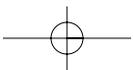
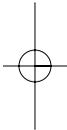
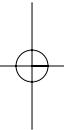


TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 2

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EXODUS



TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARIES

VOLUME 2

GENERAL EDITOR: DONALD J. WISEMAN

EXODUS

AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY

R. ALAN COLE



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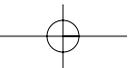
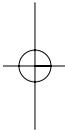
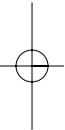
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GENERAL PREFACE

The aim of this series of Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, as it was in the companion volumes on the New Testament, is to provide the student of the Bible with a handy, up-to-date commentary on each book, with the primary emphasis on exegesis. Major critical questions are discussed in the introductions and additional notes, while undue technicalities have been avoided.

In this series individual authors are, of course, free to make their own distinct contributions and express their own point of view on all controversial issues. Within the necessary limits of space they frequently draw attention to interpretations which they themselves do not hold but which represent the stated conclusions of sincere fellow Christians. Thus, for example, the author does not put particular stress on such debated questions as the date of the revelation of the divine name or of the departure of the Hebrews from Egypt. His aim is rather to point out the profound part these crucial historical events played in the life and theology of the Hebrews and thus of the whole of the Old (and later New) Testament. The book has many lessons for our own day.

In the Old Testament in particular no single English translation is adequate to reflect the original text. The authors of these commentaries freely quote various versions, therefore, or give their own translation, in the endeavour to make the more difficult passages or words meaningful today. Where necessary, words from the Hebrew (and Aramaic) Text underlying their studies are transliterated. This will help the reader who may be unfamiliar with

the Semitic languages to identify the word under discussion and thus to follow the argument. It is assumed throughout that the reader will have ready access to one, or more, reliable rendering of the Bible in English.

Interest in the meaning and message of the Old Testament continues undiminished and it is hoped that this series will thus further the systematic study of the revelation of God and his will and ways as seen in these records. It is the prayer of the editor and publisher, as of the authors, that these books will help many to understand, and to respond to, the Word of God today.

D. J. Wiseman

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

It is with mixed feelings that I bid farewell to Exodus, for I feel as if I am parting with an old friend. I am sure that the editorial staff of the Tyndale Press, who have borne patiently with my delays over the last few years, will agree with this estimate, though their feelings may be less mixed. To me, it is a happy augury that this commentary was begun at Trinity College, Singapore; finished at Moore College, Sydney; and that this Preface is finally sent to the press from Robert Menzies College, Macquarie University. If it had a dedication, I should dedicate it to all three.

I am well aware (none more so) of the deficiencies of this commentary. I have deliberately striven to be explanatory and exegetic throughout, rather than devotional, judging that to be the main aim of the present series. It is not that I disagree in any way with the devotional use of the Old Testament (far from it), but that I must leave this task to others.

One thing I do ask is that readers will turn first to the introductory section on 'The Theology of Exodus' (pages 22ff.): this is designed to give the framework upon which the whole of the rest hangs. A prior reading of this section will not only mean that the reader will get more out of the commentary, but also more out of the book of Exodus itself (which is far more important). It is only fair to say that even this theological introduction arose from one of the many helpful suggestions made by far better scholars than I, when they read the typescript at an earlier stage. I shall not mention their names: but it is no exaggeration to say that, if this

book has any good points, it is due to their kindly suggestions. For the remaining obscurities and imperfections, I must be held wholly responsible myself.

R. Alan Cole

1972

CHIEF ABBREVIATIONS

AV	English Authorized Version (King James), 1611.
BDB	<i>Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> by F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, 1907.
Bright	<i>History of Israel</i> by J. Bright, 1960.
Buber	<i>Moses</i> by M. Buber, 1946.
Cross	'The Priestly Tabernacle' by F. M. Cross in <i>Biblical Archaeologist</i> , 1947.
Cross and Freedman	'The Song of Miriam' by F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman in <i>JNES</i> , 1955.
Daube	<i>The Exodus Pattern in the Bible</i> by D. Daube, 1963.
Davies	<i>Exodus</i> by G. Henton Davies, 1967.
Driver	<i>Exodus</i> by S. R. Driver, 1911.
Eissfeldt	<i>The Old Testament: An Introduction</i> by O. Eissfeldt, Eng. tr. 1965.
Fohrer	<i>Introduction to the Old Testament</i> by G. Fohrer, Eng. tr. 1970.
Gooding	<i>The Account of the Tabernacle: Translation and Textual Problems of the Greek Exodus</i> by D. W. Gooding, 1959.
Grollenberg	<i>Atlas of the Bible</i> by L. H. Grollenberg, 1957.
Harrison	<i>Introduction to the Old Testament</i> by R. K. Harrison, 1970.

- Hyatt *Commentary on Exodus* by J. P. Hyatt (*New Century Bible*), 1971.
- IDB* *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 4 vols., 1962.
- JB Jerusalem Bible, 1966.
- JNES* *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*.
- Kitchen *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* by K. A. Kitchen, 1966.
- LXX The Septuagint (pre-Christian Greek version of the Old Testament).
- Mendenhall *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* by G. E. Mendenhall, 1955.
- MT Massoretic Text.
- Napier *Exodus* by B. D. Napier, 1963.
- NEB The New English Bible Old Testament, 1970.
- North 'Pentateuchal Criticism' by C. R. North in *The Old Testament and Modern Study*, ed. H. H. Rowley, 1951.
- Noth *Exodus* by M. Noth, 1962.
- Rothenberg *God's Wilderness* by B. Rothenberg, 1961.
- Rowley *From Joseph to Joshua* by H. H. Rowley, 1950.
- RSV American Revised Standard Version, 1952.
- RV English Revised Version, 1881.
- Simpson *The Early Traditions of Israel* by C. A. Simpson, 1948.
- Stamm and Andrew *The Ten Commandments in Recent Research* by J. J. Stamm and M. E. Andrew, 1967.
- SVT* Supplement to *Vetus Testamentum*.
- Thompson 'Moses and the Law in a Century since Graf' by R. J. Thompson, *SVT* 19, 1970.
- Weiser *Introduction to the Old Testament* by A. Weiser, 1961.
- Wright *Westminster Historical Atlas of the Bible* by G. E. Wright, 1946.
- Wright 'Book of Exodus' and 'Route of Exodus' by G. E. Wright in *IDB*, 1962.

INTRODUCTION

1. The contents of Exodus

The book of Exodus derives its English name, not from the Hebrew (which simply calls it ‘These-are-the-names’ from its opening words) but from the Septuagint, the Greek translation made in Egypt in the third century before Christ. Yet it is a good title, if a late one, for the ‘exodus’ or ‘going out’ of God’s people is the central message of the book. Exodus begins with Israel as helpless slaves in Egypt: it shows the quiet preparation of God’s deliverer, and his confrontation of the pharaoh. Then comes the violent clash between the God of Israel and all the false gods of Egypt, with plague after plague descending on stubborn pharaoh and the Egypt which he rules. Chapter 12 brings the passover festival, and the death of Egypt’s first-born: Israel goes free at last. This is one of the high points of the book, continued in the crossing of the Red Sea, and the overwhelming of pharaoh’s chariots in its waves. Moses’ song of triumph in chapter 15, celebrating these saving acts of God, is a fit culmination of all that has gone before, and a transition to what will follow.

But this is only half the story. As proof that she had been redeemed, Israel was yet to worship God at the very Mount Sinai where Moses, the deliverer, had received his initial call (Exod. 3:12). So through the desert to Sinai she presses, still making her 'exodus' from the old life. She will need water, food, protection and guidance. All these God will give her, but already Israel makes her own true nature clear by her ceaseless grumblings and rebellions. At last she stands on the plain before Sinai and, amid thunder and lightning, hears the voice of God, and trembles. Here the covenant is made (Exod. 24:8): here Israel, as a nation, is born. This is the second high point of the book, not alone in the making of the covenant, but in the giving of the 'covenant law' that accompanies it. Summarized in the ten commandments (Exod. 20), amplified in the 'book of the covenant' (Exod. 21 – 23), God's very nature is expressed in moral terms, and the consequent demands on Israel are outlined. The exodus from the old ways will be harder than the exodus from the old land, but at least the true way is plain now.

