield: Almond, 1989); Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, trans. Israel Lotan (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001).

⁴ Leland Ryken, “Literary Criticism of the Bible: Some Fallacies,” in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical Narratives*, ed. Kenneth R.R. Gros Louis, James S. Ackerman, and Thayer S. Warshaw, BLC (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), 32. Ryken emphasizes the universality of many narrative elements because of the “archetypal nature of literature,” that is, “a story obeys certain narrative principles because it is a story . . . , a metaphor is a metaphor, and a proverb is a proverb,” etc. See also David Robertson, *The Old Testament and the Literary Critic*, GBS (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 10.

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*, JSPOTSUp 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

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.⁷ 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.⁸

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*

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."

⁶ 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), 131–33, identify repetition, irony, and reversal as three key literary devices in the Pentateuch.

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.*⁹ 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.¹⁰

Such approaches abandon the storyline of the narrative, which plainly exists, for a speculative *substitute narrative* of the texts' origins.¹¹ 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.¹²

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."

¹⁰ Martin Noth, *Exodus*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 18.

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,¹³ 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."¹⁴ 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.

¹³ 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).

¹⁴ 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.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.”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.¹⁷ Large narratives are comprised of “stories within stories”—not in the sense of imbedded tales told by characters (à la *Don Quixote* or *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.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

¹⁵ Moberly, *Mountain of God*, 32 (author’s emphasis).

¹⁶ Jonathan T. Pennington, *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.

¹⁷ According to George A. Kennedy, *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.”

¹⁸ Amit, *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.”¹⁹

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.²⁰

Fifth, the robust consideration of the story’s many constituent interrelationships requires and assumes multiple re-readings.²¹ 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”²² 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,

¹⁹ Jan P. Fokkelman, “Exodus,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 58.

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).

²¹ Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* GBS (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 20.

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 *Method* 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

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

²⁶ Moberly, *Mountain of God*, 35. Ryken, “Literary Criticism of the Bible,” 29–30, criticizes the “insensitivity 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* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 154.

²⁸ Kalman P. Bland, “The Rabbinic Method and Literary Criticism,” in *Literary Interpretations of Biblical 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 of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 16.

meaning: “the reader who bestows it, and the text which ‘has’ it.”³⁰ 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.”³¹ 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.³²

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.”³³

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.”³⁴

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.

³¹ Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives*, 136–37.

³² David J. A. Clines, “Theme in Genesis 1–11,” in *I Studied Inscriptions 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), 288.

³³ L. Daniel Hawk, “Literary/Narrative Criticism,” in *DOTP*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 539.

³⁴ Viktor Ber, “Moses and Jethro: Harmony and Conflict in the Interpretation of Exodus 18,” *CV* 50 (2008): 167.

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.”³⁵ 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.³⁶ 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).³⁷

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 reader³⁸ of the book of Exodus knows the book of Genesis.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.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,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,⁴² the Joseph cycle, the narratives of Joshua

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.”

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.

⁴⁰ Patrick, *Rendering of God*, 34.

⁴¹ For example, note the important interrelation with Num 13–14 traced by Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics*, 254–349.

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*

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 Kürle, *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 Bundestgott 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.”

⁴⁵ Calum M. Carmichael, *Law and Narrative in the Bible* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Terence E. Fretheim, “The Reclamation of Creation: Redemption and Law in Exodus,” *Int* 45 (1991): 354–61; Joe M. Sprinkle, *The Book of the Covenant: A Literary Approach*, JSOTSup 174 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994); “Law and Narrative in Exodus 19–24,” *JETS* 47 (2004): 235–52; Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, “Torah as Narrative and Narrative as Torah,” in *Old Testament Interpretation: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. James Luther Mays, David L. Petersen, and Kent Harold Richards (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 13–30; Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narrative Ethically* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000); Assnat Bartor, *Reading Law as Narrative: A Study in the Casuistic Laws of the Pentateuch*, AIL 5 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010); Gershon Hepner, *Legal Friction: Law, Narrative, and Identity Politics in Biblical Israel*, StBibLit 78 (New York: Lang, 2010); Moshe Simon-Shoshan, *Stories of the Law: Narrative Discourse and the Construction of Authority in the Mishnah* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

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

⁴⁶ Here, contrast the perspective of Dohmen, *Exodus 19–40*, 88: “Der Dekalog von Ex 20, 1–17 liegt im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes außerhalb der ihn umgebenden Erzählung.”

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.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.”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.⁵²
7. The final form has narrative coherence.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.”

⁵⁰ See Patrick, *Rhetoric of Revelation*, 6, 18.

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.”

⁵² See Wells, “The Book of Exodus,” 55; Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 191.

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.⁵⁴
9. Combined approaches (diachronic and synchronic) contribute little to the explication of the final form of the text, and often obscure it.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

exhibit enough historical inconsistency and narrative incoherence to require the Documentary Hypothesis to account for its present form. Alongside this central thesis, then, Baden judges the hand responsible for the final form of the text to have been a mere “compiler” of the four sources which had a greater narrative artistry and coherence prior to combination than the final form of the Pentateuch came to exhibit. About this “compiler,” Baden (p. 227) writes, “Above all he is not an interpreter; he does not create new theological concepts.... The sole activity that must be attributed to him ... is the combination of the sources into a single whole.” According to Baden, beyond the chronological merging of the four originally independent accounts, this compiler himself invested the text with no additional theological or narratological intentionality. Here, however, to a large degree, presuppositions seem to be particularly determinative, and the consideration of overarching theological and terminological patterns in Exodus have led scholars such as Wilfried Warning, George Knight, and Norman Whybray to claim not only a narrative unity for the final form, but also to attribute the final form to a single author. Warning, “Terminological Patterns and the Decalogue,” 520; Knight, *Theology as Narration*, x–xi; R. Norman Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodological Study*, JSOTSup 53 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 232–33.

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.”

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.⁵⁶ James Watts has written on the rhetorical strategy of Exod 32–34.⁵⁷ 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 addresssing (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.⁵⁸ His rhetorical analysis, and that of his students, was especially interested in stylistics and structure, and in the relationship between form and meaning.⁵⁹

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.⁶⁰ Concern with the

⁵⁶ Patrick, *Rhetoric of Revelation*.

⁵⁷ James W. Watts, “Aaron and the Golden Calf in the Rhetoric of the Pentateuch,” *JBL* 130 (2011): 417–30.

⁵⁸ James Muilenburg, “Form Criticism and Beyond,” *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 unrepeatabe, upon the particularity of the formulation.”

⁵⁹ 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.”

⁶⁰ Dale Patrick and Allen Scult, *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 function*⁶³ of Exod 20:2–6 and 34:6–7. Rhetorical style, structure, and artistry of language may be noted as indicators of these

suasory discourse is consonant with the biblical authors’ view of their subject matter, God’s actions in history, which themselves have a rhetorical or suasive purpose.”

⁶¹ For an outstanding summary of the classical rhetorical tradition, see George A. Kennedy, *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). For a survey of contemporary rhetorical theories and approaches, see Jim A. Kuypers, ed., *Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives in Action*, LSPC (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009).

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:

⁶⁴ John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 52.

⁶⁵ Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 76.

⁶⁶ James W. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), xv.

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

⁶⁸ Leah Ceccarelli, "The Ends of Rhetoric Revisited: Three Readings of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address," in *The Viability of the Rhetorical Tradition*, ed. Richard Graff, Arthur E. Walzer, and Janet M. Atwill (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 51–52.

⁶⁹ Patrick, *Rhetoric of Revelation*, vii.

⁷⁰ Patrick, *Rhetoric of Revelation*, 36.

⁷¹ Patrick, *Rhetoric of Revelation*, 45.

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 narration, 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.⁷³ 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).

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 its 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—oneself 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>, 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 narrative⁷⁴, 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 *within the narrative itself*.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 *within the narrative*, since its words are addressed to the reading audience not independently or directly but *as a constituent part of a narrative which in turn determines the significance of the rhetoric employed within it*.⁷⁶

appreciation of the rhetorical object under consideration. The enriching aspects of criticism that fuel our common humanity will be pushed aside in the critic's quest for a politics of meaning. A critic employing [this] perspective will possess the truth before he begins to write.... The graceful beauty inherent in appreciation and understanding will be exchanged for the hard marching, rhythmically thumping black boots of critical theory." When the rhetorical object under consideration is the Bible, the theological conviction that here God speaks and desires to be heard, comprehended, believed, and heeded only serves to sharpen Kuypers' concern.

⁷⁴ Patrick and Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation*, 29, argue that "the Bible's main form of exposition, the narrative, is most appropriately characterized as primary rhetoric, its primary objective being to persuade its audience. For an extensive theoretical development of the rhetorical-persuasive dynamics of literary narrative, see Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); and James Phelan, *Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1996).

⁷⁵ Yehoshua Gitay, "Rhetorical Criticism," 144–46, exemplifies such inner-narrative analysis of a biblical speech in his comments on the competing advisory rhetoric of Hushai and Ahithophel in 2 Sam 17, analyzing the structure and strategy of Hushai's speech in light of his goals within the narrative and the effects of the rhetoric on Absalom.

⁷⁶ Bitzer, "Rhetorical Situation," 257, insists that a situation may only be "rhetorical," and speech within it "rhetoric," if it is real situation, that is "objective, publicly observable, and historic," and that fictive speech of a character in a novel or play is "not genuinely rhetorical" even though it appears so. The approach advanced in the present study, that the meaning and rhetorical force of a speech imbedded in narrative *for the reader of the narrative* is founded in large part upon the rhetorical-persuasive force of that speech *within the narratively presented rhetorical situation*, pushes against Bitzer's claim. In my judgment, the Exodus narrative does relate real, historical divine speech within a rhetorical situation which actually existed in history, and therefore satisfies Bitzer's definition of rhetoric on those grounds as well. However, whether a narrative relates historical or fictive events and speech, it remains true that a reader encounters these through the medium of a narrated *story*, and in either case, *the rhetorical situation presented by the narrator* governs the function and force of the rhetoric within the story. The meaning and force of such narratively embedded speech *upon the reader* of the story may involve many factors, but, presuming the reader is reading the story as a (whole) story, one of these factors, and, I would argue the primary factor, must certainly be the meaning and function of the speech *within its rhetorical situation as presented in the narrative*. Not only is rhetorical analysis proper and fruitful when considering the rhetorical-persuasive force of speech internally, within a narrative, but narratively presented rhetoric often has additional resources at hand for

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.⁷⁷ 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:⁷⁸ (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.⁷⁹ 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 re-hashed here.

⁷⁸ W. M. W. Roth, "Rhetorical Criticism, Hebrew Bible," in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Hayes (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 2:398. Roth characterizes his list as a synthesis of the method outlined in three other articles: Martin Kessler, "A Methodological Setting for Rhetorical Criticism," in *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature*, ed. David J. A. Clines et al., JSOTSup 19 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982), 8–9; Wilhelm Wuellner, "Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?" *CBQ* 49 (1987): 455–58; and C. Clifton Black, "Keeping Up with Recent Studies, Pt. 16: Rhetorical Criticism and Biblical Interpretation," *ExpTim* 100 (1989): 254–55. Roth's approach is cited approvingly by and is consonant with rhetorical analysis employed by R. Reed Lessing, *Interpreting Discontinuity: Isaiah's Tyre Oracle* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 112–13.

