

NEW STUDIES IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY 28

**The God who makes  
himself known**

Titles in this series:

- 1 *Possessed by God*, David Peterson
- 2 *God's Unfaithful Wife*, Raymond C. Ortlund Jr.
- 3 *Jesus and the Logic of History*, Paul W. Barnett
- 4 *Hear, My Son*, Daniel J. Estes
- 5 *Original Sin*, Henri Blocher
- 6 *Now Choose Life*, J. Gary Millar
- 7 *Neither Poverty Nor Riches*, Craig L. Blomberg
- 8 *Slave of Christ*, Murray J. Harris
- 9 *Christ, Our Righteousness*, Mark A. Seifrid
- 10 *Five Festal Garments*, Barry G. Webb
- 11 *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien
- 12 *Now My Eyes Have Seen You*, Robert S. Fyall
- 13 *Thanksgiving*, David W. Pao
- 14 *From Every People and Nation*, J. Daniel Hays
- 15 *Dominion and Dynasty*, Stephen G. Dempster
- 16 *Hearing God's Words*, Peter Adam
- 17 *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, G. K. Beale
- 18 *The Cross from a Distance*, Peter G. Bolt
- 19 *Contagious Holiness*, Craig L. Blomberg
- 20 *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, Timothy S. Laniak
- 21 *A Clear and Present Word*, Mark D. Thompson
- 22 *Adopted into God's Family*, Trevor J. Burke
- 23 *Sealed with an Oath*, Paul R. Williamson
- 24 *Father, Son and Spirit*, Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain
- 25 *God the Peacemaker*, Graham A. Cole
- 26 *A Gracious and Compassionate God*, Daniel C. Timmer
- 27 *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, Alan J. Thompson
- 28 *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, W. Ross Blackburn

An index of Scripture references for all the volumes may be found at <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/resources/nsbt>.

NEW STUDIES IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY 28

*Series editor: D. A. Carson*

# **The God who makes himself known**

THE MISSIONARY HEART OF  
THE BOOK OF EXODUS

*W. Ross Blackburn*



APOLLOS

---

INTERVARSITY PRESS  
DOWNERS GROVE, ILLINOIS 60515

APOLLOS  
An imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, England  
Norton Street  
Nottingham NG7 3HR, England  
Website: [www.ivpbooks.com](http://www.ivpbooks.com)  
Email: [ivp@ivpbooks.com](mailto:ivp@ivpbooks.com)

InterVarsity Press, USA  
P.O. Box 1400  
Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426, USA  
Website: [www.ivpress.com](http://www.ivpress.com)  
Email: [email@ivpress.com](mailto:email@ivpress.com)

© W. Ross Blackburn 2012

W. Ross Blackburn has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Author of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher or the Copyright Licensing Agency.

InterVarsity Press®, USA, is the book-publishing division of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA® <[www.intervarsity.org](http://www.intervarsity.org)> and a member movement of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students.

Inter-Varsity Press, England, is closely linked with the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship, a student movement connecting Christian Unions throughout Great Britain, and a member movement of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. Website: [www.uccf.org.uk](http://www.uccf.org.uk)

Unless stated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, published by HarperCollins Publishers © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

First published 2012

Set in Monotype Times New Roman  
Typeset in Great Britain by Servis Filmsetting Ltd, Stockport, Cheshire  
Printed in the United States of America ☺

USA ISBN 978-0-8308-2629-2 (print)  
USA ISBN 978-0-8308-8419-3 (digital)  
UK ISBN 978-1-84474-573-9

 As a member of the Green Press Initiative, InterVarsity Press is committed to protecting the environment and to the responsible use of natural resources. To learn more, visit [greenpressinitiative.org](http://greenpressinitiative.org).

