

# **The book of Exodus and New Testament Soteriology**

T. Desmond Alexander<sup>1</sup>

## **ABSTRACT**

The Exodus account of God's rescue of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt describes the greatest salvific event found in the Old Testament. As a story that concludes with Yahweh dwelling among the Israelites, it highlights how people may come into a more intimate relationship with God. In this light of this, it is noteworthy that New Testament writers draw heavily on the book of Exodus to explain the soteriological significance of Jesus Christ's death, resurrection and ascension. This article surveys the process of salvation that is described in the book of Exodus, focusing especially on Passover and the covenant ratified at Mount Sinai. This provides a foundation for exploring some of the ways in which New Testament writers address soteriological concepts that are centred on Jesus Christ.

**KEY WORDS:** Exodus, Passover, Covenant, Sanctification, Soteriology

## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this article is to explore how a holistic reading of the book of Exodus might inform our understanding of New Testament soteriology. It is the author's conviction that the book of Exodus provides a paradigm of divine salvation that shapes how New Testament writers explain the soteriological significance of Jesus Christ. This article does not pretend to offer a fully comprehensive outworking of its central thesis. Rather it indicates with broad brushstrokes the basis for believing that a strong link exists between the book of Exodus and New Testament soteriology.

The book of Exodus narrates a remarkable story of divine activity that centres on the liberation of Israelite slaves from Egypt. This is then followed by their transformation into a nation that has the privilege of living in the presence of the God of all creation. With good reason, God's deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt is viewed as 'the foundational salvific event of the Old

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Alexander is Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Director of Postgraduate Studies at Union Theological College, Belfast, N. Ireland. He can be contacted at [t.d.alexander@union.ac.uk](mailto:t.d.alexander@union.ac.uk).

Testament.<sup>2</sup> No other period in Old Testament history compares in significance with the exodus from Egypt and the subsequent events at Mount Sinai. It is the premise of this essay that, from a biblical theology perspective, the book of Exodus models the process by which alienated humans are reconciled to God and, importantly, this model informs the New Testament understanding of how salvation comes through Jesus Christ.

In its present literary context, Exodus is penned as a sequel to Genesis. Set against the background of humanity being alienated from God, Exodus draws on promises of hope that recurs throughout Genesis. Exodus needs to be read within this larger context.

At its most basic, the Exodus narrative recounts how the Israelites come into a personal relationship with God. At the outset of the Exodus narrative, they are far from God, under the control of an anti-god figure. In the opening chapters of Exodus, the Israelites are forced to serve successive Egyptian pharaohs, who are presented as opposing Yahweh. By the end of the book, the Israelites have entered voluntarily into a unique covenant relationship with Yahweh, which results in God living in their midst. Salvation is understood in terms of how people who initially are at a distance from God come to be in his presence. Exodus describes how a particular group of people establish a close relationship with God. As we shall see, this involves, among other things, the consecration of people to a holy status.

The theme of knowing God permeates the entire Exodus narrative in multiple ways. It is highlighted in Pharaoh's response to Moses and Aaron: 'Who is Yahweh that I should heed him by releasing Israel? I do not know Yahweh and moreover I will not release Israel' (Exod. 5:2; author's translation). Responding to Pharaoh's ignorance of Yahweh, the signs and wonders episodes abound in statements about making God known to both Israelites and Egyptians (Exod. 6:3-7; 7:5, 17; 8:10[6], 22[18]; 9:14, 16, 29; 10:1-2; 11:7; cf. 14:4; 18). The theme of knowing God underlies the covenant or friendship treaty ratified at Mount Sinai. Emphasising the relational nature of knowing God, the Sinai covenant prepares the way for God to reside among the Israelites. Ultimately, knowing God does not merely involve acquiring information about him. Rather,

---

<sup>2</sup> B. D. Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif*, (Downer's Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2018), 184. C. J. H. Wright, "Reading the Old Testament Missionally," in *Reading the Bible Missionally*, ed. M. W. Goheen, (The Gospel and Our Culture; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 116, describes the exodus as the 'primary model of redemption in the Old Testament (primary both chronologically and theologically).'

it is about having a relationship with him. For the Israelites, Yahweh moves from being a remote deity to being a God who lives among them, sharing their nomadic existence as they journey to the promised land.