⁷⁹ Douglas Miller, "What the Preacher Forgot: The Rhetoric of Ecclesiastes," *CBQ* 62 (2000): 216; discussed in Lessing, *Interpreting Discontinuity*, 113.

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.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Tull, "Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality," 161 (my emphasis), summarizing George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 4.

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 thematic¹ 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.² 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

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 Galt 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 (forever) and לדר דר (to generation after generation).³

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.

³ The Hebrew word עולם 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, עולם refers to *a period of time spanning human generations*. In fact, 20 of the 29 uses of עולם 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, יליד, 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, Gen 3:22; 6:3), 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” (עוד עד-עולם, 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).”⁴

Alexander proposes a compositional unity to Genesis centered around this theme, focusing especially on the תולדות (“the generations of”) formulae and the repeated use of the word זרע (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.”⁵ Fishbane identifies “blessing” (ברכה) and “birthright” (בכרה) as keywords in Genesis, terms sharing not only the same Hebrew consonants but also the same transgenerational perspective.⁶

Related father-child terms appear as keywords or recurring formulae in specific Genesis episodes.⁷ 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

⁴ Thomas W. Mann, “All the Families of the Earth’: The Theological Unity of Genesis,” *Int* 45 (1991): 341.

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.

⁶ Michael Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken, 1979), 40–62.

⁷ Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2004), 30, commenting on the repetition of “my brother” and “your brother” in the Cain and Abel narrative, speaks of “the biblical practice of using thematically fraught relational epithets.”

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.⁸ When Jacob encounters Esau, the narrative captures his paternal concern by repeating the word “children” (ילדים) seven times in seven verses (Gen 33:1–7).⁹

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.¹⁰

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

⁸ The noun בן (“son”) occurs a dramatic 10x in Gen 22:1–18, and the substantive adjective יחיד (“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 ב here as a ב 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.¹¹ 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).¹²

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” (קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים, Gen 4:1).¹³ 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”).

womb (30:2), “vindicated” (30:6), “endowed” (30:20), “remembered” (30:22), and “took away” reproach (30:23). When barren Rachel demands of Jacob that he give her children, he responds, “Am I in the place of God?” (30:2). When God opens her womb and she finally does bear a child, Rachel names Joseph as a plea: “May Yahweh add (יִסַּף) to me another son!” (30:24) The names of Joseph’s own sons in Egypt likewise confess Yahweh’s involvement: “God has made me forget (נִשְׁכַּח, cf. Manasseh) all my trouble and the house of my father” and “God has made me fruitful (פָּרָה, cf. Ephraim) in the land of my affliction” (41:51–52).

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.”¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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* (זֶרַע), that Yahweh promises to give these vast numbers, as well as

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.¹⁶ 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).¹⁷

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 kept¹⁸ 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*:

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” (*zekhut avot*). See Shalom Carmy, “Zekhut Avot,” *ER* 14:9940–42; Solomon Schechter, “The Zekhut 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

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” (בִּאֲחֶרֶת הַיָּמִים) 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.²³

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.”²⁴ 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 (פִקֵד) 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. Gaeblein, 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” (בֵּרַךְ, בֵּרַכָה) 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.²⁵

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”²⁶ (40:38) 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

²⁵ Robinson, “Literary Functions of the Genealogies,” 607.

²⁶ The expression “the house of Israel” (בית ישראל) 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).

Flood.”²⁷ 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” (ישראלי)—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 (מילדות) 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 (שרץ) 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 (שרץ) 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.

²⁷ 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), 78. See also Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 8.

Against this backdrop, a son descended from Levi is born, hidden, providentially preserved, adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, and named Moses.²⁸ Later forced to flee to Midian, Moses marries Zipporah and has sons of his own.²⁹ 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” (שם עולם), his “memorial” (זכר), that is, the name by which he will be known and mentioned “throughout all generations” (לדור דור, Exod 3:15).

The limitations of mortal pharaohs in these opening chapters stand in striking contrast to

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” (ילד, 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.³⁰ 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.³¹

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

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” (פְּקֻדָּה) 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” (שְׁפָטִים, 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 (יִדָּן), 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).³⁵ 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.³⁶

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.³⁷ The hail, for example, will be “a very

NSBT 28 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 49: “Both the first and the last disasters call to mind Pharaoh’s murderous decree: the Nile turning to blood, having claimed the lives of infants thrown in, and the death of the firstborn sons of Egypt.” The pervasiveness of “death” (מֵוָה) in the plague narratives (Exod 7:18, 21; 8:9; 9:6, 19; 10:17, 28) can also be seen as an indicting, talionic response to the decree of the Pharaoh of the oppression, some generations back (Exod 1:16, 22).

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 from the narrative, 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).³⁸ 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).³⁹

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.”⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ When the wonders of Yahweh are

like of which had never been seen before”—a concept which appears also in the tenth plague.

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 (רַב, 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. 1.⁴² *Since the days of their fathers*, Pharaoh and the Egyptians have been seeking to kill (מֹת) 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 (מֹת, Exod 11:4–5).⁴³ *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 (צַעֲקָה, 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 (מִשָּׁה) of the water (Exod 2:10).

⁴² 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.

⁴³ 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" (בֶּן) is superfluous in both, and "firstborn (son)" (בְּכֹר) would have sufficed. He suggests that "son" (בֶּן) 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" (בֶּן) born to the Hebrews is to be thrown into the Nile" (Exod 1:22).

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 (אצ, 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.”⁴⁴

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 Somniis* 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:

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 (בְּנֵיךָ) forever (עַד־עוֹלָם). When you come into the land which Yahweh will give to you just as he promised, keep this service. And when your sons (בְּנֵיכֶם) 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

⁴⁸ 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), 53.

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.”⁴⁹

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.”⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹ The Israelites are to “take a lamb according to fathers’ households (לִבְיֹת אֲבוֹת), 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.

⁴⁹ Dale Patrick, *The Rhetoric of Revelation in the Hebrew Bible*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999), 38.

⁵⁰ Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster, 1974), 200.

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).⁵² 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),⁵³ 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.⁵⁴

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,

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).

לֵא...עוֹד עַד-עוֹלָם). 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).⁵⁵ The long-term, multi-generation future of Israel stands dramatically open before them, for “Yahweh reigns forever and ever” (לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד, Exod 15:18).

When Yahweh provides the people with manna, he commands, “An omer’s measure of it shall be kept for your generations (לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם), 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).⁵⁶ 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 (זְכָרוֹן)⁵⁷ 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 (לְשִׁמְרָתָהּ, for a preservation; Hiphil of נָוָה, 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 (זכר) of Amalek from under heaven” (17:14).⁵⁸ The reader learns not only from later OT narratives⁵⁹ 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) ”(מדר דר).

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, 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.’”⁶⁰ 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.”⁶¹

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 (לכהנת עולם) throughout their generations (לדרתם). (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 (חוקת עולם) for Aaron and for his offspring (זרע) after him” (28:43). Washing hands and feet with water before approaching the altar is described as “a perpetual statute (חוקת עולם) for Aaron and for his offspring (זרע) throughout their generations (לדרתם)” (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).⁶² 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.”⁶³

House, 1987), 55.

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 (עדי-עולם), 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).

⁶³ Trevor J. Burke, *The Message of Sonship*, TBST (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 51.

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 קשה, Exod 1:14; 6:6, 9) and has given them a blessed, perpetual “service” (עבודה) 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

⁶⁴ Thomas W. Mann, *The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 107–8.

⁶⁵ The people’s “service” (עבודה) 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” (עבודה) 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” (עבודה) 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.

⁶⁸ Charlie Trimm, "Honor Your Parents: A Command for Adults," *JETS* 60 (2017): 247–63. Similarly, Michael L. Barré, "The Fourth Commandment: Is It Just for Kids?" *TBT* 29 (1991): 42–46.

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.”⁶⁹ 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.⁷⁰ 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).”⁷¹ 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

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.”⁷²

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.”⁷³ In this sense, the motive clause for the parent commandment is closely tied to the motive clause for the idolatry commandment:⁷⁴

[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 (אָרְךָ) 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.⁷⁵ 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.⁷⁶ Because of this vital

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.

⁷³ John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 2 vols. (Carlisle, PA: Evangelical Press, 2000–2001), 2:45.

⁷⁴ 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), 29, notes the way in which the promise attached to the parent-commandment (20:12) is a manifestation of the divine רַחֵם (lovingkindness) described in 20:6.

⁷⁵ Transgenerational aspects are present in the two intervening commands as well. Exodus 20:7 warns that “Yahweh will not leave unpunished (נִקָּה) 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” (וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנְקָה) 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 twelve 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

today, so that it may go well for you and for your sons after you, and so that your days may be long upon the land which Yahweh your God is giving to you for all your days.” Moses speaks in the second person singular here, but he is addressing the people as a unified whole. This transgenerational dynamic is rhetorically dramatized between an individual father and son in Prov 3:1–2: “My son, do not forget my instruction (תורה), but let your heart preserve my commandments, for length of days (ארך ימים) and years of life and peace they shall add to you.”

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)⁷⁷ 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

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 (לעולם, Exod 19:9; 14:31) and their enduring acknowledgement of Yahweh’s enduring reign as their sole God and King (לעולם, 15:18; 20:2–3). Now, however, the people turn away from both of these “quickly” (מהר, 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*,”⁷⁸ 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.”⁷⁹ 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).⁸⁰ 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,

⁷⁸ 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), 200.

⁷⁹ Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 333, cited in Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 200.

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 וְנַחֲלָנוּ, the Qal verb נָחַל with a first plural object suffix, woodenly: “and inherit us.”⁸¹ The object of inheritance (נָחַל) 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” (נַחֲלָה) 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 of *nah^alâ*, 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 (סִגְלָה, 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),

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, “נָחַל *nāhal*; נַחֲלָה *nah^alâ*,” *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).⁸⁵ 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 (זכור) 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 עבד) 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.”⁸⁶

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” (בשנה אחת, 23:29) but rather “little by little (מעט מעט) 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.⁸⁷ 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 (נהל 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 תשתחוה 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 (ארץ), 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 (בנים), and his daughters whore after their gods and cause your sons (בנים) to whore after their gods. (Exod 34:14–16)

and great-grandchildren (e.g., Job 42:16–17).

⁸⁷ 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 תשתחוה ל) 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)⁸⁸ 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

⁸⁸ The Hophal of עבד 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 עבד there. Benno Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus*, trans. Walter Jacob (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1992), 552, also notes the Hophal form of עבד 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 extra-textual 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.⁸⁹

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.⁹⁰

This explanation, as far as it goes, is not objectionable.⁹¹ 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*,

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.

⁹⁰ John H. Walton and Victor H. Matthews, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Genesis–Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 108.

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.*⁹²

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 statutes 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.

⁹² Andrew Perriman, “The Corporate Christ: Re-assessing the Jewish Background,” *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.”