---

#### British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

---

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Blackburn, W. Ross.  
The God who makes himself known : the missionary heart of the book of Exodus / W. Ross Blackburn.  
p. cm.—(New studies in biblical theology ; 28)  
Includes bibliographical references (p. ) and indexes.  
ISBN 978-0-8308-2629-2 (paper; usa : alk. paper)—ISBN 978-1-84474-573-9 (paper; uk : alk. paper) 1. Bible. O.T. Exodus—Criticism, interpretation, etc. 2. Missions—Biblical teaching. 3. God (Christianity)—Knowableness—Biblical teaching. I. Title.  
BS1245.52.B53 2012  
222'.1206—dc23

2012007758

---

P	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2
Y	27	26	25	24	23	22	21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14			

For Lauren



# Contents

Series preface	9
Author's preface	11
Abbreviations	13
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>15</b>
Concerning biblical mission	15
Purpose and approach	18
<b>2 The name of the redeemer (Exod. 1:1 – 15:21)</b>	<b>25</b>
The problem: Exodus 6:3 and the name of the Lord	26
That the name be known (Exod. 1:7)	28
The name unknown (Exod. 1:8 – 2:25)	31
The name made known (Exod. 3 – 14)	34
Israel's continued acknowledgment: ceremonies of deliverance	50
The name known (Exod. 15)	53
Conclusion: concerning Exodus 6:3	56
<b>3 Training in the wilderness (Exod. 15:22 – 18:27)</b>	<b>63</b>
The problem: the significance of the wilderness	64
Exegesis of the wilderness section	65
Conclusion: the theological function of the wilderness section	78
<b>4 The law and the mission of God (Exod. 19 – 24)</b>	<b>83</b>
The problem: law, gospel and the generosity of God	84
You shall be holy	86
The law and the goodness of God	103
Conclusion: law and gospel in Exodus	112

## THE GOD WHO MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN

<b>5 The tabernacle instructions (Exod. 25 – 31)</b>	121
Problems with tabernacle interpretation	122
The theology of the tabernacle	126
<b>6 The golden calf (Exod. 32 – 34)</b>	153
The theological problem of Exodus 34:6–7	154
Exodus 20:2–6	162
From (near) ruin to restoration: the theology of Exodus 32 – 34	168
Conclusion: a proposal for Exodus 34:6–7	189
<b>7 The tabernacle construction (Exod. 35 – 40)</b>	197
The problem: tabernacle theology and canonical order	198
The priority of presence in the Lord's mission	199
The repentance of Israel	201
Conclusion: the glory of God among the nations	204
<b>8 Conclusion</b>	209
Bibliography	215
Index of authors	228
Index of Scripture references	231

# Series preface

*New Studies in Biblical Theology* is a series of monographs that address key issues in the discipline of biblical theology. Contributions to the series focus on one or more of three areas: 1. the nature and status of biblical theology, including its relations with other disciplines (e.g. historical theology, exegesis, systematic theology, historical criticism, narrative theology); 2. the articulation and exposition of the structure of thought of a particular biblical writer or corpus; and 3. the delineation of a biblical theme across all or part of the biblical corpora.

Above all, these monographs are creative attempts to help thinking Christians understand their Bibles better. The series aims simultaneously to instruct and to edify, to interact with the current literature, and to point the way ahead. In God's universe, mind and heart should not be divorced: in this series we will try not to separate what God has joined together. While the notes interact with the best of scholarly literature, the text is uncluttered with untransliterated Greek and Hebrew, and tries to avoid too much technical jargon. The volumes are written within the framework of confessional evangelicalism, but there is always an attempt at thoughtful engagement with the sweep of the relevant literature.

*The God Who Makes Himself Known* is a thought-provoking book. Initially, a subtitle such as 'The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus' is bound to raise a few eyebrows: has Dr Blackburn tumbled into hopeless anachronism? Yet while remaining sceptical about pieces of the argument here and there, I found the work strangely compelling, drawing me forward to the conclusion that there is much more to the thesis than one might expect. Careful reading of this volume demands frequent pauses for reflection on the inner-canonical connections that Dr Blackburn unpacks with stimulating verve. I am quite certain that most who work their way through this volume will never be able to read

THE GOD WHO MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN

Exodus in the same way they did before doing so – and that is high praise.