Exodus describes how God makes himself known through both actions and words. From beginning to end Yahweh takes the initiative so that the Israelites and others may know him. From appearing to Moses as a flame of fire (Exod. 3:2) to descending as a pillar of fire-and-cloud on the newly erected tent-sanctuary (Exod. 40:34–38), the Exodus narrative recounts how God reveals himself. Like a multifaceted diamond, the Exodus story ‘witnesses to God’s compassion, faithfulness, glory, holiness, justice, majesty, mercy and power.’<sup>3</sup>

Working with the premise that Exodus presents us with a paradigm of divine salvation, how should we determine the shape of the paradigm? What features are most significant?

To begin, it should be emphasised that we can only comprehend accurately the nature of salvation by reading Exodus as a whole. Salvation in Exodus is a process with various components. What may only be seen partially in one passage is often supplemented by what is said elsewhere. Our reading of Exodus must take into consideration the subtle allusions and parallels that are created by the author of the book. By way of illustration, it is important to recognise that in Exodus the tabernacle is portrayed as a model of Mount Sinai. This creates a series of connections that are based on the concept of graded holiness.<sup>4</sup> Recalling an observation of Nachmanides, Jacob Milgrom writes:

Mount Sinai is the archetype of the Tabernacle, and is similarly divided into three gradations of holiness. Its summit is the Holy of Holies; God’s voice issues forth from there (Exod. 19:20) as from the inner shrine (Exod. 25:22; Num. 7:89); the mountaintop is off limits to priest and layman alike (Exod. 19:24*b*) and its very sight is punishable by death (Exod. 19:21*b*), and so with its Tabernacle counterpart (cf. Lev. 16:2 and Num. 4:20); finally, Moses alone is privileged to ascend to the top (Exod. 19:20*b*; see 34:2*b*) just as later, the high priest is permitted entry to the inner shrine under special safeguards (Lev. 16:2*ff.*).

The second division of Sinai is the equivalent of the outer shrine, marked off from the rest of the mountain by being enveloped in a cloud (Exod. 20:21;

---

<sup>3</sup> T. D. Alexander, *Exodus*, (Apollos OT Commentary 2; London: Apollos, 2017), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. P. P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*, (JSOTSup 106; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).

24:15ff. [P]; see 19:9, 16) just as the cloud overspreads the entirety of the Tabernacle (Num. 9:15ff.) .... Below the cloud is the third division .... Here is where the altar and stelae are erected (24:4). It is equivalent to the courtyard, the sacred enclosure of the Tabernacle.<sup>5</sup>

When Mount Sinai is viewed as the ‘archetype’ of the tabernacle,<sup>6</sup> the process by which the Israelites become holy to ascend the mountain in Exodus 24 may be helpfully compared with the ritual described in Exodus 29 for the consecration of the priests for service within the ‘tent of meeting.’<sup>7</sup> The instructions for the consecration of the high priest in Exodus 29 parallel, but in greater detail and with more intensity, the description of the consecration of the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai in Exodus 24.<sup>8</sup> Both accounts describe how

---

<sup>5</sup> J. Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology, I: The Encroacher and the Levite: The Term ‘Aboda*, (University of California Publications Near Eastern Studies 14; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 44-45; cf. M. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 190; A. M. Rodriguez, ‘Sanctuary Theology in the Book of Exodus,’ *AUSS*, 24 (1986) 131-137; N. M. Sarna, *Exodus*, (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 105; N. M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel*, (New York: Schocken, 1996), 203; M. Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, (Oxford/New York: OUP, 1999), 59-64; G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, (New Studies in Biblical Theology 17; Leicester: Apollos, 2004), 105; Alexander, *Exodus*, 563-565.

<sup>6</sup> Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology, I: The Encroacher and the Levite: The Term ‘Aboda*, 46, fn. 173.