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” (פָּקַד עַל) 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

⁹³ Stefan Kürle, *The Appeal of Exodus: The Characters of God, Moses, and Israel in the Rhetoric of the Book of Exodus*, Paternoster Biblical Manuscripts (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2013), 61, sees the background work of Yahweh in ch. 1 as a literary device used to contrast him with Pharaoh: “Exod 1 displays the king of Egypt, on the one hand, as frantic, fearful, and malicious, and as busy ushering in political decisions; he is, thus, actively opposed to God. On the other hand, God is passively opposed to the pharaoh, and much more successfully.”

⁹⁴ Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Exodus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 39–44, in discussing the opening chapters of the book, includes the subheadings, “Heavenly Silence: Israel in Bondage” and “From Absence to Presence.” Gunn, “The ‘Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart,’” 85, observes: “The scurry of human initiatives in the action at the beginning ... comes to an abrupt end at the burning bush. Thereafter Yahweh dictates the action.”

⁹⁵ Eric A. Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior: Troubling Old Testament Images of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 23–24, regards readings which distance God from direct involvement in the warfare at the sea as theodicy attempts to avoid the scandal of the text: “This passage highlights God’s very *active* involvement in warfare. God is not portrayed as sitting up in the heavens sending down divine directives while the Israelites slog it out on the field of battle. Rather, God is the one who reportedly ‘threw the Egyptian army into panic...., clogged

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

their chariot wheels... [and] tossed the Egyptians into the sea.’ According to this text, God is directly responsible for exterminating the Egyptians. It is God who obliterates the Egyptian army by drowning countless Egyptian soldiers.” Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 104–5, notes the insistence of Exod 15, as well as Jewish tradition, in ascribing agency to Yahweh alone: “It is his right hand, and not that of Moses, that has acted. Moses is not even mentioned in the song, which concludes with the jubilant credo: ‘The LORD will reign forever and ever’.... It is thus striking, but hardly surprising, that Moses is not mentioned even once in the Jewish *Passover Haggadah*.... The whole concept of the *Haggadah* can be summed up in the confession: ‘The LORD brought us forth from Egypt: not by the hands of an angel, and not by the hands of a seraph, and not by the hands of a messenger, but the Holy One, blessed be he, himself, in his own glory and in his own person.’”

⁹⁶ Mann, *Book of the Torah*, 82, “The question, ‘Where is God?’ increasingly haunts the reader of [Exodus] 1–2.” Mann speaks of a divine silence which is “only apparent” and of “God’s apparent absence.” Michael E Williams, ed., *The Storyteller’s Companion to the Bible, Volume Two: Exodus–Joshua* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 25, “In the opening scene, God does not seem to be among the stage players. For Israel, as Pharaoh’s grip tightens, God seems to have gone on vacation.... Wryly we might ask, ‘Is the Lord hiding in the bulrushes?’” A number of scholars, with different accents, emphasize that the presence and direct agency of God within the narrative diminishes in the closing chapters of Genesis and then, after the great interventions of Exodus, across the rest of the OT. See Dale Patrick, *The Rendering of God in the Old Testament*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 22–24; Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Disappearance of God: A Divine Mystery* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995); Samuel E. Balentine, *The Torah’s Vision of Worship*, OBT (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 219; Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narrative: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 83; Mark McEntire, *Portraits of a Mature God: Choices in Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013).

⁹⁷ Terence E. Fretheim, “Issues of Agency in Exodus,” in *The Book of Exodus: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, Craig A. Evans, and Joel N. Lohr (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 596. For related discussions by Fretheim, see “To Say Something—About God, Evil, and Suffering,” *WW* 19 (1999): 349–59; *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 149–50.

such as natural events).⁹⁸ With this assumption in place, Fretheim accents the *equivaleñcies* 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 good tidings: the time of God’s action has at last arrived.”⁹⁹ 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.”¹⁰⁰ In chs. 1–2, the Egyptians exclaim neither “this is the finger

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).

⁹⁹ Moshe Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus: A Holistic Commentary on Exodus 1–11*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 47.

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.”¹⁰¹ 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.¹⁰² 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,”¹⁰³ 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.

the Tower of Babel story and elsewhere, heralds the mighty acts of God.... The stirring of the deity heralds a new ... *modus operandi* by which God will make himself known.”

¹⁰¹ Ackerman, “Literary Context,” 115.

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 *Theodicy 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.”¹⁰⁴

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).¹⁰⁵

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 (ימינך), arm (זרוע), finger (אצבע), palm (כף), and he understands this as depicting a uniquely direct mode of divine agency.¹⁰⁶ 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.”¹⁰⁷ 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

¹⁰⁴ 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), 773.

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 Yoḥai* 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.”

¹⁰⁶ David Rolph Seely, “The Image of the Hand of God in the Book of Exodus,” in *God’s Word for Our World, Volume I: Biblical Studies in Honor of Simon John de Vries*, ed. J. Harold Ellens et al. (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 38–54.

¹⁰⁷ Seely, “Image of the Hand of God,” 52.

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 (יָרַד, 3:8; 19:11, 18, 20; 34:5), going forth (יָצָא, 11:4), going with (יָלַךְ, 13:21; 14:19; 23:23; 33:14–16; 34:9), and being with (עִמָּם הָיָה, 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).

¹⁰⁸ Seely, "Image of the Hand of God," 53.

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," *JOT* 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 Prophetic Dimension of the Divine Name: On Exodus 3:14a and Its Context,” *CBQ* 64 (2002): 226–27, notes that the verb הָיָה 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. Baker, 2 vols., OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 1:191, “The oft-recurring phrase, ‘Ye shall know that I am 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

¹¹⁴ Arie C. Leder, "The Coherence of Exodus: Narrative Unity and Meaning," *CTJ* 36 (2001): 266.

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* (ידין) 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* (עם היה) *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* (פִּקֹּד יִפְקֹד) *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* (פִּקֹּד 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* (פִּקֹּד יִפְקֹד) *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)¹¹⁶

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* (פִּקֹּד) his people”

¹¹⁶ I take פקד פקדתי in Exod 3:16 as a performative perfect (see Joüon §112j): “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: פקדתי את אשר-עשה עמלק לישראל. 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 νυν: νυν 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 פקד פקדתי 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* (פָּקַדְתָּ יְיָ) *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” (פָּקַד).¹¹⁷

Other than Exod 20:5 and 34:7, the other use of פָּקַד (“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 (פָּקַדְתִּי), I will visit-in-punishment against (עַל פָּקַדְתִּי) 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

¹¹⁷ Ackerman, “Literary Context,” 81–82, details a very similar dynamic at work with the theme of Yahweh’s “descent” (יָרַד), 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).

¹¹⁹ R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34*, JSOTSup 22 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), 58–59.

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.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

¹²⁰ R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 2 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 164.

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.

¹²² Bernard S. Jackson, "The Problem of Exod. XXI 22–25 (*Ius Talionis*)," *VT* 23 (1973): 273–304; Raymond Westbrook, "Lex Talionis and Exodus 21, 22–25," *RB* 93 (1986): 52–69; Stuart West, "The *Lex Talionis* in the Torah," *JBQ* 21 (1993): 183–88; James F. Davis, *Lex Talionis in Early Judaism and the Exhortation of Jesus in Matthew 5:38–42*, JSNTSup 281 (New York: T & T Clark, 2005), 7–54.

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).

¹²⁵ Martin J. Selman, "Law," in *DOTP*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 506.

¹²⁶ Pamela Barmash, *Homicide in the Biblical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 157.

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.

¹²⁸ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Tit for Tat: The Principle of Equal Retribution in Near Eastern and Biblical Law," *BA* 43 (1980): 230–34.

¹²⁹ John Barton, "Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament," *JTS* 30 (1979): 1–14.

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).”¹³⁰ 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.¹³¹ In this way, Nile blood, firstborn dead,¹³² and drowned army all 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:

¹³⁰ Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, trans. Sierd Woudstra, 4 vols., HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 1993–2002), 2:33.

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 (פיקד¹³³) 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).¹³⁴ 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 plague¹³⁵ 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)

¹³³ Yahweh’s visiting-in-punishment (פיקד על) 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 (הִלָּחֵץ) with which the Egyptians are oppressing (לְחָצְיָם) them. And now, go that I may send you (לְכֹהֵךְ וְאֶשְׁלַחְךָ) 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 נגף and נגע are used in Exodus along with נכה 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 קשה (to harden), כבד (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 [חזק, 9:2], increasing work [קשה, 1:14; 6:9; כבד, 5:9], hardset against ‘sending’ [כבד, 13:14]; and for Yahweh’s actions in relation to Pharaoh and Egypt (mighty hand [חזק], heavy plagues [כבד], hardening Pharaoh [קשה, כבד, חזק], glory over Egypt [כבד]).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” (שליך, 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 (נער, 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 *qsh* is used for designating the ‘hard service’ (*‘abodah qašah*) 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 *לחם* ("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 (*איבֵיךָ*) and I will oppose (*צור*) those who oppose you (*צורֵיךָ*)" (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

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 *ברעה* ("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 ὄρημα 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).¹⁴⁰

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.¹⁴¹

Yahweh exercises and endorses "a measure of restraint in retribution, 'so the vengeance should not exceed the injury.'" ¹⁴² 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.¹⁴³ This weighs against

¹⁴⁰ On the OT theology of Yahweh repenting (נחם), see Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Amos*, AB 24A (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 638–79, in their excursus, "When God Repents," and R. Reed Lessing, *Jonah*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2007), 324–41, in his excursus, "When Yahweh Changes a Prior Verdict."

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.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 *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 *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" (לֹא יִנְקֶה, 20:7; 34:7). "Mere escape from Pharaoh will not suffice; he must be judged."¹⁴⁵ The operation of *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 *rather than* bringing רעה upon those who are רע according to *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

Pharaoh."

¹⁴⁴ For example, Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: JPS, 1990), 395, interprets the "visiting ... sons" passage in Exod 20:5 to mean that God's wrath at sin is "so great that it will not burn itself out until a number of generations are consumed." George Jackson, *The Ten Commandments* (New York: Revell, 1898), 54, speaks of those who read into 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." Leslie Brisman, "On the Divine Presence in Exodus," in *Exodus*, ed. Harold Bloom, MCI (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 121, exhibits this tendency, viewing the visiting phrase as a late and "vulgar" insertion in the text of Exod 34:7 which suggests that God "chooses not to strike back with perfect aim and sometimes hits as far away as the third or fourth generation."

¹⁴⁵ Williams, *Storyteller's Companion to the Bible*, 26.

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

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.”¹⁴⁷ Divine judgment plays out in these chapters as “the story of the undoing of creation.”¹⁴⁸

In a similar vein, Creach characterizes the plagues against Egypt as “the reversal of creation.”¹⁴⁹ At creation, God’s רוח (“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 רוח (“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.”¹⁵⁰ 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.”¹⁵¹ 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

¹⁴⁷ Clines, “Theme in Genesis 1–11,” 302–4.

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 accents 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.

¹⁵¹ Mann, *Book of the Torah*, 107.

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” (נָצַל Hithpael, 33:6) of their “ornaments” (עֲדִי, 33:4–6). The same verb stem occurred previously in the narrative in reference to Israel plundering or despoiling the Egyptians (נָצַל Piel, 3:22; 12:36).¹⁵² 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.”¹⁵³ As they stripped the Egyptians, so they now must strip themselves.¹⁵⁴ Fretheim speaks of these ornaments as “signs of their redeemed status” which must now be set aside.¹⁵⁵ The Exodus despoiling has been undone.