*D. A. Carson*  
*Trinity Evangelical Divinity School*

## Author's preface

The following gets to the heart of the most important question we can ask: Who is God? The writing has been a cause of great thanksgiving, for several reasons. First, it is an answer to a prayer ten years ago that the Lord would give me a doctoral project that would help me know him better. Secondly, this work has been a tremendous help in understanding how the Old and New Testaments are to be read together, making clearer, at least to me, how the God-breathed word is meant for our instruction. Finally, it has given me the opportunity to serve and be served by many others, and to put down in an organized fashion much of what I have learned from others over many years.

While my debt to others in this project is legion, I would offer special thanks to several people. Chris Seitz patiently and wisely guided my doctoral work at St Andrews, upon which the following is based. Allen Ross, by his teaching, example and consistent encouragement, has given me a hunger for biblical exposition and a particular love for the Old Testament. The fellowship of Christ the King, Boone, has been an encouragement in every way, supporting me prayerfully and financially, refining my understanding of the Scriptures and giving me the space and resources within our life together to undertake a project such as this. My reluctance to mention names is not due to lack of appreciation, but knowing that I cannot do justice to all who have played a part in this, not least through hidden prayer. However, simply because I know of their earnest prayers for this project in particular, I would mention Carolyn Clement, Darcey James, Matt Foster, Dan Kiser, and Tom and Anna Barry. I would also thank the fellowship for bringing Jonathan Riddle, whose cheerful help in assisting me has freed time to finish this work. My mother and father, Marcia and Bill Blackburn, have always been a tremendous support in just about anything I have done, and particularly this, as has my grandmother, Libby Ross. My children, William, Anna and Joseph are in all things

## THE GOD WHO MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN

a delight and a cause for great thanksgiving, and I am happy to acknowledge them here. Without Lauren, my wife (and unusually perceptive editor), none of this would be possible.

Thanks to Phil Duce at IVP for his good natured and persistent patience and eagerness to see this work published, for keeping me on track and for attending to all the particulars involved in making it happen, and to Eldo Barkhuizen for his painstaking editorial work, particularly sorting out the bibliography and Scripture references. The precision and perceptiveness with which they work is extraordinary. Thanks also to Don Carson for both initially accepting the work, and for an incisive comment concerning law and gospel that made it much clearer. Writing for the author of *Exegetical Fallacies* I am sure has made this a better work. Erin Thielman's keen eye for detail has been a great help in editing this work.

Finally, I thank God in Christ Jesus, the source of salvation and all sufficiency, who has made Himself known to me at greater depth as a result of this project. My prayer is that, in some small way, this work would be useful to him as he continues to make himself known, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.

*Soli Deo gloria*

*Ross Blackburn*

# Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ASTI	<i>Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute</i>
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
<i>BRev</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca sacra</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HCOT	Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
HTKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JANESCU</i>	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>

THE GOD WHO MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN

<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series
NASB	New American Standard Bible
<i>NIB</i>	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i> , ed. L. E. Keck, 12 vols., Nashville: Abingdon, 1993–2002
NEchtB	Neue Echter Bibel
NIV	New International Version
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society translation of the Jewish Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NS	New Series
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
OT	Old Testament
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
NT	New Testament
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SBTS	Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
SNTSMS	Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series
TBC	Torch Bible Commentaries
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , ed. G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren and H.-J. Fabry, 15 vols., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974–2006
<i>ThR</i>	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i>
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
tr.	translation, translated
<i>TynB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