But a third peak is yet to come. In subsequent chapters, slowly and lovingly, every detail full of rich symbolic meaning, there is outlined the structure known to older translators as 'the tabernacle', with all its furnishings (Exod. 25 – 31). God is to dwell with men: a fitting tent for his dwelling must be constructed, but, for the time being, we have only a priestly blueprint, the bare instructions for subsequent making, as in the book of Ezekiel (40 – 43).

Before the third peak comes a trough. With Moses still at the height of his experience up the mountain, speaking face to face with God, Israel reaches her lowest point: she makes and worships the golden calf (Exod. 32). Where is her glorious covenant now? Shattered to pieces, along with the stone tablets at the foot of the mountain? Is her new relationship with God gone for evermore? No: there is intercession by Moses and forgiveness by God, although there is stern punishment, too, in which Levi, by its faithfulness, wins its right to be the priestly tribe. So now there must be a reiteration of the covenant: step by step, the same stages are rehearsed, with the priestly love of repetition (Exod. 34 – 39). These chapters contain the story of the actual building of the 'tabernacle': meticulously, the craftsmen carry out every detail of the instructions already given by God to Moses on the mountaintop. At last all is

ready: the final chapter contains the account of dedication of the tabernacle, and the dwelling of God with men (Exod. 40). To this, in a sense, the whole of the rest of the book has led: this is the true climax of Exodus.

2. Exodus as a part of the Pentateuch

Having said this, we may now turn to the rest of the Pentateuch, of which Exodus is a part, and indeed in some ways an artificially severed limb. The opening verses of Exodus show a deliberate connection with the closing verses of Genesis, while the priestly instructions given in the closing chapters of Exodus run on into Leviticus and Numbers. In the Pentateuch, considered as a whole, there are only five major themes: God's promise to the patriarchs; the exodus; God's Self-revelation in covenant and law at Sinai; the wandering in the wilderness; the entrance into Canaan. Three of these five major themes are treated at length in the book of Exodus and, in addition, it looks back to the first theme and on to the last. Moses' vision and call at Mount Sinai are deliberately shown as a fulfilment of God's promise to Israel's forefathers, while the book ends with a promise of God's leading till Canaan is reached. Therefore, while Exodus is only part of a wider and far larger whole, it is a real part and, in a sense, enshrines the heart of the whole pentateuchal revelation. Of all the books of the Law, it is the one that has the greatest right to be called *Heilsgeschichte*, 'history of salvation'. Even the legal matter which it contains is rightly called *Heilsgesetze*, 'law of salvation', for it is set in the context of the covenant made with the redeemed nation, and the obligations thus brought (see Davies).

3. Exodus and pentateuchal 'sources'

In earlier days it was held to be axiomatic that Moses himself wrote the whole book of Exodus, virtually in the form in which we have it, with the exception of a few verses written by Joshua after Moses' death. By the end of the nineteenth century, the dominant critical hypothesis had instead reduced Exodus to a mosaic of documents of different dates (but all long after Moses). The very historicity of

Moses was doubted: Martin Noth, for instance, suggested that he was some unknown desert sheikh whose grave was remembered by Israel, and who thus entered her tradition from the outside. For such scholars, to speak of 'Mosaic authorship' in any meaningful sense was impossible. Where does the truth lie? Probably, at neither extreme. The old and tidy 'documentary hypothesis' has largely failed by its own success,¹ with ever smaller and smaller units, or unconnected fragments postulated by scholars, instead of major and continuous written sources. Scandinavian scholars instead have stressed the importance and reliability of oral tradition. They would not have us speak of written 'documents' at all, but of great complexes of oral tradition, which nevertheless, in final form, turn out to have almost the fixity of documents. Form Criticism had already taught us to classify and describe the varied biblical material by its form. It too dealt with much smaller units than the old 'documentary' hypothesis, and was concerned to see the living situations in which such units arose. More recently, some German scholars have taught us to look at 'the history of tradition', to see the possible stages by which the account of any given incident took its present form. All these are not only intellectually interesting: they also help us to realize the complexity of the process that lies behind our present text, and the great antiquity of the material contained there.

But, when all is said and done, the task of the Bible commentator is to comment on the final product, which is the text before him, and that is what the present writer has tried to do. In a commentary of this size, it is quite impossible to enter into such questions in detail, interesting though they may be. Many of these problems can be profitably studied only in relation to the Hebrew text, and to larger commentaries on the Hebrew text those interested are therefore directed. Suffice it to say that for Exodus, in spite of the so-called 'critical revolution' and widespread rejection of the documentary hypothesis in its old form, many scholars still make

1. Simpson represents the situation taken to its logical conclusion, in complete fragmentation. This may be correct, but is only an analysis, not an explanation of the book's present form.

use of signs like J, E, D and P to indicate presumed written sources of the Pentateuch.² If these signs are regarded simply as descriptions of types and blocks of material, rather than as judgments as to dates of origin, the use is perhaps fair. However, even if the same symbols are used today, there is an important difference. Modern scholars no longer regard J as a work originating in, say, the ninth century in the Southern Kingdom. Instead they regard it as a ninth-century writing-down of traditions that had been current in Judah for many centuries, and were indeed only 'fossilized' when the collection was made at that date. Similarly they would regard E as a collection of Ephraimite traditions, equally old in themselves, but collected and written down a century or so later than J. The position is thus a very different one, though the symbols are the same.

Further, they would now say that even J and E (supposing we allow their independent existence and reality) are only differing formulations of substantially the same Mosaic tradition, denoted by the sign G (standing for *Grundlage* or 'basic layer'). In turn, D is seen to be a still later collection and explanation of early laws, in many cases laws supplementing those of the 'book of the covenant' (Exod. 20 – 23). Even P, once seen as latest and least reliable of the 'documents', is now seen as conserving, with priestly meticulousness, archaisms lost elsewhere.

In other words, it is widely recognized today that the date of a document (supposing that such a document ever existed, and that we knew its date of compilation) is not nearly as important as the date of its contents. In short, in modern pentateuchal studies, we are not far removed from the New Testament position, where we have four Gospels, all alike preserving early traditions of the sayings and deeds of Jesus, although the Gospels themselves are of different and later dates. We may of course reject on principle any such form of source analysis: or we may preserve a reverent agnosticism, recognizing that some sources there must have been, but not wishing to be dogmatic as to their nature. We may simply deal with

2. Contrast North (1951) with Thompson (1970) as general summaries of the position in their times.

the text before us, unless some exegetic difficulty makes us probe deeper. But whether we do any or all of these, it is well to remember the greatly changed climate of Old Testament scholarship today. The essential historicity of Moses and of his work (at least in broad outline) would now be widely accepted. Many scholars of different schools would allow the ten commandments (perhaps in shortened form) to be of Mosaic date,³ and recognize the material of the 'book of the covenant' to be Bronze Age. We may not be personally satisfied with this, and may want to go much further, but at least we should note this changed position and be thankful for it.

4. Problems of the book of Exodus

That there are problems in Exodus, not even the most conservative of scholars would wish to deny: but many of them are geographic or historical and few of them, if any, affect the theological message of the book. Most of these problems will be discussed briefly on their first occurrence. Some few will be examined at greater length, where a more detailed treatment seemed appropriate. But for the rest, recourse must be had to larger commentaries, such as that by Hyatt, in the *New Century Bible*.

To give examples: we do not know how long Israel was in Egypt; some would even say that we do not know whether all of Israel was ever there. We do not know the exact date of the exodus (although from archaeology we can give a close approximation), nor the route that Israel took, nor even the exact site of Sinai. These are only a selection: it is possible to collect over a hundred unanswered (and, at this stage of our knowledge, unanswerable) queries rising from the book of Exodus. Yet not one of these affects the main theological issue, and therefore we must not allow them to loom too large in our thinking. It is not essential that we know the numbers, or route, or date of the exodus. It is enough that, with later Israel, we know and believe that such an event happened, and

3. So, for example, Rowley (*Moses and the Decalogue*, 1951): but not Mowinckel (*Le Décalogue*, 1927) or Alt (*Ursprung des Israelitischen Rechts*, 1934). For a modern summary, see Stamm and Andrew.

that we too interpret it as a saving act of God. Indeed, to Israel, it was the saving act of God which overshadowed all others, since, in a sense, it was the act of Israel's creation. All God's subsequent saving acts were measured by this, the heart of Israel's creed. What the cross of Christ is to the Christian, the exodus was to the Israelite: yet we know neither the exact date nor the exact place of the crucifixion, any more than Israel knew the exact date or location of Sinai. The very existence of these problems in our minds only shows that we are scientifically minded Westerners. Indeed, in one sense, we are importing our own problems into the Scriptures, and then blaming the Scriptures because we do not find answers there. Assuredly, to the original writers, these were no problems, or they would have framed their accounts differently. We are not to blame for being 'scientific man', any more than the Hebrews are to blame for being 'pre-scientific man', but we must learn not to ask of Scripture the answers which it is not written to give. If we must ask these questions, then we can only guess at the answers.