<sup>7</sup> Whereas the tent is designated a *miškān* ‘dwelling place’ 19 times in 25:1-27:19, it is called an *‘ohel mō‘ēd* ‘tent of meeting’ 15 times in 27:20-30:38. The exclusive use of *‘ohel mō‘ēd* in 27:20-30:38 is linked to the consecration of the high priest, underlining the nature of his special role as mediator between God and the Israelites. See R. E. Hendrix, ‘The Use of *miškān* and *‘ohel-mō‘ēd* in Exodus 25-40,’ *AUSS*, 30 (1992) 6-13; cf. R. E. Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. D. Alexander and D. W. Baker, (Downers Grove/Leicester: IVP, 2003), 809–810.

<sup>8</sup> The more detailed instructions for the consecration of the high priest reflect the high priest’s need to be holier than other priests. As the one who meets daily with Yahweh, the process by which the high priest is made holy models best what is necessary to facilitate human interaction with God. Yet, even the Aaronic high priest is not permitted to come into God’s presence but must remain behind the curtain that separates the holy place from the most holy place. Aaron’s role as high priest resembles that of Moses ascending and descending the Mount Sinai. The more detailed instructions in ch. 29 also involve the purification of the bronze altar through the offering of a ‘purification/sin offering’ (Exod. 29:10-14). The altar mentioned in ch. 24 does not require to be purified because it is made of natural stones (cf. Exod. 20:25). For a fuller discussion of the altar instructions in Exodus 20, see B. Foreman, ‘Sacrifice and Centralisation in the Pentateuch: is Exodus 20:24-26 Really at Odds with Deuteronomy?’, *TynBul*, 70 (2019) 12-16.

people acquire a holy status and move towards God through rituals that involve whole-burnt/ascension and peace/fellowship offerings. Although the accounts in chs. 24 and 29 are quite different in terms of content, there are clear points of similarity. Both chapters share common features associated with the concept of consecration.

Importantly, the two consecration rituals in chs. 24 and 29 have elements in common with the Passover ritual recorded in Exodus 12.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, it is worth observing what is said in Exodus 13:2. Yahweh says to Moses, 'Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether human or animal' (NIV). This theme of consecration is later picked up in Numbers 3:11-13 when the Levites become substitutes for the firstborn males.

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be mine, for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn in Israel, both of man and of beast. They shall be mine: I am the LORD." (Num. 3:11-13 ESV)

This reference to the consecration of the firstborn at Passover is echoed later in Numbers 8:

For they are wholly given to me from among the people of Israel. Instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the people of Israel, I have taken them for myself. For all the firstborn among the people of Israel are mine, both of man and of beast. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I consecrated them for myself, and I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the people of Israel. (Num. 8:16-18 ESV)

As we shall see shortly, acquiring a holy status is an important element in the process of salvation; only those who are holy may come safely into God's presence.

There are, however, other aspects to the process by which the Israelites come to know God personally. As a model of divine salvation, the Exodus story describes how God delivers the Israelites from oppression under the king of Egypt. The story, however, is not merely recorded to narrate the deliverance of the people, remarkable as this is. This liberation has a significant theological

---

<sup>9</sup> These will be considered in more detail below.

component. This is intimated at the start of Exodus when Pharaoh is portrayed as resisting God's plan for humanity. Pharaoh's exploitation of the Israelites is set against the background of the people being fruitful, multiplying and filling the land (Exod. 1:7). The vocabulary used in Exodus 1:7 recalls clearly Genesis 1:28. The wording of 1:7 underlines that the Israelites are fulfilling God's creation mandate. However, Pharaoh does all in his power to oppose this. The Egyptian king, who is viewed as a deity by his own people, is subtly portrayed as opposing God's purposes. From the outset Exodus portrays Pharaoh as Yahweh's archenemy, with the king's malevolent actions underlining his evil nature.

In spite of the intransigence of successive Egyptian kings, God reassures Moses that he will free the Israelites from the yoke of Egyptian oppression, redeeming the people 'with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment' (Exod. 6:6; NIV). Later, after the decimation of Pharaoh's chariot force at the Lake of Reeds, the Israelites celebrate their divine redemption, echoing God's earlier promise: 'You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode' (Exod. 15:13 ESV). In both Exodus 6:6 and 15:13 the Hebrew verb *ga'al* is used to denote redemption.