A similar wordplay may be at work in the double use of the root פָּרַע 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 נָצַל (Piel and Hithpael) between Exod 3:22; 12:36; and 33:6 is strengthened by the prominence of נָצַל (Hiphil) in Exodus, indicating “deliverance.” Both in Exod 3:22 and 12:36, the “plundering” (נָצַל) of the Egyptians is preceded by a reference to Yahweh’s “deliverance” (נָצַל, 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* (פָּרַעַץ), for Aaron *had turned them loose* (פָּרַעַה), to the ridicule of their enemies.” It is difficult to miss the resemblance of the unique form פָּרַעַה (with archaic 3ms object suffix¹⁵⁶) to the word “Pharaoh” (פָּרַעַה)—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

¹⁵⁶ On the archaic 3ms object suffix פָּרַעַה, see GKC §58g; Joüon §61i.

¹⁵⁷ Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 562.

¹⁵⁸ Steven A. Geller, “Gold and Incense: For Better and for Worse,” <http://www.jtsa.edu/gold-and-incense-for-better-and-for-worse>.

¹⁵⁹ Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 284 (my emphasis).

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.”¹⁶⁰ 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,¹⁶¹ 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

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” (עשה) 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” (יבשה, 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.¹⁶² 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” (שטררים) 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 (רִיב) and test (נִסָּה) Yahweh (17:5). Only in the manna episode is there differentiation: “some” (אֲנֹשִׁים, 16:20) leave part of the manna overnight and “some of the people” (מִן־הָעָם, 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* (קוֹל אֶחָד) 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

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 (עַמֶּךָ) whom you brought up from the land of Egypt have made a ruin of things.... I have seen *this people* and, behold, *it* (הֵיאֵה) *is a stiff-necked people*. And now, leave me alone so that my anger may 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 (רָעָה) 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).¹⁶⁴ 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.

¹⁶⁴ 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” (בְּנוֹ וּבְאֵחָיו, 32:29). Here I read ב as *beth pretii* (GKC §119*p*), 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 (העם) 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 (sg.) people* 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 if not, blot me out from the book which you have written” (32:31–32). It is then followed by Yahweh plaguing “*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 Levite 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" (בכל־ארץ מצרים, 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).¹⁶⁸ 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)—which in Gen 15:18 was “not yet complete (שלם)” —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

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 (חַמַּל)¹⁶⁹ [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

¹⁶⁹ The standard lexicons define חַמַּל 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” (חַמַּל) the infant Moses (Exod 2:6) from the decree of genocide, Saul and the people “spare” (חַמַּל) 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” (לֹא חַמַּל) 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.¹⁷⁰ 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 18.¹⁷¹ 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 (הרג) 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 (צדיק, Exod 9:27) and the defender of the cause of righteous ones (צדיקים, 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.

¹⁷² Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd ed., SBLDS 6 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 5. Cited in Kürle, *Appeal of Exodus*, 81.

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).¹⁷³

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 (עזב, 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

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.¹⁷⁴ 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” (פלה) 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

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 *שָׂא שְׂא* ('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 כִּי almost always involves a singular verb and subject, especially when expressing the consequence or sanction.

If (כִּי) 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 (כִּי) 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* (הַנֹּפֵשׁ הַהוּא) 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* (אֵת אִשְׁרֵי יְשָׁא) 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]).¹⁷⁹ 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.”

¹⁷⁹ 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 כִּי employed in an asseverative sense (“indeed”), addressed with a hypothetical individual situation in view: “If you (ms) do indeed afflict him, and, indeed (כִּי), 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 (חַנּוּן).” This final remark connects Yahweh’s concern for individual justice with his innermost character, using the same language which Yahweh will use in Exod 34:6, “a compassionate and gracious God” (אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן).

vestments, individual death may be the penalty.¹⁸⁰ 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” (רשע) of a pair of fighting Hebrews (Exod 2:11–13).¹⁸¹ 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 איש 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

¹⁸⁰ See Exod 28:35, 43; 30:20–21, 33, 38; 31:14–15; 35:2. Cf. Lev 10:1–3.

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 (יָקִי) or a righteous person (צַדִּיק) do not kill,
for I will not acquit (Hiphil of צַדַּק) a guilty person (רָשָׁע). (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 כִּי-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."

¹⁸⁴ Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1986), 4–5.

¹⁸⁵ Cassuto, *Exodus*, 299.

not as innocent. And the righteous person must be treated as righteous, and not as wicked.¹⁸⁶

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.¹⁸⁷

If you meet the ox of your enemy (אִיבֵי) or his donkey going astray, you shall indeed bring it back to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you (שֹׂנְאֶךָ) 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—שֹׂנְאֶךָ—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 (שֹׂנְאֵי).”¹⁸⁸

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

¹⁸⁶ 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.”

¹⁸⁷ 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.”

¹⁸⁸ The morphology is nearly identical: Qal participle with pronominal suffix.

characterize its speakers.”¹⁸⁹ 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.¹⁹⁰ 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.¹⁹¹

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.”¹⁹² This theme stands in tension with the careful justice safeguarded by the immediate context¹⁹³ and with Yahweh’s actions toward his enemies thus far in the narrative.

¹⁸⁹ James W. Watts, *Reading Law: The Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield Academic, 1999), 90.

¹⁹⁰ Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 173.

¹⁹¹ 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, 2006), 55. Similarly Gunther W Plaut, *Exodus, The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1983), 278.

¹⁹² Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation: Exodus: The Book of Redemption* (New Milford, CT: Maggid, 2010), 160.

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.¹⁹⁴ 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.¹⁹⁵ 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* (מקנה). Furthermore, the people in Exod 17 are described as those who "contend" (ריב) 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” (לְשׂוֹנְאֵי) 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.*”¹⁹⁶

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.¹⁹⁷ However, the targumim seem to reckon here with the concern for individual justice displayed in the broader Exodus context, and

¹⁹⁶ English text online: <http://targum.info/targumic-texts/pentateuchal-targumim/>. Emphasis mine.

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 literarily 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 (אֲחֻזָּה) 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

¹⁹⁹ W. J. Peter Boyd, "The Mystery of God and Revelation," *SJT* 13 (1960): 182.

²⁰⁰ Buber, "Holy Event (Exodus 19–27)," 46.

²⁰¹ L. Daniel Hawk, "Literary/Narrative Criticism," in *DOTP*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 539, discussing observations by Auerbach, Alter, and others.

theological claim in the book of Exodus.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.

7.7.1. Establishing the Theme

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.²⁰³ But it is not brief, taking place during “those many days” (בַּיָּמִים הָרַבִּים הָהֵם, 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

²⁰² Ackerman, “Literary Context,” 96–97, discusses “the hiddenness and mystery of God” as “a theme which will move throughout the epic.”

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.

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?²⁰⁴ The narrative itself gives no clear answers to these questions.²⁰⁵

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.²⁰⁶ Like Moses, the reader of Exod 4:24–26 is disturbed from

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)?"

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).²⁰⁷ 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” (מִן־הָעָם...כַּשְׁלִשְׁתַּיִם אֵלֶּפֶי אִישׁ, Exod 32:28).²¹¹ Why this many?

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 לִיַן (לִיַן). Yahweh encounters Moses at his “night-lodging place” (מִלִּיָּן, Exod 4:24, from BDB I לִיַן, “lodge, stay the night”). Israel exhibits dismay at their perceived endangerment by Yahweh with “grumbling” (15:24; 16:2; 17:3; from BDB II לִיַן, “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?²¹² 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,²¹³ but even so, does it occur chronologically at this point in the narrative, or is it a later punishment reported here proleptically?²¹⁴ 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

through...” (32:26, 27).

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

²¹⁵ Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 28.

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 chiasmic 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.”²¹⁷ 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.²¹⁸

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).

אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה

I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will be merciful to whom I will be merciful (33:19b).

וְהִנַּחֲתִי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֶחַן וְרַחֲמֵתִי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֶרְחַם

²¹⁷ Walter A. Maier III, “The Divine Presence within the Cloud,” *CTQ* 79 (2015): 101.

²¹⁸ Annemarie Ohler, *The Bible Looks at Fathers*, trans. Omar Kaste (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), xxv, thus speaks of “the God who is both near and inscrutable.” Geoffrey H. Parke-Taylor, *Yahweh: The Divine Name in the Bible* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1975), 62, likewise speaks of “the continuing presence of God among his people in his *freedom* and sovereignty” (my emphasis).

Lundbom examines the function of this *idem per idem* rhetorical formula throughout the OT, and especially here in Exod 3:14 and 33:19.²¹⁹ 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.²²⁰

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.²²¹ The formulation אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה, "I will be whom I will be" (3:14), echoes Yahweh's preceding promise אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ, "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.²²² G. Henton Davies captures this sense by a paraphrase: "I am what you will discover me to be."²²³ 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."²²⁴ 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

²¹⁹ Jack R. Lundbom, *Biblical Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism*, HBM 45 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 89–92.

²²⁰ Lundbom, *Biblical Rhetoric*, 96.

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."

²²³ G. Henton Davies, *Exodus*, TBC (London: SCM, 1967), 72, cited in Parke-Taylor, *Yahweh: The Divine Name*, 56.

²²⁴ den Hertog, "The Prophetic Dimension," 226.

saving attention to his people.”²²⁵ 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.”²²⁶ Thus, Yahweh’s strange “אֶהְיֶה” (“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.”²²⁷ 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.”²²⁸

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, *’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh* ... tying ‘grace-giving’ to Yahweh’s very being.”²²⁹ The *idem per idem* statement in 33:19 anticipates the self-proclamation of 34:6–7: “I will be gracious (חַנּוּן) to whom I will be gracious, and I will be merciful (רַחֵם) to whom I will be merciful” (33:19) corresponds to “Yahweh, Yahweh, a merciful (רַחֵם) and gracious (חַנּוּן) God” (34:6).

While the *idem per idem* expression in Exod 3:14 anticipates the imminent revelation of

²²⁵ Reinhard Feldmeier and Hermann Spieckermann, *God of the Living: A Biblical Theology*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 31.

²²⁶ Parke-Taylor, *Yahweh: The Divine Name*, 56.

²²⁷ Wout Jac. von Bekkum, “What’s in the Divine Name? Exodus 3 In Biblical and Rabbinic Tradition,” in *The Revelation of the Divine Name to Moses: Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity*, ed. George H. van Kooten, TBN 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 8.

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.”

²²⁹ Robert D. Miller, *Covenant and Grace in the Old Testament: Assyrian Propaganda and Israelite Faith*, PHSC 16 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2012), 101.

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-disclosure²³⁰—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.²³¹ “It depends entirely upon Yahweh himself as to who is the recipient of his grace.”²³²

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, וּבְיוֹם פְּקֹדֵי וּפְקֹדֹתַי עֲלֵיהֶם חֲטָאתָם).

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.”

²³² Moberly, *Mountain of God*, 78.