5. Relevance of the book of Exodus

It is very difficult to say which book stands at the heart of the Old Testament: but certainly the claims of Exodus are hard to match. To those who see theology as essentially the recital of the saving acts of God, Exodus 1 – 15 gives the supreme example, around which the rest of the biblical narrative can be assembled. To those who see the Old Testament as the product of the worshipping life of the community, at the heart of the book of Exodus lies the account of the institution of the passover, greatest and most characteristic of Israel's festivals. Indeed, the Exodus narrative may be seen as the explanation of the origin of that festival, recited or read aloud (as today) during its celebration. To those who see God's *tôrâ*, his law, as central to the life and thinking of later Israel, Exodus enshrines the law giving and contains the very kernel of the law in the form of the ten commandments. To later Jewish writers of priestly interests, who saw the maintenance of worship in the temple as one of the pillars of the universe, Exodus contained the account of the building of the tabernacle, forerunner of the temple. Yet, at the same time, it was not the priestly stream alone that looked back with

vation to Moses and Aaron. Moses stands also as the prototype of all prophets in Israel (Deut. 18:18), and the later prophets, while they may well search the mind of God more deeply, are best seen as essentially reformers, returning to the spirit of the Mosaic revelation, and to Israel's experience of salvation from Egypt.

It is therefore natural that the exodus from Egypt, interpreted by Israel's faith as being the supreme example of God's grace, faithfulness and power, dominated all the thought of later Israel. It even overshadowed, for a long period of Israel's history, the great events of creation and of the patriarchal days, although it will be seen that both God's creative power and his promise to Abraham are linked in thought with the exodus and indeed 'fulfilled' in part in that event. Not even the later promise to the line of David (2 Sam. 7:5-17) could obliterate the memory of the deliverance from Egypt. Instead, the exodus became a type to which later deliverances were compared. When the exiles came streaming home from Babylon, it was no wonder that this return was seen as a second and mightier exodus (Jer. 23:7-8), another leaving of another Egypt.

But if the event of exodus, and therefore the book of Exodus, was precious to the Jew, it became doubly precious to the Christian. When Moses and Elijah are portrayed as discussing Christ's coming death, in the story of the transfiguration, the Evangelist deliberately uses the Greek word *exodos* to describe that death (Luke 9:31). Whatever the exact day of Christ's death, it was clearly in the general context of the great passover feast (Luke 22:13). Paul makes this identification specific by calling Christ the passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:7). John, in his allusive way, hints at the same identification by stressing that no bone of Christ was broken on the cross (John 19:33, 36), just as no bone of the passover lamb might be broken (Exod. 12:46). From then on, throughout the whole of the New Testament, the allusions flow thick and fast. Passover introduced the week-long feast of unleavened bread: so the Christian must eat his 'unleavened bread' of sincerity and truth, free from sin's corruption (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

That this association of exodus with redemption was not a later invention of the church, but sprang from the very mind of Christ himself, can be seen by the way in which, as reported by Paul, he views his death as a new covenant sacrifice (1 Cor. 11:25) sealing by

blood God's new covenant just as, long ago in Exodus, blood had sealed the old covenant between God and Israel (Exod. 24:6). If the old covenant led to the law, then this new covenant, prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31), will lead to the law of love, explained in detail in many New Testament epistles (e.g. Rom. 13:8). From whatever angle we study it, the great themes of Exodus have been, like the rest of the 'Old Covenant' (which draws its name from the events of this book), not destroyed but fulfilled in Christ (Matt. 5:17). That is why, when the song of the redeemed rises in heaven, it is the song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev. 15:3). No book therefore will more repay careful study, if we wish to understand the central message of the New Testament, than this book, the centre of the Old Testament and the record of the establishment of the Old Covenant.

THE THEOLOGY OF EXODUS

It would be hard to find a single major topic of Old, or even New, Testament that is not exemplified in the book of Exodus. Many of the themes, used later in the Bible, actually take their rise in this book, in the interpreted experience of Israel, through the great events that led to her foundation as a people. In this theological introduction we shall consider a few salient points under the headings of aspects of God's nature. This treatment is not intended to be exhaustive. It is simply intended as a meagre introduction to the theological riches of the book.

The God who controls history

God is the unseen controller of all history and all circumstances. This is seen in Exodus 1, although God's name is not even mentioned until verse 20. This omission does not mean that the Hebrew was irreligious, but that, in contrast to us, he saw the hand of God in every circumstance of life, not merely at high moments in those signal acts of God that we call 'miracles'. Nothing is beyond

his power and control – not even the stubbornness of a pharaoh (Exod. 4:21). It was this same conviction that made the Hebrews see the exodus as the supreme fact of all history, and as God's act of salvation for Israel. That it happened, no Israelite could doubt, for they had indeed been saved from Egypt: and the only possible explanation of this impossibility was that God had done it, since all things were under his control. But this invincible power of God over history is not exercised arbitrarily or purposelessly. He overrules all events for the ultimate good of his children, whatever the immediate effects. This is demonstrated in the opening chapter of Exodus; the very measures designed to repress the Israelites only made them multiply more (Exod. 1:12). God's loving providence is again seen in the preservation of Moses' life and in his adoption by pharaoh's daughter (Exod. 2:10), as it is in the fortunes of the Hebrew midwives (Exod. 1:21). It might be argued that the midwives had deserved such gracious treatment, by their faithfulness to God (Exod. 1:17), and that the infant Moses had at least done nothing to forfeit such care. But God shows the same love to Moses when, by his own rash act, he is a penniless fugitive in Midian (Exod. 2:15–22). None could say that thankless Israel merited such treatment, if we study her subsequent history (e.g. Exod. 16:3), and no doubt she had been just as undeserving in Egypt as she was after the exodus. So, what had begun as a doctrine of providence now proves to be a doctrine of God's grace, his undeserved favour and love, showered upon the unworthy object of his choice.

I am YHWH

God is YHWH. Exodus 3:13–15 makes plain that the revelation of God under this name was fundamental to the theology of the Mosaic age. As to pre-Mosaic days, there are various views. Some hold that the name YHWH was neither known nor used before the time of Moses (Exod. 6:3) and that its present use in earlier parts of the Old Testament is simply designed to show the complete identity of the God of the patriarchs with the God known and revealed to Moses. (However, on the whole question, see Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 578–582.) Others, relying on texts such as

Genesis 4:26, maintain that the name itself was known long before Moses, to some at least of Israel's ancestors, and that this knowledge accounts for the free use of the name in the earlier Genesis texts. They would further say that Exodus 6:3 refers to a revelation as to the meaning of the name, which is now discovered to have new depths. The question is not, however, of importance in connection with the theology of Exodus. The significant thing is that God has a name, and is thus fully personal.

To the Hebrew, 'name' is shorthand for 'character'. Therefore to know God's 'name' is to know him as he is, and to 'call on his name' is to appeal to him by his known and revealed nature (Ps. 99:6). To 'proclaim' the name of YHWH is to describe his character (Exod. 33:19). Since Israel is YHWH's people (Exod. 19:5), YHWH's 'name' is involved in all that happens to them: this becomes important in Moses' later intercession for Israel (Exod. 32:11–13). God's reputation is bound up with the Israelites. God cannot abandon them: instead, he must get glory for his name through them. If God now bears a new 'name' (and if this is the correct interpretation of Exod. 6:3), it means to the Hebrew that a new and higher revelation has taken place than that associated with the old title El-Shaddai (Gen. 17:1–8) or any other patriarchal name for God. Henceforth, for the Old Testament, the name YHWH will mean all that the name 'Jesus' means for the New Testament. It is the name that sums up in itself all past revelation (for YHWH is still the 'God of the fathers', even if under a new name), and it also lies at the very heart of their new experience of redemption and salvation. Just to say 'Jesus' is, for the Christian, to be reminded of the cross; so to say YHWH is, for the Hebrew, to be reminded of the exodus. When God describes himself as YHWH, it is therefore natural to add the phrase 'who brought you out of the land of Egypt' (Exod. 20:2), just as it is natural for the Christian to describe Christ as the one who 'redeemed us' (Gal. 3:13).