The concept of divine redemption from evil powers is an important component in the Exodus story, but this of itself is insufficient to restore a harmonious relationship between God and the Israelites. To achieve this outcome, the Exodus story underscores through various episodes that before the Israelites may come into God's presence they need to be ransomed from death, purified from sin's defilement and endowed with a holy status. All of these elements are essential if people are to be restored to the special status that Adam and Eve had before God expelled them from the Garden of Eden.

## PASSOVER AND CONSECRATION

Although it is rarely appreciated, the account of the Passover in Exodus 12 is theologically significant as regards understanding the paradigm of salvation that is developed in the book of Exodus. As the climax to the signs and wonders that Yahweh performs in Egypt, the Passover is central to God's redemption of the Israelites from Pharaoh's control. At the heart of Passover is the consecration of the firstborn. In the light of this, it is noteworthy that the account of Passover contains elements that are associated elsewhere in Exodus with the consecration of people. Striking parallels exist between the Passover ritual, the ratification of the Sinai covenant (Exod. 24:1-11) and the process by which the Aaronic priest

are sanctified (Exod. 29:1-37; Lev. 8:1-36).<sup>10</sup> In all three cases, animal sacrifices are offered, blood is sprinkled and a meal is eaten, involving sacrificial meat. While the circumstances differ, in each context a process occurs by which people are consecrated to a holier status.<sup>11</sup>

One unexpected feature of the Passover account in Exodus 12 is the need for the firstborn Israelite males to be delivered from death. This necessity is especially noteworthy, for on all previous occasions when God struck Egypt, he carefully distinguished the Israelites from the Egyptians, ensuring that no hardship comes on the Israelites. The death threat concerning the firstborn Israelite males introduces a new dimension into the story. It reveals that deliverance from death is a necessary component in the process of consecration. Before people can be restored to a fully harmonious relationship with God, death must be overcome, reversing the punishment that came on humanity when Adam and Eve betrayed God in the Garden of Eden. To this end, the Exodus story introduces the concept of a sacrificial ransom that delivers the firstborn males from death. The animals that are sacrificed die in the place of the firstborn males.

While the concept of ransom is not mentioned specifically in Exodus 12, it comes in Exodus 13:13-15, which records directions for remembering the Passover in the future. Firstborn male donkeys are to be ransomed from death through the offering of a suitable substitute. Something similar appears to be intended for firstborn male Israelites. These instructions involve the concept of 'ransom', using the verb *pādāh* (cf. Exod. 34:20). The specific mention in Exodus 13 of a substitute being offered to save a life strongly suggests that a similar principle is at work when the Passover sacrifices are made. The animals die as substitutes for the Israelite firstborn males.

In a further development at a later stage, God instructs that male Levites should become substitutes for all firstborn Israelite males (Num. 3:41-51). This process also involves the payment of a ransom. Designated by God as substitutes, the Levites replace all the firstborn males who have been consecrated to Yahweh through the Passover (compare Exod. 13:2 and Num. 3:45). When the Levites replace the firstborn males, the holy status of the latter is transferred to the

---

<sup>10</sup> Cf. J. A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6*, (JSOTSup 395; London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 119-124.

<sup>11</sup> While Exodus 12 is the first episode of significance that focuses on the motif of consecration, the actions of Zipporah in rescuing Moses from death may prefigure this (cf. 4:24-26). See Alexander, *Exodus*, 106-107.

former. For this reason, the Levites, and they alone, are authorised to serve at the tabernacle/temple.

Apart from ransoming the firstborn Israelite males from death, the sacrificial animals contribute other elements to the Passover ritual. Special instructions are given that involve the sprinkling of blood on the door frames of the Israelite houses (Exod. 12:7, 22). This action is probably viewed by the ancient Israelites as ritually cleansing all those who entered through the doors.<sup>12</sup> The mention of hyssop<sup>13</sup> points in the direction of purification.

Finally, very precise directions are given concerning the cooking of the sacrificial meat and its consumption by the people. The nature of these instructions implies that the Passover meal differs from other meals. The combination of sacrificial meat and unleavened bread reappears in the instructions for the consecration of the Aaronic priests in Exodus 29. Although the narrative in Exodus 12 does not mention the concept of consecration, Exodus 13:2 refers specifically to the firstborn males being consecrated and belonging to God.