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.”²³³ When the moment of theophany arrives, true to his promise Yahweh descends (יָרַד) upon the mountain, presents himself (יָצַב), and passes by (עָבַר) before Moses’ face—yet all this he does “in the cloud” (בְּעֶנָן, 34:4–5), again “denoting the paradox of presence hidden from view.”²³⁴ 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’).²³⁵

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 (וְשָׂא עֲוֹן, 34:7a) and visiting iniquity in punishment (פָּקַד עֲוֹן...עַל, 34:7b). As Brueggemann observes, “God ... deal[s] with violators of covenant in two very different ways that cannot be logically or in practice

²³³ Mark S. Boda, *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology: Three Creedal Expressions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 34.

²³⁴ Mark S. Smith, *Exodus*, NCollBC (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 121, commenting on Exod 34:4–5.

²³⁵ R. W. L. Moberly, “How May We Speak of God? A Reconsideration of the Nature of Biblical Theology,” *TB* 53 (2002): 199.

harmonized. Moreover, the formula itself gives no hint of how to work out this contradiction.²³⁶ 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."²³⁷ 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 *mysterium divinum*.²³⁸

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" (רב חסד ואמת). He is not abounding in wrath.²³⁹ Yet both in showing mercy

²³⁶ 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.

²³⁷ Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 172.

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 *mysterium 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.

²³⁹ Paul R. Raabe, "The Two 'Faces' of Yahweh: Divine Wrath and Mercy in the Old Testament," in *And 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), 293, notes one key difference between Yahweh's mercy and wrath implied by the expression רב חסד ("abounding in lovingkindness") in Exod 34:7: "Nowhere in the Old Testament does it say that Yahweh 'abounds in wrath.'" See also 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 Johannson, FfSk 13 (Gothenburg: Församlingsförlaget, 2013), 83–94, where he traces the "asymmetrical relationship" in the Psalms between God's retributive justice against the wicked and his undeserved lovingkindness shown to the righteous.

(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).

²⁴¹ Thomas M. Raitt, “Why Does God Forgive?” *HBT* 13 (1991): 47 (author's emphasis).

²⁴² Moberly, *Mountain of God*, 86–87.

²⁴³ Brueggemann, “Book of Exodus,” 842.

²⁴⁴ John Kessler, *Old Testament Theology: Divine Call and Human Response* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 259–60n146 (my emphasis).

perhaps (אוּלַי) 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),²⁴⁵ that it refers to Yahweh "examining" later generations to see if they walk in the iniquity of their fathers and then taking appropriate action,²⁴⁶ or that it refers to children sharing the burden of punishment with their parents only as long as the parents live.²⁴⁷ Due consideration of the hiddenness theme in Exodus also resists *Religionsgeschichte* 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.

²⁴⁵ As happens, for example, with Achan and his family in Josh 7.

²⁴⁶ Josef Scharbert, "Das Verbum PQD in der Theologie des Alten Testaments," *BZ* 4 (1960): 209–26; repr. in *Um das Prinzip der Vergeltung in Religion und Recht des Alten Testaments*, ed. Klaus Koch (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 278–99.

²⁴⁷ Michael Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, FAT 2/8 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 198, 342–45.

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. Exod 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” (פקד על) 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" (לשנאי) 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 theodicying; 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 accented 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 Kürle, *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 (עבד) 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

⁴ William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB2 (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 37n16.

⁵ Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament: A Christian Survey*, EBS (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 104, 111–13; Jan P. Fokkelman, “Exodus,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987), 56; Kürle, *Appeal of Exodus*, 99; Mark S. Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus*, JSOTSup 239 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1997), 190–91; Dohmen, *Exodus*; R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34*, JSOTSup 22 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), 78–79; Thomas B. Dozeman, *Exodus*, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 44–47.

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)⁷ 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).⁸ 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

⁷ The עבד 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 (עבדה קשה, 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 עבד 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,¹⁰ or especially at ch. 15 with the victory song at the sea.¹¹ 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. 18,¹² with the arrival at Mt. Sinai in ch. 19,¹³ or with the utterance of the Decalogue in ch. 20.¹⁴ 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.

¹⁰ George W. Coats, “A Structural Transition in Exodus,” *VT* 22 (1972): 138, 142, judges that both the J and the P narratives introduce a new arc of narrative tension in Exod 1:1–14 which finds its resolution in ch. 12: the P narrative in 12:28, 51, and the J narrative in 12:29–36.

¹¹ The following treat Exod 15:1–21 as the end of part one of the Exodus narrative: Dozeman, *Exodus*; Georg Fischer, “Exodus 1–15—Eine Erzählung,” in *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction—Reception—Interpretation*, ed. Marc Vervenne, BETL 126 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996), 149–78; Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 37–38; David Robertson, *The Old Testament and the Literary Critic*, GBS (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 17; Helmut Utzschneider and Wolfgang Oswald, *Exodus 1–15*, IECOT (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2015), 17–34. Mark S. Smith, *Exodus*, NCollBC (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 11–12, views the whole poem in Exod 15:1–21 as “the book’s fulcrum . . . , the thematic midpoint between Exodus, the land of slavery, and Sinai, the mountain of freedom.” So also Robert Shreckhise, “‘I Will Sing Unto the Lord’: A Rhetorical-Narrative Analysis of the Poem in Exodus 15:1–21” (PhD diss., Concordia Seminary, 2006).

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.

¹³ Dohmen, *Exodus*, treats chs. 1–18 under the heading “Der Auszug aus Ägypten und der Weg zum Sinai,” and chs. 19–40 under “Die Sinaitheophanie.” Both John D. Currid, *A Study Commentary on Exodus*, 2 vols. (Carlisle, PA: Evangelical, 2000–2001) and Eugene E. Carpenter, *Exodus*, EvExCom, 2 vols. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016), like Dohmen, divide their two-volume commentary into chs. 1–18 and 19–40. Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Exodus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), treats 1–18 as a unit under the heading “God Saves Israel from Egyptian Bondage,” although he divides the remainder of the book into two parts: 19–24 (Covenant) and 25–40 (Tabernacle).

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.”¹⁵

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. 18.¹⁶ Here, Moses and Jethro repeatedly refer to Yahweh’s preceding works as “deliverance” (בצל, 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 (כל־התלאה אשר מצאתם בדרך), and [how] Yahweh had delivered them.” This emphasis on deliverance in ch. 18 may also account for the narrator’s deferral of the

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 (נצל) me from the sword of Pharaoh" (18:4).¹⁷

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."¹⁸ 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."¹⁹

Fourth, there is a chiasmic structure to the external threats encountered by Israel in chs. 14–

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. 18 literarily 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 (משפטים) 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

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 chiasmic 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” (יצא), “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 (יצא, 3:10–12; 12:17; etc.). This is followed by acts of protection and provision in the wilderness. In particular, having journeyed to the Rephidim, 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” (העם) 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 Rephidim, 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.²⁴ 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."²⁵

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.²⁶ 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* (הַיָּד הַגְּדוֹלָה) 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

²⁴ Kenneth Ngwa, "The Story of Exodus and Its Literary Kinships," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 131, judges that both the victory over Amalek in ch. 17 and Moses' appointing of judges in ch. 18 "are interpreted as *evidence of deliverance from Egypt* (18:1, 10)" (my emphasis).

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 (זְרוּעַ), hand (יָד), right hand (יְמִינִי), and finger (אֶצְבָּע), 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.²⁷

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 divide 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

²⁷ Dennis T. Olson, “Literary and Rhetorical Criticism,” in *Methods for Exodus*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman, MBI (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 45–46.

crushing slavery in Egypt. The remaining chapters state the response that God expects from Israel as the redeemed community.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 *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.”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 18:1–12.³⁰ In ch. 2, the daughters report to Jethro that “an Egyptian delivered (נצל) us out of the

²⁸ Johnstone, *Exodus*, 1:1. Also Kürle, *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.”

²⁹ Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 207–8.

³⁰ Bernard P. Robinson, “Acknowledging One’s Dependence: The Jethro Story of Exodus 18,” *NBf* 69 (1988): 139–42, discerns and describes an intentional literary relationship between the Jethro scenes in Exod 2 and

hand (מִיד) 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 (נצל) Israel out of the hand (מִיד) of the Egyptians” (18:8–10) and Aaron and the elders of Israel “eat bread”³¹ 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 (שִׂים) you as a chief (שָׂר) and a judge (שֹׁפֵט) over us?”³³ As the first narrative arc draws to a close, we see Moses sitting from morning until evening to judge (שֹׁפֵט) the people (18:13). Jethro suggests that Moses appoint (שִׂים) others as chiefs (שָׂרִים) over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, so that they can judge (שֹׁפֵט) 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 [רַעֲדָ]?” 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, JSOTSup 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 (שֹׁפֵט),’ only to take refuge with the priest of Midian, who later offers great help when Moses is judging (שֹׁפֵט) the Israelites in Exod 18:13–26.”

“between a man and his neighbor” (בין איש ובין רעהו) in 18:16.³⁵ Even Moses’ fearful realization that “surely the thing (הדבר) 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 (אש, cf. 19:18) in it by night, in the sight of (לעיני, cf. 19:11) the whole house of Israel (בית ישראל, 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” (עם ישראל), although the expression “the people of the sons of Israel” (עם 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 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.).

(נסע, 19:2) and the noun “journeys” (מסעים, 40:38) are the only occurrences of נסע and its derivatives in chs. 19–40. Theophanic fire (אש) and the expression “in the sight of” (לעיני) 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).³⁹ The verb יצא (“go out, bring out”) is central to the story, occasioning the LXX title for the book: Ἐξοδος. It summarizes the chief actions of both Moses and Yahweh in the first narrative arc of the book.⁴⁰ 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 (ראה ראיתי) the affliction of my people..., and I have also seen (וגם ראיתי) the oppression with which the Egyptians have been oppressing them” (3:7, 9; cf. 2:25).⁴¹ 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.⁴² 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

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 רעה 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* (רשע, 2:13). Moses' question to the guilty man indicts him for human mistreatment: "Why are you striking your neighbor (רעה)?"⁴³ The man's own retort indicts 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* (הרג) 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

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.

8.1.4. The Transitional Function of Exodus 15:22–18:27

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" (חֻקִּים, 15:25–26; 18:16, 20), "laws" (תּוֹרָה, 16:4, 28; 18:16, 20), "commandments" (מִצְוֹת, 15:26; 16:28), and "ordinances" (מִשְׁפָּטִים, 15:25) point ahead to the giving of the law at Sinai in Exod 19–40.⁴⁶ When

⁴⁶ 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 (דָּרַךְ) 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 grumbings, 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 34:5–10.⁴⁷ 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.”⁴⁸ 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

concur with Noth and others that the wilderness chapters do not present an independent theme within Exodus, and he argues that the thirsting and Amalekite episodes in ch. 17 “are primarily concerned with ... introducing the theological realities associated with the revelation of the law at Sinai” (8).

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.”

⁴⁸ Kürle, *Appeal of Exodus*, 35.

attention in these chapters, since God does not react to their complaints but “simply resolves the problem.”⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰

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.⁵¹ 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).⁵² 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

⁴⁹ Kürle, *Appeal of Exodus*, 70.