## Chapter One

# Introduction

### Concerning biblical mission

*The God Who Makes Himself Known* will argue that the Lord's missionary commitment to make himself known to the nations is the central theological concern of Exodus. Therefore, a word about the use of the term 'mission' is warranted. One danger of using a well-known term is that ideas commonly connected with the term are often read into the argument, sometimes bringing in unintended associations. For instance, despite its definition as 'any remedial activity pursued with zeal and enthusiasm',<sup>1</sup> it is difficult for the term 'crusade' to be divorced in the minds of many readers from violence and coercion. Likewise, despite its definition as 'a specific task with which a person or a group is charged',<sup>2</sup> 'mission' also carries with it meaning (e.g. direct, usually Christian, evangelistic endeavour) that may be too suggestive to be useful. There are, however, important reasons for using the term. First, the contemporary use of the term 'mission', particularly as defined above, fits the following argument. Many contemporary institutions, whether religious or secular, use the term 'mission' to speak of their purpose; hence the popular use of the term 'mission statement'. However, while the terms 'mission' and 'purpose' overlap, the former has a distinctively proactive sense that the latter often does not. Sunglasses serve the purpose of reducing glare, but one would hardly speak of the mission of a pair of sunglasses. Mission, on the other hand, implies both purpose and the corresponding effort and strategy to achieve that purpose. The word 'mission' therefore fits the following argument, which addresses both the Lord's purpose in Exodus and the means by which he pursues that purpose.

The second reason for using the term 'mission' lies in the context

<sup>1</sup> 'Crusade', in Gove 1968.

<sup>2</sup> 'Mission', in Gove 1968.

in which I believe the argument is appropriately considered. Using the term 'mission' positions the following argument in the wider discussion of biblical mission. Too often the concept of mission in the OT has either been generally denied, or the OT has been used as a short prologue to a discussion of biblical mission, which usually means mission according to the NT.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, many discussions of mission in the OT tend towards a focus on a handful of texts that appear to address more explicitly missionary themes, texts such as Genesis 12:1–3, Exodus 19:4–6 and the book of Jonah.<sup>4</sup> While the importance of these texts cannot be denied, OT mission is much more than a collection of extracted proof texts. In fact, the reason that those texts above are appealed to with such frequency is that we have read the OT through the lens of the NT, particularly the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20), and therefore look to texts that explicitly refer to the nations to inform our understanding of mission. The problem is that when this happens, the whole notion of mission in the Bible is severely truncated, even distorted. It is noteworthy that the Great Commission is spoken by Jesus in Matthew, the Gospel that most explicitly and frequently grounds itself in the OT. And yet much of the modern church reads the Great Commission as if Jesus were commanding something entirely new. How is the Great Commission to be carried out? To whom is it given? What is the message? Is proclaiming a message even an appropriate way to understand Jesus' command? What are disciples, and how are they made? These are all issues firmly rooted in the OT. An important implication of the following study is that we cannot even understand mission as expressed in the NT apart from a thorough grounding in the Old.

Two publications help lend definition to the term, at least as used in the following discussion. First, Seitz (2001) has suggested that mission, biblically understood, fundamentally involves God's seeking to put right what has gone awry; that is, the evil inclination of the human heart. Christian evangelistic proclamation, with which mission is commonly associated, may be understood as one means by which God sets right what is wrong, but it is only part of that larger concern:

<sup>3</sup> Two major exceptions to this tendency are C. J. H. Wright's *The Mission of God* (2006) and Beale's *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (2004), both of which heavily interact with the OT in their discussions of biblical mission.

<sup>4</sup> E.g. Kaiser 2000.

## INTRODUCTION

*Mission means getting at the something awry*, when we look at the issue theologically and not sociologically. Stated differently, the notion of missionary ‘sending’ is an earthly subset of a theological reality, and it is this theological reality that makes mission have a divine and not a natural or simply human mandate. Mission is God’s address to humanity’s forfeit. Understood in this way, it is an Old Testament theme as well as a New Testament theme. Indeed, it could be said to be *the* theme of the Old Testament as such. (2001: 147, emphasis original)

If Seitz’s understanding is applied to Exodus, that which has gone awry is a condition in which the world does not know the Lord. ‘Getting at the something awry’, for Exodus, is simply the Lord’s effort to make himself known among the nations for who he is, the God who rules over the universe and redeems those who call upon him. The goal of the following, then, will be to demonstrate that this commitment to right what is awry, or to move Israel and the nations from ignorance to knowing him, is the Lord’s motivation behind his actions in Exodus. In this way the theme is missionary. Whether or not mission, thus understood, is ‘*the* theme of the Old Testament’, as Seitz suggests, is beyond the scope of this work, but I do intend to argue that it is the governing theme of Exodus.