Strong links exist between Passover and the consecration of the high priest in Exodus 29, although the instructions for the latter are much more detailed, as befits his holier status. Nevertheless, the same pattern is evident. When the relationship between the rituals in chs. 12, 24 and 29 is appreciated fully, the Exodus story reveals a process of salvation that focuses on ransom from the domain of death, purification from the uncleanness of defilement from sin, and consecration from common to holy status. Bringing the fuller Exodus narrative into view, we can include, as we have already noted, redemption from the powers of evil. To this we may add another component: the making of a friendship treaty/covenant that binds those redeemed by God into an exclusive relationship with him. This underlines the relational dimension of knowing God.

---

<sup>12</sup> Before the Israelites can become God's people they need to be ransomed from the domain of death and purified from the defilement of sin. Both of these elements are essential to the process of atonement (J. Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions*, (Hebrew Bible Monographs 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 44-79) and both are found at the heart of the Passover ritual. The use of blood for cleansing is described more fully in Exodus 29.

<sup>13</sup> Although the Hebrew term *'ēzōb* is frequently translated 'hyssop,' a more accurate translation would be 'marjoram' (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes: The Pentateuch (Exodus-Leviticus)*, vol. 2, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1864), 22; C. Houtman, *Exodus. Vol. 1, Chapters 1:1-7:13*, (HCOT; Kampen: Kok, 1993), 164; W. H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (Anchor Bible 2A; New York: Doubleday, 1999), 407).

## ESTABLISHING A COVENANT RELATIONSHIP

According to Exodus 15:17, God's purpose in rescuing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt is that they should dwell with him on his holy mountain. With this aim in view, God brings the Israelites to another mountain, Mount Sinai, where he establishes a special covenant relationship with them. The events at Mount Sinai anticipate and prepare for the Israelites living with God on his holy mountain.

At Mount Sinai God invites the Israelites to enter a covenant relationship with him. If they are prepared to obey him and keep his covenant, they will become 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Exod. 19:6 ESV). God grants the Israelites the privilege of potentially becoming a kingdom of priests (Exod. 19:6),<sup>14</sup> who will fulfil God's original commission to humanity at creation. The Hebrew expression *mamleket kōhānīm* is best understood as denoting 'a body of priests ruling as kings,' a reading that is reflected in the earliest translations into Greek and Aramaic.

Once the covenant relationship is established, God gives instructions for the construction of a portable sanctuary, where he will dwell among the Israelites. This underlines that the people have come to know God relationally.

The transformation of the Israelites into a holy nation rests on the grace of God. By God's initiative and power, they are brought to Mount Sinai, carried on eagles' wings (Exod. 19:4). Yet Exodus reveals that this is not cheap grace. If the Israelites are to have a covenant relationship with God, they must obey God

---

<sup>14</sup> See R. B. Y. Scott, 'A Kingdom of Priests (Exodus xix 6),' *Oudtestamentische Studiën*, 8 (1950) 213-219. As Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes: The Pentateuch (Exodus-Leviticus)*, 97, remark, 'Israel was to be a regal body of priests to Jehovah, and not merely a nation of priests governed by Jehovah' (Keil and Delitzsch 1864a: 97). Supporting this interpretation of *mamleket kōhānīm*, W. H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19-40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, (Anchor Bible 2B; New York: Doubleday, 2006), 158, draws attention to other elements within the narrative that point in a similar direction: in 19:10-15 all of the Israelites are to consecrate themselves by way of preparing to ascend Mount Sinai into God's presence; 22:31[30] requires all Israelites to be holy; those who offer sacrifices in 24:5 are designated 'young men' and are not 'hereditary clergy.' See also W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology*, (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984), 80-105; J. L. Ska, "Exode 19,3b-6 et l'identité de l'Israël postexilique," in *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction - Reception - Interpretation*, ed. M. Vervenne, (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium, 126; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1996), 298-299; Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6*, 63-100.

and keep his covenant (Exod. 19:5). Yahweh demands of the Israelites exclusive and total obedience if they are to become priestly monarchs and live as a holy nation in God's presence. The obligations of the covenant are designed to order and shape the Israelite community so that the people's behaviour resembles that of Yahweh. Compassion and integrity are to be prominent characteristics of God's holy people.