As to the exact meaning of the name YHWH, there has been considerable controversy: see the commentary on Exodus 3 for various suggestions. However, two points should be remembered: first, Exodus 3:14 is the only place in the Old Testament where the meaning of the name is explained. Secondly, the name is clearly

represented as being explicable only by God himself. The theological implication of this is that none but God can explain what God is like: we shall learn the meaning of his 'name' from what he says and does. Whatever the exact grammatical force of Exodus 3:14, so much is clear, since the Hebrew verb 'to be' has the sense of 'to be present (and active)': it is dynamic, not static. Israel is not left, like other nations, to speculate about the problematic existence and nature of gods. Her God is a 'God who is there', active in history and revealing himself in word and deed.

The exodus itself initially defines the nature of YHWH, as revealed in his salvation of Israel from Egypt. Israel's subsequent history will add clause after clause to this initial statement of her creed ('who brought you out of the land of Egypt') as her experience of salvation grows. YHWH will not only be confessed as the One who led out of Egypt (Exod. 20:2), but also as the One who led into Canaan (Deut. 26:9) and as the One who raised up judges (Judg. 2:16), and so on. The promise inherent in the initial explanation of the divine name (Exod. 3:14) is being fulfilled in history, whether that explanation be understood as 'I am who I am', or 'I will be who I will be'. Since more and more of God's nature is gradually being shown to men by his words and acts, his 'name' is continually taking on a richer meaning. The crown and fulfilment will come in New Testament days, when God's greatest word to man is spoken (John 1:14) and his greatest saving act is finished (John 19:30). Henceforth, he will be fully known as 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rom. 15:6) and as the giver of the Spirit (John 14:26). A new 'name' for God will now come into use, corresponding to this new fullness of revelation. So it will be seen that, while all biblical theology rests on a right use of linguistics, at the last we must seek a theological, rather than linguistic, understanding of the divine name. Indeed, the whole of the ten commandments are this sort of theological explanation of the significance of the name of YHWH, for they begin with the definition of YHWH's saving act (Exod. 20:2) and continue with an expression of his moral nature. Perhaps the most significant addition is that which defines YHWH as being a 'zealous God', zealous both in punishing and in keeping covenant (Exod. 20:5, 6). With this may be compared the later Self-proclamation of God's

name to Moses (Exod. 34:5–7), where the ‘name’ is understood in terms of both love and judgment, and where God’s ‘zealous’ nature is again stressed (Exod. 34:14).

The God who is holy

God is holy: the very place where he revealed himself to Moses is (or rather becomes, by that revelation) ‘holy ground’ (Exod. 3:5). This is the first occasion upon which the adjective ‘holy’ appears in the Pentateuch, although the idea is already to be found in Genesis (cf. Gen. 28:17). Later, ‘holy’ will be one of the adjectives most frequently used to define the nature and being of God, especially in Leviticus (e.g. Lev. 11:45). Without entering into philological arguments, the basic idea of the Hebrew root seems to have been ‘set apart’ and therefore ‘different’ from common things. To the Canaanite, this idea might have no moral connotations at all. One title of the fertility goddess Astarte, used in Egypt, was ‘Qudshu’ (the Holy One), and the name of the temple prostitutes, strictly forbidden in Israel (Lev. 19:29), was literally ‘holy ones’. But the ‘separateness’ or ‘difference’ of God from men is not merely that of two different orders of being. It is in his moral nature that the God of Israel is different: therefore ‘holiness’ in Israel has a moral content. That is why he will reveal himself in the ‘ten words’, which are a moral rather than an intellectual revelation, although they have an intellectual content. Israel’s ongoing experience of God, after her salvation from Egypt, was also to be a gradually deepening moral experience: it was her conscience rather than her intellect that was continually challenged. So it is that, in the new covenant, God ‘reveals’ his ways to babes and ‘hides’ them from the wise (Matt. 11:25), for there is nothing hard to understand in a moral imperative, no matter how hard it may be to obey. Basically, our stumbling-blocks are not so much intellectual as moral: the root of our opposition to God lies in our will.

Since God is ‘holy’, since he is so ‘different’, then anything associated with him, or devoted to his service, partakes of this characteristic. If it is an inanimate object (such as oil for anointing), this may mean only that it is forbidden for common use (Exod. 30:32). It may even convey the idea of some mysterious danger on

manual contact (Exod. 19:12, 13). But since God's holiness is defined as being moral, to be a 'holy people' (as Israel was called to be, Exod. 19:6) meant that stern moral demands are made of her. Outside the book of Exodus, the requirements are put bluntly: 'You shall be holy; for I YHWH your God am holy' (Lev. 19:2). It can be stated still more succinctly: the motivation for a moral command may be simply 'I am YHWH your God' (Lev. 19:3). Since YHWH is holy, there is no need for more explanation: the new relationship, brought about by grace, makes inexorable moral demands.

Within Exodus itself, it could be said that the whole 'book of the covenant' (roughly, Exodus 21 – 23) is an attempt to define what it means to be God's people, a holy people. Therefore holiness is, in the deepest sense, a definition of God's nature as he expects to find it reflected in his children. It is this concept of God's holiness which, in turn, is mirrored and portrayed in the very construction of the meeting-tent, with its 'holiest place of all' far within, and with metals and materials in gradually lessening degrees of preciousness as they are further from this centre. If the law was a verbal expression of God's holiness, the Tent was a visible parable of it, and the nation of Israel was intended to be a walking illustration of it. It would perhaps be true to say that the whole concept of sin-offering (Exod. 29:14), so basic to Israel's religious practice, springs from this concept of the holiness of God, understood in moral, not merely ritual, terms. This aspect, however, is better discussed under another heading.

The God who remembers

YHWH is also the God who remembers (Exod. 2:24). Specifically, he is the God who 'remembered his covenant with Abraham' and with the other patriarchs. This is of course not to say that God can forget (except in so far as 'forgetting' is a metaphor, to describe his forgiveness of sin; cf. Isa. 64:9). To say that God 'remembers' is an anthropomorphism (or, more correctly, an anthropopathism) to express the changelessness of God. There is nothing arbitrary about him: anything learned about him from his past relationships with men will be equally valid for present and future relationships. This is in utter contrast with the gods of paganism, who shared all the whims and tantrums of their human creators. It is this divine

consistency and this alone that makes an ongoing process of revelation possible. It is in accordance with this principle that Israel will measure all her subsequent history, and understand every later happening, in terms of the exodus. This principle will be the measure of her hope for the darkest days of the future. For, in her turn, God will call upon Israel to 'remember' what he has done for her in the covenant. From this, she will draw assurance that his gracious purpose for her will continue. In addition, 'remembering' will be the spur and goad to keeping his commands (Exod. 20:2). As has been well said, only this 'remembering' can join gospel and law in one: Israel keeps the law because she 'remembers' the gospel of salvation.

To Hebrew thought 'to remember' is 'to act'; this too is equally applicable to God or to Israel. Again, this is not new. God, says Scripture, 'remembered Noah' (Gen. 8:1); that is to say, God acted in such a way to Noah as to show the consistency of his character. There too it was God's grace that was consistent (Gen. 6:8), as it was for Israel in the present instance. So, to say that God 'remembers' is to assert that he repeats his acts of saving grace towards his people Israel again and again, and in this way fulfils his promises, and shows his own self-consistency.