⁵⁰ John I. Lawlor, “The ‘At-Sinai Narrative’: Exodus 18–Numbers 10,” *BBR* 21 (2011): 23–42, from a wider perspective, notes ways in which Exod 18 initiates the Pentateuch’s long narration of Israel’s time at Sinai.

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.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴ 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-

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.”

⁵⁴ Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 95–96.

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 (משפט). 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 While these multiple intentions are

⁵⁵ Patrick, *Rendering of God*, 64, cites the rubric suggested by Francis Fergusson in *The Idea of a Theater* (New York: Doubleday, 1949) that the action of a character or a play can best be “denoted by an infinitive phrase.”

⁵⁶ Thomas B. Dozeman, *The Pentateuch: Introducing the Torah* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 11, makes the simple observation: “Two themes dominate the narratives of the ancestors [in Genesis]: the divine promises of many descendants and of a homeland (12:1–4). These two themes remain central to the plot of Exodus–Deuteronomy.” These two themes correspond with the first two divine motives mentioned here: fulfilling the land-promise to the fathers and obtaining for himself a (numerous) “people.”

⁵⁷ Syntactically, these statements of purpose involve various constructions, including $\text{ב} + \text{infinitive construct}$

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” (עֲנִי, 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

(or ל of purpose + verbal noun); clauses introduced by למען or בעבור; certain occurrences of ו with imperfects or cohortatives (see Waltke & O’Connor, §34.5.2b; Joüon & Muraoka, §116a, b; §168b); certain occurrences of vav-consecutive perfects (Arnold & Choi, §3.5.2.(b, c); GKC, §111i, l; Joüon & Muraoka, §119e); negative purpose clauses employing פן or לבלתי; sometimes the apodosis in temporal or conditional constructions introduced by אם or כי; certain uses of the expression בזאת (“by means of this”) when the antecedent of the demonstrative זאת is an action or a circumstance, e.g., Exod 17:7; בקש + infinitive construct (“seek to...”), e.g., Exod 4:24; substantive participles, when used as a self-description in close connection with the name Yahweh, thus identifying a core work/purpose of Yahweh within the narrative, e.g., Exod 6:7, “Yahweh your God, the *One-who-brings-you-out*,” cf. 15:26 and 31:13; certain statements of self-commitment (first person) or threat/promise (second or third person), ordinarily using the imperfect; and, sometimes, the final imperative(s) within an imperative sequence, which can suggest the culminating purpose of the preceding imperatives, e.g., Exod. 8:1 [Eng 8:5].

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).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).⁶⁰ From this

may enjoy a life of provision.

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.

⁶⁰ Larsson, *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,” *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.⁶¹ 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 (שָׁכַן) 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 (talionic 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*

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?"

judgment” (שפטים גדולים, 6:6; 7:4) and as “*acts of judgment* (שפטים) 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 (צדיק); I and my people are the guilty ones (הרשעים)” (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” (משפטים, 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 משפט, 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 רשע) (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.”⁶² 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*⁶³ which stands as the dominant goal driving the plot of Exodus and under which the other goals can be subsumed.⁶⁴ Eslinger identifies the manifestation of the divine name as the “fundamental purpose of all that occurs in the exodus story.”⁶⁵ 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

⁶² Kürle, *Appeal of Exodus*, 198.

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 *יָדַע*. 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.⁶⁶

Propp discusses the verb יָדַע (“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.”⁶⁷

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).⁶⁸

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

⁶⁶ Fokkelman, “Exodus,” 63–64.

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 Texts⁷⁰

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

⁷⁰ This section presents an independent summary but is also indebted to helpful readings of the narrative development of Yahweh's character within Exodus offered by: Pamela Barmash, "Through the Kaleidoscope of Literary Imagery in Exodus 15: Poetics and Historiography in Service to Religious Exuberance," *HS* 58 (2017): 145–72; Blackburn, *God Who Makes Himself Known*; Jerry R. Harmon, "Exodus 34:6–7: A Hermeneutical Key in the Open Theism Debate" (PhD diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005), 160–69; Kürle, *Appeal of Exodus*, 29–124; Brian R. McCarthy, "The Characterization of Yhwh, the God of Israel, in Exodus 1–15," in *God's Word for Our World: Volume 1: Biblical Studies in Honor of Simon John De Vries*, ed. J. Harold Ellens et al., JSOTSup 388 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 6–20; 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), 36–46. See also Saner, *'Too Much to Grasp': Exodus 3:13–15 and the Reality of God*, JTISup 11 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015). An outstanding summary of Yahweh's name-revelation trajectory in Exodus is presented by Stephen G. Dempster, "Exodus and Biblical Theology: On Moving into the Neighborhood with a New Name," *SBJT* 12 (2008): 4–23. I came across this resource only in the final editing of this project—too late to profit from its additional insights in the analysis which I offer here. I mention it here also as another example of the scholarly neglect and avoidance of the visiting phrase. While Dempster's article features 20:2–6 and 34:6–7 prominently, he does not mention the visiting phrase, nor does he acknowledge the punishment language more generally in 34:7.

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.

⁷² Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 324–25.

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

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*.⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵ 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:

אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה

I will be who I will be. (Exod 3:14)

כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְיֶה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם ... כֹּה תֹאמַר אֲלֵיבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה... שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם

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)

אֲנִי יְהוָה... אֲנִי יְהוָה

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)⁷⁶

יהוה איש מלחמה יהוה שמו

Yahweh is a man of war. Yahweh is his name. (15:3)⁷⁷

אנכי יהוה אלהיך.... כי אנכי יהוה אלהיך

I am Yahweh your God.... For I am Yahweh your God. (20:2, 5)

וידעו כי אני יהוה אלהיהם.... אני יהוה אלהיהם

And they will know that I am Yahweh their God.... I am Yahweh their God. (29:46)

ויקרא יהוה

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.”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

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).

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*: *Yahweh ’ish-milchamah*, *Yahweh shēmō*.

⁷⁸ Fretheim, *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.”

the OT.⁷⁹ 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” (כי אהיה עמך), 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?” (מה שמו, Exod 3:13), occasioning the first of our key summary name proclamations:

And God said, “I will be who I will be” (אהיה אשר אהיה). And he said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I Will Be’ (אהיה) 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

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.”⁸⁰ 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.”⁸¹ 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.⁸²

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

⁸⁰ Larsson, *Bound for Freedom*, 32.

⁸¹ Dale Patrick, *The Rhetoric of Revelation in the Hebrew Bible*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999), 27.

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

⁸³ Humphreys, *Character of God in the Book of Genesis*, 21.

⁸⁴ Christopher R. Seitz, "The Call of Moses and the 'Revelation' of the Divine Name: Source-Critical Logic and Its Legacy," in *Theological Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs*, ed. Christopher Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 153.

⁸⁵ G. Henton Davies, *Exodus*, TBC (London: SCM, 1967), 72.

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.⁸⁷ 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.⁸⁸ 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.”⁸⁹ 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.⁹⁰ 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” (לעולם) and “from generation to generation” (לדור דור, 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

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)⁹¹ 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).

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 (אל שדי), but by my name Yahweh I did not make myself known (Niphal of ידע) 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 (ידע) 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” (אהיה, 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),⁹² a repetition which gives 6:2–8 a “sublime and majestic tone.”⁹³ 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

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)

⁹³ Nehama Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot: In the Context of Ancient and Modern Jewish Bible Commentary*, trans. Aryeh Newnan (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1976), 117; cited in Jonathan Magonet, “The Rhetoric of God: Exodus 6:2–8,” *JSOT* 27 (1983): 60.

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).⁹⁴

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 (מעבדים, 6:5) and pledges to deliver Israel from their servitude (מעבדהם, 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 chiasmic structure within 6:2–8 and emphasizes the familial dimensions of redemption in the

⁹⁴ 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.

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.”⁹⁵ 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 covenant⁹⁶ (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 יָדַע) by the name Yahweh” to the patriarchs (6:3) create the narrative vacuum which occasions such self-disclosure and recognition.⁹⁷ 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

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 יָדַע. 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

⁹⁸ Kürle, *Appeal of Exodus*, 68.

⁹⁹ Childs, *Exodus*, 115.

¹⁰⁰ Patrick, *Rhetoric of Revelation*, 31.

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.¹⁰¹ 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” (גאֹל) and “covenant” (בְּרִית), 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” (בְּחַזֶּק יָד or בְּיַד חֲזָקָה, 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.¹⁰² 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])¹⁰³

that you may know that I am *Yahweh* in the midst of the land (8:18 [Eng 8:22])¹⁰⁴

to show you my power (כֹּחַ) 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 (אֵרֶץ) (9:14)

that you may know that the land/earth (אֵרֶץ) 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)¹⁰⁵

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

¹⁰² 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."

¹⁰³ 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.

¹⁰⁴ 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..."

¹⁰⁵ 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, יה, יהוה (vv. 1–2)—and then introduces the

¹⁰⁶ Kürle, *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, Kürle 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."

¹⁰⁹ This observation is made by David Noel Freedman, *Pottery, Poetry, and Prophecy: Studies in Early Hebrew Poetry* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980), 146.

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.”

¹¹³ Barmash, “Through the Kaleidoscope,” 158–59.

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 unrivalled 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” (לִטְמִים) of Egypt’s “magicians” (הַרְטָמִים), 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. Kuemmerlin-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*.¹¹⁹ 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),¹²⁰ 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).¹²¹ 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 Kürle, *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 (יִדַע) 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.¹²² 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”: והיה יהוה לי לאלהים), 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.

¹²⁴ John Currid, “Why Did God Harden Pharaoh’s Heart?” *BRev* 9.6 (1993): 47.

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.¹²⁵ 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־פְּנֵי, 20:3) reflects the narrative situation in which Yahweh has literally brought Israel out from Egypt and "to himself" (אֵלַי, 19:4; cf. 3:12).¹²⁶ It also anticipates the intention of Yahweh to dwell in Israel's midst, intimated

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.¹²⁷ Therefore, Yahweh forbids the sons of Israel to “bow down to them” (הורה) 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).¹²⁸

The motive clauses in 20:5–6 reinforce the prohibition of others 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” (פָּקַד) 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 רַסָּה 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” (שֹׂנְאֵי, 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: אֹיִב, “enemy” in 15:6, 9; and קָם, “one who rises up (against)” in 15:7. These terms, and especially אֹיִב, are commonly paralleled with שֹׂנְאֵי; 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*.¹³⁰ 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*” (החקים והתורות, 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 (שקד) 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 (שקד). 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 Exodus 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 1–18.¹³³ 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.”

¹³³ This generations theme is discussed at length in §7.1.2 above.

23, 29).

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” (אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ, 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” (עַל-פְּנֵי, 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 (ושכנתי בתוך בני ישראל), and I will be their God. And they will know that I am Yahweh their God (אני יהוה אלהיהם) who brought them out of the land of Egypt in order that I might dwell in their midst (לשכני בתוכם). 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

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 (קדש) 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* (קדש). 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)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 וחנון ארך אפים ורב־חסד ואמת: נצר חסד לאלפים נשא עון ופשע וחטאה ונקה לא ינקה פקד עון אבות על־בנים ועל־בני בנים על־שלישים 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” (אעלה בקרבך) he would destroy them, conceptually mirroring the double repetition in 29:45–46 of his intention to “dwell in their midst” (לשכני בתוכם).