The covenant or friendship treaty established at Mount Sinai brings the Israelites into a unique relationship with God. This is necessary if they are to dwell with God on his holy mountain in the land of Canaan. Strikingly, Mount Sinai and Mount Zion are linked by the portable sanctuary, which Yahweh instructs the Israelites to build. Symbolically, the Israelites take Mount Sinai with them on their onward journey to the promised land. This underlines that the events in the Exodus story lay the foundation for Israel's future relationship with Yahweh.

#### GOD AS SAVIOUR AND SOVEREIGN

Viewed as a whole, the Exodus story emphasizes Yahweh's role as both saviour and sovereign. While the first half of Exodus gives prominence to God's saving the Israelites from slavery, his majestic power is demonstrated through the signs and wonders that lead eventually to the destruction of Pharaoh's chariot force. In celebration of their dramatic deliverance at the Lake of Reeds the Israelites extol God's majesty (Exod. 15:6, 11). Although the second half of Exodus stresses the lordship and majesty of Yahweh through a covenant that demands exclusive allegiance and a portable sanctuary constructed for a royal inhabitant, his compassion and mercy are highlighted by his willingness to forgive the rebellious Israelites and renew the covenant relationship that is endangered by the golden calf/bull incident (Exod. 32:1-34:33).

Exodus highlights how Yahweh comes as saviour and sovereign to bring the Israelites into a special relationship with himself. The sequence of events described in Exodus provides a distinctive paradigm for understanding the process by which alienated humans are brought closer to God. In this respect Exodus is unique in the Old Testament.

The Exodus account of the process by which the Israelites become God's holy people is followed in the book of Leviticus by descriptions of rituals that are designed to maintain the holy status of the nation, removing any defilement that threatens the God's presence in their midst. These rituals have much in common with the process of salvation that is set out in the book of Exodus, but a

distinction should be carefully drawn between rituals that inaugurate the covenant relationship and those that maintain it.

## EXODUS FORESHADOWS A GREATER SALVATION

The events recorded in Exodus are presented as describing the process by which the Israelites experience divine salvation, but these events merely foreshadow a greater salvation that is yet to come. The salvation paradigm revealed in Exodus becomes the basis for Old Testament expectations regarding a future, greater exodus. Several features point toward this.

Firstly, although the Israelites have the privilege of knowing God more closely, they do not enjoy unhindered access into God's presence. Even Moses is not permitted to see Yahweh's face. In Exodus Moses' relationship with God becomes more intimate - from hiding his face in fear before Yahweh in Exodus 3:6 to asking to see God's glory in Exodus 33:18 - but at most he is permitted to see only God's back (Exod. 33:23). The limitation placed on Moses reflects the limitation of the covenant established at Mount Sinai. The remarkable events at Mount Sinai involve a partial restoration of humanity's broken relationship with God, but this falls short of being a complete restoration. The Israelites are brought closer to God, but they still cannot come into his immediate presence.

Secondly, the Exodus story reveals that the Israelites are prone to disobey Yahweh. Their wayward actions are a constant barrier to them becoming fully the holy nation that God desires. As God's initial proposal in Exodus 19:6-7 highlights, the Israelites special status is conditional on their faithful and exclusive obedience to him, a point underlined by the three-fold mention of the Israelites affirming their willingness to obey God (Exod. 19:8; 24:4,7). Unfortunately, even before they depart from Mount Sinai their proneness to disobey is illustrated by their making a golden idol (Exod. 32:1-6).

Thirdly, the tabernacle is but a model of the heavenly sanctuary (Exod. 25:9). There is an expectation of something more permanent to come. In addition, the regulations associated with the Sinai covenant presuppose a world in which uncleanness remains a dynamic force, having the power to disrupt the holy status of the Israelites. Viewed as a microcosm, the tabernacle illustrates the idea that one day God's glory will fill the whole earth.<sup>15</sup> At this stage God's holy presence is restricted to the Holy of Holies.

---

<sup>15</sup> See T. D. Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 31-42.

Our analysis of Exodus reveals that the story of God's deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt provides a paradigm of salvation involving redemption, ransom, cleansing, consecration and a covenant relationship. How is this paradigm reflected in the New Testament?