But there is an even deeper thought here: it is God's 'covenant' that he remembers. Now we are at the very heart of Exodus and its theology, for the covenant made by God with Israel at Sinai (Exod. 24:3-8) dominates, not only the thought of this book, but all of subsequent Israelite thought. Every time that we speak of 'the Old Testament', that is 'the Old Covenant', we give unconscious assent to this fact. True, in later days the covenant at Sinai so overshadowed the covenant with Abraham that the latter is rarely mentioned again until exilic times (Ezek. 33:23, 24). But, in the text of Exodus, the whole movement of salvation that culminates in the Sinai covenant is a fulfilment of divine promises stemming from the covenant with Abraham (Exod. 3:15-17). Indeed, the whole biblical history of salvation is seen in terms of promise and fulfilment: this is what gives the Sinaitic covenant depth and roots in the past, since, in giving it, God is 'remembering' his covenant with Abraham, and thus, in a sense, reiterating it. To Paul, the covenant made with Abraham is actually deeper and more fundamental than that made

with Israel at Sinai (Gal. 3:17). It is the former covenant, not the latter, to which he turns for an illustration of justification by faith. In either case, the 'Old Covenant' has given the terminology for the 'New Covenant' prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31), the introduction of which by the death of the Messiah was symbolized by Christ at the Last Supper (I Cor. 11:25).

There is no need to stress how important 'covenant' is, as a category of explanation used by both Old and New Testaments. Terms like 'covenant blood', 'covenant sacrifice' are basic for the understanding of the plan of God and the work of Christ, since a covenant was usually sealed by the blood of a victim. 'Covenant' was indeed a natural form of expression of mutual obligation at the time. It covered relationships both individual (Gen. 21:32) and collective (Josh. 9:15), and could even be used metaphorically of non-human elements (Job 31:1). There is some argument as to whether 'covenant' was originally a trader's term: certainly it included the meaning of our word 'contract', and covered matters that were fully secular (Gen. 21:32) as well as religious. Some secular covenants were between equals: some, like Israel's, were between a superior and an inferior. The closest (non-religious) parallel to Israel's 'covenant' with God is the unilateral 'sovereignty' type of treaty between a monarch and a subject people whom he was graciously bringing under his sovereign protection. Particularly good examples are found in treaties made by Hittite and Assyrian kings. The king would first outline what he had done for the people; then, after that exhibition of grace, he would lay down, as of right, consequent demands and obligations upon them. We may see here the beginning of an understanding of the relationship between grace (the origin) and law (the resultant). Such early 'suzerainty treaties' usually included, at the end, a list of blessings and curses on those who either kept or broke the covenant respectively. The similarities between this structure and the format of Israel's covenant at Sinai or indeed of Abraham's covenant (Gen. 15:7-21) are obvious, but should not be overstressed. For instance, YHWH is not actually described in the law of Moses as 'king' of Israel, although this concept is probably involved in Exodus 20:5, 6, and was certainly expressed later (Judg. 8:23). Therefore it is not probable that we have here a direct borrowing by Israel: rather, a

new relationship to God is expressed in terminology already familiar to them from the general cultural background.

There is yet another point to be considered under this heading. God is the 'God of the fathers', in that he declares himself to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exod. 3:6). This is, in one sense, a statement of the consistency and continuity of divine revelation: in another sense, it is an assertion of the lasting quality of the relationship that God establishes with man. The first is a truth which is very clear in Genesis, where Abraham's servant prays to the God of Abraham, not just as a name for God, but as describing a divine character of faithfulness and mercy shown to Abraham and as claiming these qualities for himself (Gen. 24:12). The second sense is even more significant for later theology: any relationship established by God is lasting. In the New Testament, on the lips of Christ, this has become an argument for what we might call the 'personal immortality' of the patriarchs (Matt. 22:31, 32). By virtue of establishing a relationship with them, God has assured to that relationship an abiding quality which in itself guarantees the continued existence of the human participants. In New Testament terms, eternal life is to know God (John 17:3), not merely in that the whole quality of worldly life alters when we enter a relationship with God, but that such a relationship, by the nature of the One with whom we have it, can never pass away. Put in simplest terms, if God still 'remembers' the patriarchs, then they must still exist. Here, then, early and unselfconscious though it is, is the beginning of the revelation of life after death. It is ultimately this relationship to which the psalmist will reach out in hope (Ps. 17:15) or Job, in despair (Job 19:25-27).

At a wider level, this stress on God's relationship with the patriarchs is an emphasis on the essentially historical nature of the faith of Israel. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were seen as real men, with a real experience of God. It was this same stubborn insistence on historicity that led Israel to look back again and again to the event of the exodus in later days. She knew that God's grace and power, as shown in the exodus, had been a fact: her present existence proved it. So too, in the New Covenant, Luke stubbornly insists on the historicity of the facts of the Christian faith (Luke 1:1-4). That was the great strength of Israel's creed: it was neither a philosophy

nor a mysticism nor an initiation nor a 'religion of feeling', but a 'religion of fact'. It was essentially a consistent interpretation of experienced history and, while man might deny the interpretation, no man could deny the history. That was why Israel could see God as a 'God who acts', and could wait, in confident faith, for him to act again, in accordance with his word of promise.

The God who acts in salvation

Unlike the gods of Canaan (1 Kgs 18:27), God is a living God (Deut. 5:26), a God who acts. Above all, he is the God who acts in salvation: 'I have come down to deliver them' is his word for Moses to bear to the Israelites (Exod. 3:8). This introduces the biblical concept of salvation, an area where later biblical passages are largely indebted to the book of Exodus for language and imagery. The idea of salvation is of course present far earlier than Exodus in the stories of Noah (Gen. 8) and of Lot (Gen. 19), for instance. In both of these cases, the word used of God is not 'save' but 'remember', but as mentioned already, 'remember' has essentially an active significance. 'Bring up' (Exod. 3:8) and 'bring forth' (Exod. 3:10) are also virtual synonyms for salvation, arising from the historical circumstances in which Israel found herself, a slave in an alien land. 'Redeem' is another synonym which has a rich history in both Old and New Testaments, but the main verb (*gā'al*) is comparatively rarely used in Exodus. (For a full discussion, see the Tyndale Commentary on *Ruth* by Leon Morris.) The verb often, by its use in land-transactions, comes to have the sense of 'pay the purchase-price' (although this more properly belongs to the rarer verb *pādā*). Exodus 6:6 and 15:13 do however use this verb (*gā'al*) of God's redemptive activity towards Israel. It literally means 'act the part of the redeemer-kinsman', as exemplified in Ruth and as defined in Leviticus 25:25. The verb is used very frequently in the second part of Isaiah to describe God's coming great redemption of his people from Babylon, seen as a second exodus (e.g. Isa. 43:1). As at first, Israel, his people, were slaves in a foreign land, helpless to move, and it was God's purpose to save them from that slavery.

Salvation, whatever the word employed, is therefore seen as the characteristic activity of God: it is his very nature to rescue the

oppressed and helpless. In later Old Testament terms, this activity is seen as part of God's judicial 'righteousness' (Isa. 11:4). All through the law, his active care for the widow, fatherless, captive and stranger is stressed (Exod. 22:21–24). More, because God cares for the helpless, Israel must care for them too (Exod. 22:21, 22). The memory of God's salvation, which she has already experienced, and the memory of her own helplessness before that salvation, must make her, in turn, a 'saviour' of others. To do this is truly to 'know' God, to know what he is like, and to show that knowledge by action.

It was not enough that God should save his people from the slave-pen of Egypt: by a succession of mighty saving acts, he led, protected and fed them in the wilderness. Even this is not enough: finally, God is the God who acts to bring his redeemed into a rich heritage. This had been promised to Abraham (Gen. 12:7), and again promised to Moses in Exodus 3:8, the first of many passages telling of the lush wealth of Canaan. From this stems the growing consciousness of the inheritance of blessing that God has prepared for his chosen ones, the great theme of Deuteronomy. In the Old Testament, such blessings largely remain this-worldly, although increasingly they are translated into an ideal future (Isa. 11:6–9). In the New Testament, the promised inheritance has become a matter of spiritual treasures (1 Pet. 1:4), but that does not mean that it has become a less real part of salvation, or a lesser manifestation of God's power to act for his people. Nevertheless, in spite of the manifold nature of the saving activity of God, it was always the experiences of the exodus itself to which Israel turned back as the supreme example. If we must isolate one moment, it was the crossing of the sea (Exod. 14:30, 31) that was decisive, because it was then that Israel knew that she had passed from death to new life. There are those who see in the great triumph-story of Exodus 15 echoes of some old mythological battle of creation, by which God triumphs over his enemy, *Yām*, the sea-monster. The Exodus poem may well use faded metaphors drawn from such mythology, as poetry has done in all ages, but the sea is not an enemy here, as it would have been in a myth. It is only God's agent, doing his will: it is not even personified. The true enemy is the stubborn pharaoh (Exod. 15:4), the man who has tried to pit himself against God (Exod. 5:2), and it is over him that God triumphs gloriously.