The second work, Bauckham’s *Bible and Mission* (2003), examines biblical mission in terms of the relationship between the particular and the universal in the Bible. Bauckham understands mission in both the OT and the NT in the light of this movement. The Lord particularly chose Abraham for the universal purpose that all families of the earth might be blessed. The Lord particularly chose Israel for the universal purpose that the nations might acknowledge that he is God. The Lord particularly chose Zion, with its Davidic king, for the universal purpose of extending his rule throughout the earth. In each case the particular always moves to the universal, leading Bauckham to argue that the Lord never chooses a particular person or people for its own sake, but for the sake of the world. This movement, for Bauckham, is biblical mission.

The relationship between particularity and universality is of crucial importance in understanding the book of Exodus, especially in arguing that the central concern of Exodus is missionary. One of the chief burdens of the following argument, then, is to demonstrate that the particular existence of Israel has a universal goal,

and that Israel's existence is unintelligible apart from her mission to the nations. In other words the following argument will seek to demonstrate that the existence and nature of Israel cannot be rightly understood apart from the Lord's universal mission.

Finally, a point about the language Exodus uses to express this missionary commitment. Often, mission in Exodus is expressed in terms of knowing the Lord or knowing his name, such as in the oft-repeated phrase 'they shall know that I am the LORD'. Sometimes the Lord's mission is expressed in terms of his being glorified or honoured (e.g. 14:4, 18), and other passages suggest that the Lord acts as he does for the sake of his name (e.g. 32:12). While each of these expressions may have different nuances, they convey the same general meaning. As we shall see, the Lord desires to be known as God, and, further, as a particular kind of God, a God who is both supreme and good. In other words *the Lord seeks to be known for who he is, and* (the corollary, while obvious, needs to be said) *not for who he is not*. Knowing the Lord implies honouring him for who he is. The terms 'honoured', 'glorified' and 'known' will be used at different points in the discussion, depending on which seems to fit best in relation to a given passage. It bears mention, however, that they all point in the same direction.

## Purpose and approach

The New Studies in Biblical Theology series of which this volume is a part seeks to address one or more of three areas: issues related to the discipline of Biblical Theology, the exposition of the structure of thought of a particular book or corpus, and the delineation of a particular theme across part or all of the Scriptures. The following work seeks to address all three.

First, recognizing that hermeneutical decisions often turn on the contexts in which particular passages are interpreted, *The God Who Makes Himself Known* makes a case for the importance of canonical context in interpretation.<sup>5</sup> As Olson (1985: 3) writes, 'A

<sup>5</sup> While there are differences in approach between interpreters who identify their method as canonical, Schultz (2002: 96) cites five common commitments among canonical interpreters, all of which describe the approach of this work: (1) canonical approaches focus on the final form of books, rather than reconstructed histories, (2) theological reflections are based on the canonical presentation of history (regardless of the assessment of historical validity), (3) the Bible is viewed as theologically normative, (4) theological unity is emphasized, and (5) an