#### THE INFLUENCE OF EXODUS ON NEW TESTAMENT SOTERIOLOGY

In the light of Old Testament prophetic expectations of a greater exodus, New Testament writers adopt the Exodus paradigm of salvation to interpret the significance of Jesus Christ, especially his death at Passover. The apostle Paul captures in a sentence this connection when he writes: 'For Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed' (1 Cor. 5:7; ESV). In a similar fashion, the apostle Peter speaks of Jesus Christ as 'a lamb without blemish or defect' (1 Pet. 1:19 NIV). The context suggests that Peter has Passover in mind. He subsequently remarks that those ransomed by Christ's blood (1 Pet. 1:18) become 'a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession' (1 Pet. 2:9 NIV), an obvious allusion to the Exodus story (Exod. 19:6). The concept of ransom is associated with Jesus Christ frequently throughout the New Testament (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; Luke 1:68; 2:38; 21:28; 24:18; Rom. 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7, 14; Col. 1:14; 1 Tim. 2:6, 14; Heb. 9:12, 15). Unfortunately, because many of these references are brief, we cannot always be certain that they allude to Passover, although this possibility is not ruled out.

In describing Jesus Christ as the source of eternal life, John's Gospel presents Jesus Christ as a Passover sacrifice, a link confirmed by John's remark that Jesus' bones were not broken, like those of the Passover sacrifice (John 19:31–37; cf. Exod. 12:46; Num. 9:12). In the light of Jesus' death, it seems likely that the author of John's Gospel interprets John the Baptist's remarks about Jesus being the 'Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29; cf. 1:36) as denoting the Passover lamb. While some New Testament scholars claim that Passover has no soteriological significance, this reflects a failure on their part to appreciate the true nature of Passover as a consecration ritual. Elsewhere in John's Gospel, Jesus' statements about eating his flesh and drinking his blood (John 6:53–58) and about being freed from slavery to sin (John 8:34–36) make best sense when viewed in the light of Passover.<sup>16</sup> This special interest in Passover is reflected in the fact that compared to the Synoptic Gospels, John's

---

<sup>16</sup> See P. M. Hoskins, 'Deliverance from Death by the True Passover Lamb: A Significant Aspect of the Fulfillment of the Passover in the Gospel of John,' *JETS*, 52 (2009) 285-299; P. M. Hoskins, 'Freedom from Slavery to Sin and the Devil: John 8:31-47 and the Passover Theme of the Gospel of John,' *Trinity Journal*, 31 (2010) 47-63.

Gospel mentions three annual celebrations (John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55). Passover is important in John's Gospel.

As a consecration ritual, Passover highlights the importance of people being made holy so that they may come close to God. Possibly drawing on Passover, the author of Hebrews states that Jesus Christ is 'the one who makes people holy' (Heb. 2:11 NIV). Later, he repeats this claim on two occasions. He writes, 'We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all' (Heb. 10:10 NIV); 'And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood' (Heb. 13:12 NIV). Acknowledging the importance of sanctification, the apostle Paul regularly speaks of the followers of Jesus Christ being 'holy ones' or 'saints' (e.g. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2).<sup>17</sup>

## A NEW COVENANT

The Exodus story records how the Israelites enter a covenant relationship with Yahweh. Through this friendship treaty, they agree to serve him faithfully and exclusively. However, subsequent events reveal that due to their persistent disobedience their unique relationship with God is constantly under threat. Eventually, the prophet Jeremiah announces, in line with other prophets, that God will establish a new covenant with his people (Jer. 31:31–34; cf. Isa. 54:10; 55:3; 61:8; Ezek. 34:25; 37:26–27; Jer. 32:40). This new covenant is later mediated through Jesus Christ (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; 2 Cor. 3:6), with the author of Hebrews extolling its many advantages over the covenant made at Mount Sinai (Heb. 8:8; 9:15; 12:24).