Pharaoh stands for the height of human power, ranged against God and the people of God: therefore his fall is a fitting symbol for all time of the impossibility of striving against God, or of thwarting his plans. That is why the crossing of the sea became such a fitting symbol of God's act of salvation for Israel. It was to Israel what the resurrection of Christ is to the Christian church: the sign that the powers of darkness had been decisively defeated, and that salvation was now secure and certain (Exod. 14:30). Just as the appeal to God in the New Testament was on the basis of his greatest act in Christ (Rom. 8:32), so in the Old Testament the appeal to God is always on the basis of what he has done at the exodus (Judg. 6:13), his greatest act on behalf of Israel. This too is what makes the crossing of the 'Sea of Reeds' such a fitting symbol of baptism for Paul (1 Cor. 10:1, 2): the waters of judgment are past, and salvation has been entered upon.

Nevertheless, if we may press the New Testament analogy a little further, the resurrection was but the proclamation of the triumph of God; the actual work of salvation was done on the cross (Col. 2:14, 15). So too, in Old Testament days, it was the passover night that marked the actual redemption of Israel from Egypt (Exod. 12:29-32), and the passover must therefore be reckoned among the 'mighty acts' of God. While there is frequent allusion in the other parts of the Old Testament to Israel's salvation from Egypt, there are surprisingly few direct references to the passover. But it has yielded rich symbolism for the New Covenant, principally through the concept of the death of the passover lamb, seen by Paul (1 Cor. 5:7) as fulfilled in Christ. It is probable that the same idea partly at least underlies the title 'Lamb of God', given to Christ by the Baptist (John 1:29). Whatever the exact calendar day, Christ's death on the cross was certainly in the general context of passover, making the fulfilment plain (Luke 22:8). Indeed, the Last Supper, the symbol of his death (Luke 22:1); if not an actual passover meal, was certainly closely connected with it.

While the passover was not exactly a sacrifice in the full legal sense of the word, still less a sin-offering (these aspects of Christ's work fulfil the sacrificial system of Israel, not the passover), yet passover was associated with a blood-ritual, as was sacrifice (Exod. 12:7). Moreover, it had not only an 'apotropaic' aspect (averting

harm), but also a substitutionary element, in that a victim must die, if the first-born of the house was to live (Exod. 12:13). It might also be said to be propitiatory, in that it turned aside God's wrath (expressed in terms of the angel of death) from the Israelite houses. All this fitted passover uniquely to be a category of understanding for the cross (1 Cor. 5:7), that mightiest act of God for man's redemption, by the blood of Christ.

The God who acts in judgment

God is a God who acts, but his activity is not limited to salvation. He is also a God who can be angry, even with his own servants (Exod. 4:14). This is an important aspect of all theology, New Testament (John 3:36) as well as Old. Certainly this is an anthropomorphism, but it corresponds to a reality, as great a reality as God's grace: it represents God's unchanging attitude of judgment on sin (and therefore on the sinner, unless he repents). Characteristically, the Old Testament does not speak of attitudes but of acts. God's anger is shown by the judgments that he brings on those that 'hate' him (Exod. 20:5), as surely as he shows his 'steadfast love' to those who love him (Exod. 20:6). If God's anger burns hot against his own people, he will consume even them (Exod. 32:10). The slaughter of rebellious Israel by the Levites after the making of the golden calf (Exod. 32:28), and the plague that followed (Exod. 32:35), were alike the outward manifestations of God's anger towards his own people. The plagues of Egypt and the overthrow of the chariots at the Red Sea were signs of his wrath towards his foes.

This again is typical of Israel's faith, seen as an interpretation of historical events. The slaughter and the plague took place, and the apostasy against God had previously taken place: that was incontrovertible. To interpret these events, Israel simply applied the same yardstick to disaster as she had done to triumph. If one was the salvation of God, the other was his punishment: the principle must be as valid one way as it was the other. Both are alike aspects of God's 'judgment', that activity of God which brings salvation to the oppressed, but punishment to the oppressor (Luke 1:52). So, while Israel crosses the Sea of Reeds in safety, Egypt's chariots are overwhelmed in the waters (Exod. 14:28, 29). Just as in all her

subsequent history, Israel will interpret every victory in terms of God's saving activity, so she will interpret all her disasters in terms of God's anger. It was this system of interpretation which alone enabled her to accept her later history without losing her faith in God. Disaster was no longer meaningless: it had its place in the purpose of God for Israel, even if it was a disciplinary purpose.

However, God's anger is never arbitrary, as that of Baal might be: we can tell what things anger him, just as we can tell what things please him and, as the history of revelation moves on, these areas become clearer and clearer. Normally it is stubborn opposition to him that arouses his anger in the case of his enemies (Exod. 14:4), while it is unfaithfulness to him that arouses his anger in the case of his own servants (Exod. 32:7-10). Both principles are expressed succinctly in the 'ten words' (Exod. 20:5, 6). It is because of this aspect of God's nature that he can describe himself as a 'jealous God' (Exod. 20:4 and 34:14) or 'zealous God', to use a word less liable to modern misunderstanding. He saves because he loves, and punishes his people because the exclusive bond of that love has been outraged. In the later pages of the Old Testament, the implications of the covenant between YHWH and Israel will be worked out in terms of the marriage bond by Hosea, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. While the actual marriage-metaphor is not used in Exodus to describe the relationship between God and his people, the seed thought is already there. So sin against God may be described as adultery (Hos. 2:2), unfaithfulness to the marriage bond. Since marriage is a form of covenant to Hebrew thought (Mal. 2:14), this is a most appropriate metaphor. What evokes God's anger is therefore a breach of personal relationships, and since God has revealed himself primarily in moral terms, this breach is normally a failure to keep his moral law, obedience to which is the greatest test of love (Exod. 20:6). Indeed, the whole moral law can be summed up, within Old Testament as New, as love to God (Deut. 6:5) and love to neighbour (Lev. 19:18).

Nowhere in the whole Old Testament is God's wrath more stressed than in the context of the revelation at Sinai (Exod. 19:16-19), at the very moment when God's grace is most in men's minds. Therefore, much of the stock symbolism, used in later days to describe God's anger, is drawn from the actual circumstances of Sinai: fire, darkness, mountains quaking (Ps. 18:7-15) – all are used.

Even in New Testament days it is still so, as can be seen from Hebrews 12:18, 19. Yet, in a sense, even this wrathful aspect of God was part of his glory (Exod. 24:17): God is glorified by his acts, whether of salvation or of judgment.

In the face of God's anger, it is not surprising that Israel was afraid (Exod. 20:19). Such fear was at once an appreciation of God's true nature, and a realization of Israel's own sinfulness. When God's holiness and man's sin were brought together, some violent reaction seemed inevitable. So their fear became, at its best, a godly 'fear of YHWH', a fear of disobedience and of its consequences. This sort of godly fear is commended in Exodus 20:20. From this time onwards, the 'fear of YHWH' becomes the Old Testament synonym for a life spent in obedience to him (Ps. 111:10). Seen in this light, there is no contradiction between the Old Testament virtue of 'fear of YHWH' and the New Testament dictum that perfect love expels fear (1 John 4:18). This is the more true, in that the very God who is angry has provided for Israel the means by which his anger can be averted: he does not delight to punish, but to save.