## INTRODUCTION

major obstacle to the appreciation and interpretation of any literary work is a perceived lack of coherence or organization'. One of the problems of much critical interpretation is that it has increasingly assumed a lack of coherence,<sup>6</sup> which has led some interpreters increasingly to explain difficulties in the text by resorting to different sources, traditions or editorial processes. Now, of course, some will argue that critical scholarship has not *assumed* a lack of coherence, but rather has demonstrated it.<sup>7</sup> Aside from the obvious point that there is significant difficulty in assessing coherence, particularly in a text far removed both temporally and culturally, one's assessment of what a text *is* informs how it will be read. Practically, the more that one fragments the text, the greater the tendency to fragment it further becomes. This is not to say that there are not places of real difficulty in the text, some of which have been brought to light by critical scholars. But it is to say that the impulse has made interpretation increasingly difficult.<sup>8</sup> If A does not appear to fit with B, it may be that we are discerning different sources or editorial layers, or it may be that we simply have not yet discerned how they do indeed fit together. For example, is Van Seters's (1994: 323) judgment that Exodus 33:18–23 is 'so entirely out of character with [33:12–17] that it must be considered an addition' an accurate reading of the text, or might there be a connection between the two sections that Van Seters misses? It is noteworthy that Van Seters's assessment closes down theological discussion, for he simply asserts 33:18–23 as an addition without enquiring as to its theological function. The point of this work is not to repudiate critical scholarship, *per se*, but rather to demonstrate that the impulse to retreat to sources or editorial histories is sometimes due to the fact that

effort is made to preserve the distinctive voice of the OT so as not to be silenced by the NT.

<sup>6</sup> Following Sailhamer (1995: 87–88), the term 'critical' is used to speak broadly of various types of historical, source, literary and form criticism, which base their theological judgments upon historical or literary reconstructions, rather than on the final canonical form of the biblical text.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. Barton 1996: 24: 'Literary criticism begins with the attempt to understand and make sense of the text; and its conclusions about the composite character of many texts arise from noticing that the text actually cannot *be* understood as it stands, because it is full of inconsistencies, inexplicable dislocations of theme, form, style, and so on, which make it impossible to know what to read it as' (emphasis original).

<sup>8</sup> In the words of Childs (1974: xiv–xv), 'The concentration of critical scholars on form-critical and source analysis has tended to fragment the text and leave the reader with only bits and pieces.'

we have not taken the canonical context of the Scriptures seriously enough.

In addressing this hermeneutical concern, each chapter follows a similar pattern. Beginning with a (usually well-known) hermeneutical problem, each chapter moves to argue that the particular section at hand points to the Lord's missionary commitment to be known as God, then ends with a suggestion of how appreciating that missionary commitment helps make sense of that hermeneutical problem. In addition, occasionally I suggest specific examples where critical decisions have been made, to my mind unnecessarily, on theological grounds or due to a lack of appreciating the canonical movement of the text. In order not to discourage readers not primarily interested in these matters, I have left these examples mainly in the footnotes.

Secondly, this volume argues that the Lord's missionary commitment to be known as God governs the book of Exodus. Breaking the book up into five commonly accepted divisions, I have sought to demonstrate that this missionary commitment is the reason why the Lord does what he does in each section, whether it is the manner of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, the giving of the law, or the Lord's response to Israel after she made the golden calf.

The effort to argue for a governing trajectory in Exodus brings up another, related, issue in Biblical Theology that has brought forth much discussion: whether or not it is appropriate to speak of a 'centre' of Biblical Theology.<sup>9</sup> The objection to searching for a centre is the very real concern of imposing a particular theme or structure that would in effect flatten or silence the sometimes diverse voices of the Scriptures. Yet the corresponding danger of such a fear is to rule out the possibility a priori, and therefore possibly miss ways in which the Scriptures might be read as a coherent whole. In the end, whether or not there is a centre of Biblical Theology is an issue that cannot be settled theoretically, but must be joined exegetically, with proposals being offered and subsequently evaluated. Whether or not one wants to use the term 'centre', the argument in this volume is that the Lord's commitment to be known as God throughout the earth governs all the Lord does in the book of Exodus.

Consistent with my own commitments, this work is written from a confessional evangelical perspective. I bring to the work an understanding of Scripture as the word of God, and thus an expectation

<sup>9</sup> For an overview of the discussion concerning a centre of Biblical Theology, see Hasel 1991: 139–171 and Baker 2010.