While God comes to dwell *among* his people at Mount Sinai, through the new covenant God comes through the Holy Spirit to dwell *within* his people.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, the Aaronic high priesthood and cultic activities associated with the old covenant become redundant (cf. Heb. 7:12). With his ascension, Jesus Christ becomes high priest in the heavenly sanctuary. Whereas under the old covenant the Holy Spirit equipped individuals to manufacture the tabernacle, under the new covenant the Holy Spirit bestows grace-gifts for the building of an organic temple. Illustrating this correspondence, the apostle Paul describes

---

<sup>17</sup> See the fuller discussion in D. Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, (Leicester: Apollos, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> See J. M. Hamilton, Jr., *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, (NAC Studies in Bible & Theology; Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2006).

himself as a master builder, who, like Bezalel with the tabernacle, lays a foundation on which others can build (1 Cor. 3:10; cf. Exod. 31:2-5; 35:30-35).

## CONCLUSION

Without exhausting every detail, a strong case can be made for claiming that the book of Exodus provides a model that exemplifies the process necessary for repairing the broken relationship that exists between a holy God and aberrant humanity. The means by which the Israelites come to experience God's presence in their midst includes the following: redemption from the powers of evil; ransom from the domain of death; purification from defilement; consecration or sanctification to be holy; the establishment of a covenant relationship. This list is not exhaustive, but it emphasizes the importance of understanding biblical soteriology in a way that embraces a variety of important, complementary elements.<sup>19</sup>

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

T. D. Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009).

T. D. Alexander, *Exodus* (Apollos OT Commentary 2; London: Apollos, 2017).

R. E. Averbeck. 'Tabernacle.' In *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, edited by T. D. Alexander and D. W. Baker (Downers Grove/Leicester: IVP, 2003), pp. 807-827.

G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (New Studies in Biblical Theology 17; Leicester: Apollos, 2004).

J. A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6* (JSOTSup 395; London: T&T Clark International, 2004).

M. Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford/New York: OUP, 1999).

---

<sup>19</sup> This is a revised version of a lecture that was presented to the Tyndale Fellowship Biblical Theology Study Group in 2019. The author is especially thankful for feedback received from those who were present.

- W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984).
- B. D. Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2018).
- B. Foreman. 'Sacrifice and Centralisation in the Pentateuch: is Exodus 20:24-26 Really at Odds with Deuteronomy?' *TynBul*, 70 (2019) 1-21.
- J. M. Hamilton, Jr., *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments* (NAC Studies in Bible & Theology; Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2006).
- M. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).
- R. E. Hendrix. 'The Use of *miškān* and *'ōhel-mô'ēd* in Exodus 25-40.' *AUSS*, 30 (1992) 3-13.
- P. M. Hoskins. 'Deliverance from Death by the True Passover Lamb: A Significant Aspect of the Fulfillment of the Passover in the Gospel of John.' *JETS*, 52 (2009) 285-299.
- P. M. Hoskins. 'Freedom from Slavery to Sin and the Devil: John 8:31-47 and the Passover Theme of the Gospel of John.' *Trinity Journal*, 31 (2010) 47-63.
- C. Houtman, *Exodus. Vol. 1, Chapters 1:1-7:13* (HCOT; Kampen: Kok, 1993).
- P. P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (JSOTSup 106; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992).
- C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes: The Pentateuch (Exodus-Leviticus)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1864).
- J. Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology, I: The Encroacher and the Levite: The Term 'Aboda* (University of California Publications Near Eastern Studies 14; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).
- D. Peterson, *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness* (Leicester: Apollos, 1995).
- W. H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 2A; New York: Doubleday, 1999).

- W. H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19-40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible 2B; New York: Doubleday, 2006).
- A. M. Rodriguez. 'Sanctuary Theology in the Book of Exodus.' *AUSS*, 24 (1986) 127-145.
- N. M. Sarna, *Exodus* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991).
- N. M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1996).
- R. B. Y. Scott. 'A Kingdom of Priests (Exodus xix 6).' *Oudtestamentische Studiën*, 8 (1950) 213-219.
- J. L. Ska. 'Exode 19,3b-6 et l'identité de l'Israël postexilique.' In *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction - Reception - Interpretation*, edited by M. Vervenne (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 126; Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1996), pp. 289-317.
- J. Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions* (Hebrew Bible Monographs 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005).
- C. J. H. Wright. 'Reading the Old Testament Missionally.' In *Reading the Bible Missionally*, edited by M. W. Goheen (The Gospel and Our Culture Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), pp. 107-123.