The God whose anger may be averted

YHWH is also the God whose wrath can be turned aside (Exod. 32:30–34). Repentance (even at times repentance of a shallow kind, like that of pharaoh) can avert it, as can intercessory prayer (Exod. 8:8). Sin-offering, too, can turn it aside (Exod. 29:10–14), though Leviticus is richer in examples of this. The supreme example of God's anger being averted is by the noble intercessory prayer of Moses after the episode of the Golden Calf (Exod. 32:32), where he identifies himself with his people in a readiness to share their very judgment (cf. Paul in Rom. 9:3). In other religions, men also believed that the anger of the gods could be averted by prayer or offering; but such prayer had for them a magical or quantitative efficacy. If we look at the contents of Moses' prayer (Exod. 32:1–14) we see the distinctiveness of Israel's faith. Moses appeals to God by his own nature revealed in past saving act and in promise of blessing. Long before, in his prayer for Sodom, Abraham had done the same (Gen. 18:22–33). This is no extortion of forgiveness from one who is unwilling to give it: this is the claiming of the loving purpose that

God has already revealed. When we read later of YHWH's Self-revelation of his own nature, we see that he is not a God who delights in wrath and judgment: his delight is in mercy (Exod. 34:6), as is made explicit in later parts of the Old Testament (Ezek. 18:23). To offer such intercessory prayer (sometimes symbolized by incense, Num. 16:46) on behalf of sinful Israel is called 'to make atonement' (Exod. 32:30). Even an offering of money to the sacred treasury may be 'an atonement' (Exod. 30:16) considered as an propitiatory offering, accepted as a ransom for the life. This leads directly to the next point.

While, as said above, God's wrath may be 'atoned' by intercessory prayer, the common use of the concept 'atonement' (usually an intensive form of the Hebrew root *kāpar*, meaning 'to cover') is in connection with animal sacrifice seen as a sin-offering. Exodus contains several instances where such animal sacrifice, and especially the blood that is shed in sacrifice, and especially the blood that is shed in sacrifice, is said to 'atone' for Aaron and his sons (Exod. 29:35, 36), or even to 'atone' for inanimate objects such as the altar (Exod. 29:37). The principle is thus clearly assumed in Exodus, which is stated clearly in Leviticus (17:11). It is shed blood, symbolizing life laid down, that 'atones' upon the altar and thus averts God's anger. In Exodus 29:36, 'atonement' is directly equated with 'sin-offering', so that the meaning of 'atonement' is clear: but 'atonement' also seems to bring with it in Exodus the thought of 'consecration' for a particular task or use (Exod. 29:37). As the Old Testament continues, the concept of atonement by sin-offering persists, and in the temple at Jerusalem it became a mighty system, extending into every department of life. There is little doubt that this concept of atonement by sacrifice stems from the principle of substitution, seen as early as the time of Abraham (Gen. 22:13). Other religions too had the idea of appeasing the wrath of gods by sacrifice: but Israel's concept was basically different. To Israel all sacrifice originated with God in any case (Lev. 17:11). It was he who ordained and accepted the sin-offering that made possible the atonement, just as he had provided the lamb for Abraham (Gen. 22:8). This, like the prayer of Moses for his people, was no extortion of forgiveness from an unwilling God: it was a way of approach to him that he had graciously granted. Further, sacrifice was not

mechanical in its effect: a good illustration is the fact that men could not practise 'high-handed' sin (Num. 15:27–31), that is wilful, open defiance of God, with the thought that afterwards they could always buy forgiveness by sacrifice. For such a man, sacrifice was of no avail. Even within the Old Testament, saints realized that it was not the sacrifice itself that averted God's wrath, but the broken contrite heart that it should ideally represent (Ps. 51:16, 17).

The most interesting use of this root 'to atone' in Exodus is the noun *kappōret* (often translated 'mercy-seat'), used as a name for the covering of the ark (Exod. 37:6). It is only fair to say that some commentators translate the word simply as 'lid', from the literal meaning of the root, 'to cover'. If, however, it does indeed mean 'atoning-place', or 'place where sin is covered' (as the Greek translation *hilasterion* would suggest), then this would be another expression of God's willingness that his anger should be turned aside from men. The ark was the very place at which God had promised to meet men (Exod. 25:22) and where he had promised to speak to them. This 'cover' for the ark was seen as YHWH's very throne (Ps. 99:1), overshadowed by the wings of the cherubim (Exod. 25:20), the locus (if we may use the term reverently) of the very presence of God. Indeed, it was because of this that the ark was seen as the symbol of God's presence. This significance of the ark can be seen by its being placed in the 'holiest place of all' within the tent (Exod. 40:21) and by its function of leading Israel, either upon the march (Num. 10:33), or into battle (Num. 10:35). Therefore, at the very heart of the concept of God's presence with Israel lay the thought of atonement and forgiveness, supplied and provided by God for his sinful people.

For a brief discussion as to the actual meaning of the word *kappōret*, see the commentary (on Exod. 37:6): but whatever the answer linguistically, it does not affect the wider issue of God's willingness to forgive. At best, it would be only a linguistic prop for a theological truth, discernible elsewhere throughout the whole of the Old Testament.

The God who speaks

It is noteworthy that, on the first occasion when the phrase 'the living God' occurs in the Old Testament, it is in connection with

God speaking (Deut. 5:26). This is one of the ways in which he shows that he is living and active: for God is a God who speaks, a God who reveals himself in word. Exodus 3:4–22 is an illustration of this truth, which needs restating today, to correct a modern imbalance. Our forefathers had laid so much emphasis on the concept of ‘the God who speaks’ that our generation has perhaps overemphasized, in an understandable reaction, the complementary biblical concept of ‘the God who acts’. What both are equally asserting is that God is a God who reveals himself to man by word and deed, that is, by explained act: as often said, in biblical theology, ‘act, plus interpretation, equals revelation’. Often in the Bible, the word comes before the act: first comes the promise, then the fulfilment of that promise. To put it in abstract terms, to say that he is the God who speaks is an assertion of the principle that God’s revelation is always intellectually comprehensible and communicable: it can be both understood by the recipient and preached to others. This is what makes possible the later sequence of prophets, with their interpretation of history, within Israel. Indeed, the call and experience of Moses at the burning bush sets the pattern for all later prophetic calls (Exod. 3:1–6). When any later prophet says ‘Thus says YHWH’ (Amos 1:3), he is asserting the same truth, like Moses, not in terms of some abstract principle, but of his own concrete personal experience. He speaks the word of YHWH because he has first heard the word of YHWH himself (Exod. 16:23).

This thought of ‘the God who speaks’ runs deep throughout Exodus. At Sinai, true, all Israel hears God’s voice, symbolized by the thunder (Exod. 19:19) and all Israel fears (Exod. 20:18). The supreme mark of Moses’ unique relationship is that God ‘speaks’ with him, face to face and openly (Exod. 33:11), unlike the indirect way in which he may communicate with others. When the great covenant is made at Sinai, it is on the basis of the ‘words’ of God (Exod. 24:8). Indeed, what we call the ‘ten commandments’ are to the Hebrew the ‘ten words’ of revelation from God (Exod. 20:1): it is only because they are God’s words of revelation that they become mandatory. Further, because he is a God who speaks, he is a God who delights to declare his own nature (Exod. 33:12–23). The beginning of this process lies in God’s revelation of the name

YHWH to Moses at the burning bush (Exod. 3:14, 15). Nowhere, however, is it brought out more clearly than in the great Self-declaration of God's 'name' (that is, his 'nature') at Horeb (Exod. 34:6, 7), in answer to Moses' prayer that God will show him his ways, that he may know him (Exod. 33:13). The word of revelation that comes is profoundly true. No man can experience God as he is, in all his wonder: but God may be known by the marks of his passing, by what he has done ('you shall see my back', Exod. 33:23). So it is God as proven in Israel's experience who will be declared, and God as Israel will yet find him to be in history.

This Self-revelation is in one sense a reiteration of the earlier revelation contained in the name YHWH, and in another sense a further amplification of it. For instance, the '*idem per idem*' construction found here, 'I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy' (Exod. 33:19) is not only an explanation of the name YHWH, but also has the same grammatical form as the earlier explanation 'I am who I am' (Exod. 3:14). For the question as to whether this construction is deliberately restrictive or not, see the commentary: it certainly emphasizes both God's activity and his complete sovereignty in that activity. It is striking that God's activity is primarily defined here in positive terms, that is, in graciousness and mercy (Exod. 33:19). So Israel had certainly proved it in her own experience. The opening phrases of the fuller declaration in the next chapter will describe him in the same way (Exod. 34:6, 7): but the closing phrases of the latter verse will also give the negative aspect of destruction ('by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity...'). That is needed to give the full picture of God. The similarity, in both respects, to Exodus 20:5, 6 has often been noticed. It is not by accident that, in both cases, this 'autokerygma', this 'Self-declaration' by God, is in the context of commandment to his people. In Exodus 20 the context is the moral decalogue, while in Exodus 34 the context is the so-called 'ritual decalogue', dealing largely with Israel's festivals. In either case, it is because of who YHWH is, and what he has shown himself to be in the life of Israel, that he has the right to command.