¹⁴⁰ For a lengthy explanation and defense of this translation, see above §4.3.

illustration of character?”¹⁴¹ 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.¹⁴² 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,¹⁴³ 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.’”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Cited in M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 9th ed. (Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009), 265.

¹⁴² On the metaphorical dynamics of the expression “stiff-necked” (קשה-עֶרְוֹת), 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 הִנֵּה (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

Form of a Commentary (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 218.

conflict of the golden calf narrative. In 20:2, God had proclaimed: “I am Yahweh *your God* (אלהיך) 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* (אלהיך), 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* (אלהיך), 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* (אלהיך), O Israel” (32:4, 8). The plural with possessive pronoun—“your gods (אלהיך)” —precisely echoes Yahweh’s self-description in 20:2: “I am Yahweh *your God* (אלהיך).”¹⁴⁵ The plural here also directly recalls Yahweh’s prohibition in 20:3: “You shall not have other gods (אלהים אחרים).”

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 (לפנינו, 32:1),” and Aaron, having fashioned the calf idol, builds an altar (apparently) to Yahweh “before it” (לפניו, 32:5)—violating Yahweh’s demand to have no other gods “before me” (על-פני,

¹⁴⁵ The plural verbs (ילכו) “[they] will go” in 32:1, and העלוך “[they] brought you up” in 32:4, 8) along with the plural pronouns (“*These* (אלה) 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, אנכי יהוה אלהיך (“I am Yahweh your God”), and 32:4, אלה אלהיך ישראל (“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.

20:3). In 20:4 Yahweh commanded, “You shall not *make for yourselves* (עשה לך) an idol.” Now the people demand of Aaron, “Arise and *make for us* (עשה לנו) gods” (32:1), and Yahweh relates to Moses, “They have *made for themselves* (עשו להם) a calf idol” (32:8).¹⁴⁶ Yahweh adds, “And they have *bowed down to it* (וישתחו לו)” (32:8), recalling the prohibition, “You shall not *bow down to them* (תשתחוה להם)” (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 32:9.¹⁴⁷ 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” (פקד על) from 20:5 reappears at the end of ch. 32: “In the day of my visiting (פקדי), I will visit-in-punishment against them (על) their sin” (32:34). In 20:6, Yahweh is a God who acts in lovingkindness to *thousands* (אלפים), to those who those who love him and “*keep my commandments* (מצותי).” But after the calf, Yahweh declares, “They have quickly turned aside from the way which *I commanded them* (צויתים), 32:8),¹⁴⁸ and through Moses he dispatches the Levites with swords so that about “three *thousand men* (אלפי איש)” 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

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” (ויעשו להם אלהי 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 תעשו לכם).

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”).

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*,¹⁴⁹ 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 (שכם) in the morning and builds (בנה) an altar (מזבה); they offer up (עלה) whole burnt offerings (עלוֹת) and sacrifice (זבה)¹⁵⁰ peace offerings (שלמים); and

¹⁴⁹ The prepositional phrase אִתִּי (Exod 20:23a) is translated here in its sense of “with me, beside me,” that is, “in my presence,” analogous to the meaning of אִתּוֹ in the syntax of Isa 30:8, and influenced by the sense of עִלְיָנִי (“in my presence”) in Exod 20:3.

¹⁵⁰ The verb זָבַח 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 (זָבַח) sacrifices, peace offerings to Yahweh,” the golden calf narrative says, “they offered up whole burnt offerings and brought near (Hiphil of נָגַשׁ) peace offerings” (32:6). While Exod 24 did not use נָגַשׁ in connection with the peace offerings, נָגַשׁ 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 (נָגַשׁ); Aaron, the elders, and the people are forbidden from drawing near (לֹא נָגַשׁ, 24:2). Thus, the use of נָגַשׁ in describing Aaron and/or the people’s illicit worship in 32:6 (LXX has singular form of נָגַשׁ, 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 (אכל) and drink (שתה) 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. 24.¹⁵¹

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.¹⁵² In chs. 28–30, God gives instructions regarding the ordination and *central role of Aaron*,¹⁵³ the high priest, in the holy

him draw near (נגש) to them” (24:14). When Aaron and the people next re-enter the narrative, this is precisely what happens: the people gather together against Aaron in official complaint, with a public demand. Very soon, in contrast to Moses’ drawing near (נגש) to Yahweh, the people are “bringing near” (נגש) their sacrifices before the calf idol. In ch. 24, the people “sacrificed sacrifices, peace offerings to Yahweh” (24:5). Ch. 32 simply says they “brought near peace offerings” (32:6), significantly omitting “to Yahweh.”

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* (להגג 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* (הג 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 לו)” (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* (ליהוה) your God” (20:10). In Exod 31:15 God declares it to be “a Sabbath of solemn rest, something holy *to Yahweh*” (ליהוה). With this description of the holy Sabbath “to Yahweh” immediately preceding, Aaron’s proclamation in 32:5, “A feast *to Yahweh* (ליהוה) *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.¹⁵⁴ 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).¹⁵⁵

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.¹⁵⁶ 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

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).¹⁶⁰ 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).¹⁶¹ 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*.¹⁶² Here the trajectory of Yahweh’s self-revelation in Exodus comes to its pinnacle:

יהוה יהוה אל רחום וחנון ארך אפים ורב־חסד ואמת: נצר חסד לאלפים נשא עון ופשע וחטאה
ונקה לא ינקה פקד עון אבות על־בנים ועל־בני בנים על־שלישים ועל־רבעים:

Yahweh, Yahweh, a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful lovingkindness, preserving lovingkindness for the thousands, forgiving

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-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)

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),¹⁶³ 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* (ברא, עשה) 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 (פלא, 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.*

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”¹⁶⁴ in something else: Yahweh is the God who preserves and forgives stiff-necked Israel.

Fretheim notes the language of creation (עֲשֵׂה and בְּרָא) in 34:10 and describes the *newness* of this covenant:

This is a *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. *This is an entirely new reality for Israel, indeed for the world.*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 *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 רַחֲמֵי (‘‘lovingkindness’’). Third, he bears with their grumbling in the wilderness and supplies their needs (Exod 16–17).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

¹⁶⁴ The narrative dynamic here calls to mind the opening of an historic collect from the *Book of Common Prayer*: ‘‘O God, who declarest thy almighty power most chiefly in shewing mercy and pity. . . .’’

¹⁶⁵ Fretheim, *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.

¹⁶⁶ George W. Coats, *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.¹⁶⁷ Fourth, it might be countered that Yahweh’s self-revelation as “a merciful and *gracious* (חַנוּן) God” in 34:6 simply repeats Yahweh’s blunt claim in 22:26: “For I am compassionate (חַנוּן).” 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.¹⁶⁸ 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 חַנוּן 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 (נשא or סלח) anyone.¹⁶⁹ Abraham bargained that God might forgive (נשא) 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 (נשא) him (Exod 10:16–17). Yet Pharaoh’s humility and the reprieve from the plagues were both short-lived, and there was no forgiveness.¹⁷⁰ 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 (נשא) their rebellion (פשיע)* (Exod 23:20–21). Only with the full narrative realization of Israel’s towering need for forgiveness because of their “great sin” (הטאה גדולה, Exod 32:21, 30–31) does Yahweh for the first time in Genesis–Exodus “forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin” (נשא עון ופשע) (Exod 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 נשא 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 (נשא) 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.”¹⁷¹

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.¹⁷² 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 (לכהנה עולם) throughout their generations (לדרתם)” (40:15b).¹⁷³ 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 היה. 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 (לָקַח 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” (לָקַח 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 לָקַח 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 (אל רחום והנון) “a compassionate and gracious God”) mirrors God’s declaration accompanying his promise of theophany in 33:19b: “I will be gracious (הנון) to whom I will be gracious, and I will be merciful (רחום) 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 אהיה אשר אהיה (“I will be who I will be”) of the first name-speech in Exod 3:14.¹⁷⁶ 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.¹⁷⁷

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 devastates 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).¹⁷⁸ And it is especially his quality of lovingkindness (חסד) that receives amplification and extension after the golden calf. Only here

¹⁷⁶ Dozeman, *Exodus*, 730.

¹⁷⁷ Leslie Brisman, “On the Divine Presence in Exodus,” in *Exodus*, ed. Harold Bloom, MCI (New York: Chelsea House, 1987), 110.

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 (יחרה אפך) against your people?” (32:11) and petitioned, “Turn from your burning anger (חרון אפך)” (32:12).

does God reveal how abundant his lovingkindness is to Israel (רַב חַסֵּד). It is abundant in this sense: He himself carefully preserves this lovingkindness (נִצַּר חַסֵּד) 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* (נִשָּׂא עוֹן וּפְשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה). 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.”¹⁷⁹ 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 Fokkelman, *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 *וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנְקָה* ("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.¹⁸⁰ 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.¹⁸¹ 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

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 forsaking 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 beneficent 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 lovingkindness 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: נָשָׂא עוֹן (“forgiving/lifting/removing iniquity”) and פָּקַד עוֹן (“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 עוֹן אֲבוֹת עַל-בְּנֵיהֶם, “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 whore 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

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*.³ 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,

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.

⁴ This description of Kennedy's approach is given by Patricia K. Tull, “Rhetorical Criticism and Intertextuality,” in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and their Application*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R Haynes, rev. and enl. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 161 (my emphasis), summarizing George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 4.

⁵ See §6.2.2 above.

⁶ Dale Patrick, *The Rhetoric of Revelation in the Hebrew Bible*, OBT (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1999), 72–73.

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 inscription 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.⁷ Throughout the story, the sons of Israel are a single, corporate character, acting and speaking as one.⁸ 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

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.⁹ 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.

⁹ See Patrick, *Rhetoric of Revelation*, 51–87.

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

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 *בוא* last heard in Yahweh’s statement in 19:9.

¹¹ Belden C. Lane, *The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 37–39, describes the psychological power of desert and mountain terrains, and especially of a mountain jutting up from the desert: “The liminality of desert and mountain . . . redefines every boundary giving shape to one’s life.”

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.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.”¹⁴

¹³ Dale Patrick, *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 בּוֹא in Exod 19–20. Yahweh has brought (Hiphil of בּוֹא) the people to himself (19:4), and now he comes (בּוֹא) 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.

¹⁴ Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and the Ancient Near East*, Studies

After three day's 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).¹⁵ 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”¹⁶—do not exchange the blessed freedom of Yahweh and his presence for a new slavery of idolatry.

אנכי יהוה אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים (20:2)

לא יהיה־לך אלהים אחרים על־פני (20:3)

לא תעשה־לך פסל וכל־תמונה אשר בשמים ממעל ואשר בארץ מתחת ואשר במים מתחת לארץ (20:4)

לא־תשתחוה להם ולא תעבדם (20:5a)

כי אנכי יהוה אלהיך אל קנא (20:5b)

פקד עון אבת על־בנים על־שלשים ועל־רבעים לשנא (20:5c)

ועשה חסד לאלפים לאהבי ולשמרי מצותי (20:6)

(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) You shall not have other gods in my presence.