## INTRODUCTION

that it is the product of a unified voice. As suggested above, this commitment can mute our understanding of the Bible's witness, which is of particular concern when arguing for a 'centre'. However, it must be recognized that more critical approaches to the Bible can have a similar effect. Barton's (1996: 84) critique of Childs's canonical method is pertinent:

But doesn't this all amount simply to a return to pre-critical exegesis? If we are going to read Scripture as a unified work, doesn't that mean that we are going back to all the old abuses – allegory, harmonization, typology, and even downright falsification of the text – from which the historical critical method has freed us?

While Barton rightly raises several potential dangers, his allusion to the historical-critical method as a type of hermeneutical saviour from pre-critical exegesis suggests not only a deep scepticism of attempts to read the OT as a unified whole, but also an approach to the text that is less concerned with understanding how the Bible might fit together, thus running the danger of muting the witness of the biblical text from another direction. If, however, the Bible is given by God, then its unity and coherence should be able to be discerned exegetically (even if imperfectly). In the end, it is my hope that this work will serve as an encouragement to take difficult texts and read them in the light of the whole, listening to them as they are given to us in their canonical form. The unified voice of the Bible, if real, need not just be insisted upon a priori, but ought to be increasingly appreciated as we continue to engage with it.

This leads to one further comment concerning the perspective of the work. Writing from a confessional evangelical perspective (and particularly admitting it!) has the effect of ruling out one's contribution in some circles of biblical scholarship. We do well to recognize, however, that prior commitments are unavoidable in all interpretation. For example, in arguing for the academic community as the appropriate community for Biblical Theology, Collins (1990: 8) writes:

We are shaped by the rational humanism that underlies our technological culture and political institutions, no less than by the Bible (usually far more so). It is possible to have critical dialogue between our modern world view and the Bible,

but we cannot simply abandon the twentieth century for the ancient world.

In referring to ‘the twentieth century’, Collins speaks not of a period in time as much as a viewpoint informed by rational humanism. However, it cannot be said that all people in the twentieth century (or all people living in the West) hold that particular perspective, as Collins seems to assume. The ‘we’ to whom Collins refers is a particular community, the academic community, which, by his definition, holds the presuppositions (or dogma) of rational humanism. Whether or not this is true of the academic community *in toto*, Collins is clear that he approaches the text from a humanistic perspective as ‘confessional’ as the one he dismisses, even though his perspective rules out God. In all cases interpreters inevitably are governed by specific assumptions and concerned with specific questions.

Finally, the work is concerned with a biblical theme that spans the whole Bible. As mentioned above, mission is a theme of tremendous biblical importance, but not adequately appreciated in the OT, which runs the risk of distorting our understanding of biblical mission as a whole. In seeking to draw this theme out more broadly, I have sought to make connections throughout the Bible, Old and New Testaments. There are, of course, certain dangers here, particularly the temptation to read canonically later writings back into Exodus. However, to read Exodus apart from the later canonical witness, while perhaps safer in a certain way, would significantly impoverish its message. Aside from the myriad NT allusions to the Old, Jesus explicitly taught that the OT bore witness to him (John 5:39), and interpreted it accordingly (Luke 24:27). In dealing with this tension, I have sought to refer to later canonical writings by way of illustrating or confirming a point made in Exodus, extending a line of thought discerned in Exodus itself or drawing out the implications of what Exodus reveals about the Lord or his mission. I have tried, to the best of my ability, to steer clear of reading later canonical writings back into the earlier. An implicit argument of this work is that appropriate interpretation must take into account the canonical form of the Bible as a whole, and honour its movement. Whether or not I have been successful is for the reader to discern.

In the end, this work is about knowing God, for Exodus itself is about knowing God, knowing God for who he has made himself known to be, rather than for who we might think he is, imagine him

## INTRODUCTION

to be or wish him to be. In the ancient words of Augustine, ‘Who can call on Thee, not knowing Thee? for he that knoweth Thee not, may call on Thee as other than Thou art.’<sup>10</sup> The mission of God is God’s commitment to be known for who he is, among his people, and through them, among all peoples.

<sup>10</sup> Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1.