This Self-declaration by God continues, at an ever-deepening level, throughout the revelation of the Old Testament. For the

Christian, however, it is the coming of Jesus Christ, God's 'word' become flesh, that has made the definition of God's nature complete and final for all time. Here God has at last most truly declared himself in his Son.

The God who is transcendent

God is One who cannot be experienced directly in his fullness by mortal man. The classic expression of this truth is in Exodus 33:20: 'man shall not see me and live.' (There is only a superficial contradiction between this and Exod. 24:11; see commentary.) The same idea is conveyed in Exodus 3:2 by the introduction of the phrase 'angel of YHWH', better translated as 'YHWH's messenger'. This is not the place to enter into a discussion of biblical angelology, the more so as we are dealing with an aspect of spiritual reality beyond our modern experience. But Genesis 16:7–13 will serve as an example of the same usage earlier, with the same ambiguity as to whether what we call 'an angel' (a subordinate and created spiritual being) is meant, or whether the phrase is only a reverential substitute for the word 'God'. Older theologians used to explain such angelic visitations as 'theophanies', appearances of God himself, on earth. Indeed, many of them used to see in such manifestations 'Christophanies', appearances of the pre-incarnate Christ. While we may not agree with them completely, we may well see here an illustration of the same spiritual principle as was fulfilled in the 'word made flesh' (John 1:14). This would explain the curious alternation by which sometimes the angel appears to act independently in his own person (Exod. 3:2), while sometimes he seems to speak and act directly in the person of God himself (Exod. 3:4).

But whether we regard the phrase 'angel of YHWH' in such cases as a reverential periphrasis for God, or as a separate being, in either case the wording serves to highlight the theological problem of how to combine God's transcendence and God's active participation in the world of history – indeed, his control of that history for his purpose. This antithesis, marked though it is in Exodus, is not unique to it: it is found from the very beginning of our Bibles. On the one hand, God was transcendent and almighty (Gen. 1:1), spirit

and not flesh (Gen. 6:3), the One whose thoughts were far above those of men (Gen. 6:5). On the other hand, he was one possessed of full personality, who could be described in daring anthropomorphic terms (Gen. 3:8), and who was concerned with the smallest details of daily life. The introduction of ‘angels’ was a way, in the providence of God, in which both aspects could be asserted simultaneously.

Though God cannot be experienced directly, yet something of his presence we may know. He is a God of ‘glory’: it is typical of Exodus to say ‘the glory of YHWH appeared in the cloud’ (Exod. 16:10). Hebrew *kəbôd* (literally ‘weight’, and metaphorically ‘dignity’) is one of the words used to denote the presence of God when manifested to men. Usually it brings with it, not only the thought of the splendour of God, but also something of his awfulness, as in this instance. Mortal men must fear when they see God’s glory, as Israel feared to see even the reflected glory shining on the face of Moses, when he returned from communion with God on the mountain-top (Exod. 34:29–35). As far as we can tell, some form of brightness is intended. In Exodus 24:17, God’s glory on Mount Sinai is compared to ‘devouring fire’, appearing in the middle of the dark cloud. Certainly something similar was conveyed by the later word ‘*shəkinab*’ (literally ‘dwelling’), used to describe the visible symbol of God’s presence in tent or temple. The link between ‘glory’ and ‘dwelling’ is that God’s ‘glory’ is said in Exodus to ‘dwell’ in the completed tent (Exod. 40:34); indeed, that is the sole object of building it.

Sometimes, therefore, when God displays his glory, it shows his favour, as in this case: sometimes however it shows his anger (Exod. 16:10). This follows directly from what has been said above (‘fire’ is a two-edged symbol) and may be compared with God’s twofold activity in salvation and judgment. God gets glory in and by his people (Isa. 49:3), but he also gets glory by overthrowing pharaoh and his army (Exod. 14:4). The word ‘glory’ may therefore be considered as a virtual synonym for the revealed and acknowledged presence of God as he is, in all his godhead; indeed it is a periphrasis for God’s very being. So too the word seems to be used in the New Testament: that is why we see in Christ the very glory of God.

The God who lives among his people

He is a God who will live among his people (Exod. 29:45). This aspect is sometimes called the 'theology of the presence', and is a recurrent note throughout the entire book of Exodus. We have mentioned something of it under the heading of God's 'glory', but the theme is wider still. God's basic promise to Israel is 'My presence will go with you' (Exod. 33:14). By contrast, Moses' prayer is that, if God's presence does not accompany Israel, he will not lead them to Canaan at all (Exod. 33:15). To Moses, the whole distinctiveness of Israel lies in this accompanying presence of God. So important is this 'theology of the presence' that a commentary on Exodus such as that by Henton Davies will see it as the centre of the thought of the book. Initially, the call of Moses is a confrontation with the presence of God (Exod. 3:5). It is the presence of God that enables Israel to cross the sea, but overwhelms the Egyptians, just as it is the presence of God that leads and protects Israel in the wilderness (Exod. 14:19, 20). When YHWH passes before Moses and 'proclaims the name of YHWH' (Exod. 34:5) it is a proclamation of the nature of that presence. The whole process of the making of the covenant (Exod. 24:1-11) and the giving of the law (Exod. 20) is a guarantee of the reality of this presence.

Lastly, the entire aim of the construction of the tent is so that God's presence may be experienced in the very midst of Israel (Exod. 25:8). The crowning glory of the tent's completion is when Israel has visible proof that this has actually happened (Exod. 40:35). The book ends with the confident assurance that this same Presence will indeed continue to go with Israel, lead her into Canaan, and give her that 'rest' (Exod. 33:14) which will be the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham (Gen. 13:15). As mentioned, this Presence is emphasized by the very plan of construction of the tent, and symbolized particularly by the ark, resting in the holiest place of all, in the very centre of God's people. In later days in Israel, the 'static' symbolism of God's dwelling at Jerusalem (Ps. 9:11), especially in Solomon's temple (Ps. 20:2), replaced the 'dynamic' symbolism of early days, where a movable tent and a portable ark did less to 'localize' his presence. There were of course abuses possible in either case: Hophni and Phinehas thought of God's presence as

automatically guaranteed by the ark (1 Sam. 4:3), just as the later Hebrews thought it automatically guaranteed by the temple at Jerusalem (Jer. 7:4). The fate of the sanctuary at Shiloh should have warned them otherwise (Jer. 7:12). Yet, in spite of abuses and misunderstandings, the most prized promise of the Old Testament was still God's promise to live among his people (Isa. 7:14), and, in the coming of Jesus Christ, the prophecy of a coming 'Immanuel' (God in our midst) came true at last. Henceforth, the presence of God is directly, not indirectly, among men for evermore (Rev. 21:3): type and figure have passed away, because reality has come in Christ.

Excursus 1: The date of the exodus

The date of the exodus is not a matter on which we can make dogmatic assertions: equally great scholars and equally devout Christians have differed, and will doubtless continue to differ here. The matter is not one of orthodoxy or conservatism, but of historical judgment in an area where evidence is scanty. Providentially, it is not a question that affects the theology of the book, provided that we accept the historic fact that the exodus took place, and the interpretation that makes it the supreme 'act of God' leading to Israel's salvation. It is doubtful if any later Hebrew knew its exact chronological date, and even more doubtful if he would have cared. Nevertheless, since we accept the historicity of the exodus, we may well enquire as to its probable date.

One of the difficulties in such enquiry is that, apart from the two store-cities built for pharaoh by Israel (Exod. 1:11), there are no proper names in the story to pin the events to known Egyptian history: even the title 'pharaoh', 'king', is anonymous throughout. All we know is that the pharaoh of the exodus was not apparently the pharaoh of the oppression (Exod. 4:19). A second difficulty is that Egyptian history makes no mention of the event at all. True, some would identify the exodus with the expulsion by the victorious Egyptians of the Hyksos, hated Semitic conquerors, in 1550 BC. But this sort of military action is worlds apart from the exodus of the biblical account. In any case, it is too early to match the archaeological evidence for the presence of Israel in Canaan. Silence is not, however, an argument against the historicity of the exodus.