(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) You shall not bow down to them or become enslaved to them.

(20:5b) For I am Yahweh, your God, a jealous God

(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) but who, with respect to those who love me and keep my commandments, acts in lovingkindness to thousands (of descendants).¹⁷

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.”¹⁸ 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.”

יְהוָה, fuller in both vowels and consonants than the alternative יְהִי. Of the 19 Exodus occurrences of the expression “I am Yahweh,” all use יְהִי 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.

²⁰ For example, Daniel I. Block, “Reading the Decalogue Right to Left: The Ten Principles of Covenant Relationship in the Hebrew Bible,” in *How I Love Your Torah, O LORD!* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 30.

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 whore 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 whore after their gods and entice your sons to whore 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.”²³ 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.²⁴

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

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.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.

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

²⁶ Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 76–77, commenting on Deut 5:9–10, a verbatim parallel to Exod 20:5–6.

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* (כי) “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 אֵל קַנָּא ("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—אֵל קַנָּא, "a jealous God"—now governs the remainder of the third part of the speech, as the jealous God is further announced under two

²⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 213–28.

²⁸ Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, JPSTC (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 66, commenting on Deut 5:9–10, a verbatim parallel to Exod 20:5–6.

participle clauses.²⁹ 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."³⁰ 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.³¹ 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 יֹנְאֵי (“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 concern³² 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 (צוה)

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 (מצוות) 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—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, *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” (על-פני, 20:3). The threat of divine “visitation-in-punishment” (פקד על) 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 Outcome³⁵ 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 *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:

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.³⁶

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.³⁷

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) *intends to elicit*, and others to describe the audience response *which actually results* from the the force of the rhetoric. Some authors use the term in both senses: compare, for example, Patrick, *Rhetoric of Revelation*, 55 and 196. Because of this ambiguity, it seems more useful to simply speak in terms of *rhetorical aim* (or *intention*) on the one hand, and the *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.

³⁶ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, I 1, 1355b, 10–16, cited in Forbes I. Hill, “The ‘Traditional’ Perspective,” in *Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives in Action*, ed. Jim A. Kuypers, LSPC (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 49.

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).³⁸ They request that Moses speak to them, rather than Yahweh, lest they die (20:19).³⁹ 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.

instructions).⁴⁰

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

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.⁴¹ 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 diametric 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,⁴² 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.

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 עָדַת) to me your ways, that I may know (עָדַת) you” (33:13), and thereafter, “Show (Hiphil of הִרְאֵה) 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.⁴³ 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*

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).⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵

This paradox is reflected in the usage of “grace/favor” terminology (the Hebrew root חָנַן) 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 (חָנַן, 33:19; חָנּוּן, 34:6). Yet it is also true that Yahweh does these things in response to the intercession of Moses, who has found “favor” (חֵן) 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.⁴⁶ Clearly the dominant

⁴⁴ In Exod 24, Yahweh makes his covenant with all the people, using second person plural language (עִמָּכֶם, with you all, 24:8). In contrast, the renewal of the covenant in Exod 34 is a “wonder” which he performs “with you [Moses]” (עִמָּךְ, 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” (כָּרַחְתִּי אִתְּךָ בְרִית וְאִת־יִשְׂרָאֵל).

⁴⁵ Thomas W. Mann, *The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 110–11.

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” (קִשָּׁה עֵרֶף), a designation which likens the people to Pharaoh himself in his “hardness” (קִשָּׁה, 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’” (בָּרַע, “set on evil” [ESV], “in the grip of evil” [Houtman]).⁴⁷

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.”⁴⁸ 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.

⁴⁷ Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, trans. Sierd Woudstra, HCOT, 4 vols. (Leuven: Peeters, 1993–2002), 3:609, 661.

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 of נָצַל) echoes the Piel of נָצַל 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”⁴⁹ 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.

⁵⁰ Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster, 1974), 567.

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 (פני) 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 (ראה) that this nation is your people!*” (33:13), the imperative ראה directly recalls Yahweh’s earlier statement, “I have seen (ראה) 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.”⁵¹ 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 (אחי), 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).⁵² 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 forfeiture of their many-generations blessings intended by Yahweh.

⁵¹ Moberly, *Mountain of God*, 85.

⁵² The similarities and contrasts between the scene of Yahweh “passing through” (עבר) in Exod 12 and his “passing by” (עבר) 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”⁵³ (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):

יהוה יהוה
אל רחום וחנון
ארך אפים ורב־חסד ואמת

נצר חסד לאלפים
נשא עון ופשע והטאה
ונקה לא ינקה
פקד עון אבות על־בנים ועל־בני בנים
על־שלישים ועל־רבעים

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 אל 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 נצר חסד לאלפים and נשא עון ופשע והטאה

⁵³ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 216.

(“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 (נשא 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
 אל רחום וחנון
 ארך אפים ורב־חסד ואמת
 נצר חסד לאלפים
 נשא עון ופשע וחטאה
 ונקה לא ינקה
 פקד עון אבות
 על־בנים ועל־בני בנים על־שלשים 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 chiasmic 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 *יִנְקָה לֹא ויִנְקָה* (“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 *אל חנון* or *אל רחום* but *אל רחום וחנון*. The redundant descriptions abound. Most notable in this regard is the triple description of sin *עון ופשע והטאה*, which serves to magnify the action of the preceding verb: “forgiving” (*נשא*). 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.

⁵⁸ Brueggemann, “Book of Exodus,” 946.

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 *הַבְּנוּן* echoes the vowels of the word it seconds: *רַחֲמוּם*. So also with the assonance in *הַסֵּד וְאַמָּת*. The extension of the preserving lovingkindness phrase by a second participle clause pairs *נֹצֵר* with *נֹשֵׂא*. The amplification of *לֹא יִנְקָה* uses the precisely resonant infinitive absolute *יִנְקָה*. 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 *עַל* leading into each element and the plural *יָם־* ending on each element. This listing also includes a triple repetition of “sons” and the morphologically similar pairing *רַבְעִים* and *שִׁלְשִׁים*.

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 *אָרַךְ אַפִּים*, which woodenly means “*long of nose/anger*.” In terms of his faithful lovingkindness, Yahweh is *רַב*, the common adjective meaning “*much, many*.” When predicated of a subject and bound to another noun (as a genitive of specification), *רַב* 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 (נצר). 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.⁵⁹ While third person language might seem more interpersonally distancing than first person speech, and often is,⁶⁰ 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 יהוה יהוה comes as, itself, a *theophany*. Yahweh himself *is present in and with this proclaimed name*,⁶¹ 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 רחום and חנון are intensely personal in meaning and connotation. The adjective רחום (“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 חנון (“gracious”) resonates with the personal favor, benevolence, and approbation Yahweh grants to Moses in the surrounding context (חן, 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—

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 (חן) 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 (חן) 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.”

⁶⁵ Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics*, 186.

פִּשַׁע—with its connotation of rebellion and fracturing of trust.⁶⁶ 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 redeploys 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

⁶⁶ Eugene Carpenter, “פִּשַׁע,” *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 אֲנִי יהוה (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 אֵל קָנָא (“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: אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנוּן (“a compassionate and gracious God”).⁶⁷ 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 (חַסֵּד) precedes any reference to his visiting iniquity in punishment (פָּקֵד עַל). 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 חַסֵּד twice rather than once. Fifth, the language from 20:6 of Yahweh “acting in lovingkindness” (עָשָׂה חַסֵּד) now becomes Yahweh “preserving lovingkindness” (נִצַּר חַסֵּד), 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.⁶⁸

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 (לְשֹׂנְאֵי, to those who hate me) and *with respect to whom* Yahweh will act in lovingkindness (לְאַהֲבָי וְלִשְׁמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתַי, “to those who love me and keep my commandments”). Israel has acted in rebellion and opposition to Yahweh; they have not

⁶⁷ The connection and contrast between the speeches on this point is further highlighted by the phonetic proximity of אֵל חַנוּן (“a gracious God,” 34:6) and אֵל קָנָא (“a jealous God,” 20:5), as previously discussed.

⁶⁸ For a defense of this reading, see the lexical-semantic analysis of the expression נִצַּר חַסֵּד 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.”⁶⁹ The corresponding phrase לשנאי (“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 לשנאי, 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 (נשא 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

⁶⁹ John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 85–86.

new depth and outworking of Yahweh’s חסד. Along with the verb נשא (“forgiving”)⁷⁰, 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 ונקה לא ינקה (“yet he will certainly not neglect punishment”)—breaking the sequence of participles⁷¹ and expressing, by its natural syntax, emphasis—comes as a very sharp turn.⁷² 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 (נשא) clause builds upon the

⁷⁰ For a defense of the meaning “forgiving” for נשא 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 ונקה לא ינקה, both because the infinitive breaks the sequence of participles and because of its initial *vav*, 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 ונקה would lure the hearer into an initial assumption that the mercy language is continuing, by the phonetic continuity from נשא to נצר and now to ונקה—all are two-syllable verbal forms of I-*nun* roots, with a *seve* as the final vowel. (As ancillary testimony to this hearing of the word ונקה, 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 (ונקה) 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 ונקה 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 (נשא) is brought into direct rhetorical association with the visiting-in-punishment participle (פקד), their two clauses standing astraddle the “sharp turn” phrase ונקה לא ינקה.

נשא עון ופשע וחטאה
ונקה לא ינקה
פקד עון אבות

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

⁷³ A number of interpreters seek to re-explain the meaning of נשא, 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 נשא], 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 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,”⁷⁴ 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,”⁷⁵ 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* (כי) *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" (נשא 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 *exhorts 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 עון) 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” (נשא 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.”⁷⁸ 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

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.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),

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*⁸⁰—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

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:

⁸¹ Jer 3:21–25; 14:19–22; Dan 9:16–19; Neh 1:6; 9:2; Ezra 9:6–9; cf. Lev 26:40–45; Deut 4:15–31; 32:19–21; Amos 2:4–11.

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—for⁸² 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

⁸² Here I translate יָ 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 יָ is also possible here (cf. NIV). The logic of explanatory יָ 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.⁸⁵ 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).”⁸⁶ 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.⁸⁷

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*

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.”⁸⁸

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 נָחַל can be employed in a general sense of “get” or “possess,” it most often carries the sense of permanent, transgenerational possession.⁸⁹ 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

⁸⁸ Brueggemann, “Book of Exodus,” 948.

⁸⁹ Christopher J. H. Wright, “נָחַל,” *NIDOTTE* 3:77, in discussing a family’s allotted land as נַחֲלָה, 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.⁹⁰ 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 (בְּרָצוֹן) of heart” (35:5, 21) and that offerings

⁹⁰ Wright, *NIDOTTE* 3:79–80.

of precious metals and other materials were brought by men and women whose hearts “carried” them (אָנַח) and whose spirits “inclined” them (כַּוְּנָה) 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.”⁹¹ 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 of 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*,⁹² stand as their own model and appropriate response to Yahweh’s rhetoric.⁹³ 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).

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 *X על-פקד* denotes “visiting-in-punishment against X. In contexts dealing with iniquity, the collocation *על פקד* 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 *על פקד* 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 פקד על 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 *נשא עון* and *פקד 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

34:9, 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, 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.

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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