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Let My People Go:

A Biblical Theology of Liberation in the Exodus Motif

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Let My People Go: A Biblical Theology of Liberation in the Exodus Motif

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First and foremost, I want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who loved me enough to die on the cross so that I might be redeemed from my sins. I am eternally grateful to my Father in Heaven that He loved mankind so deeply that He sent His only begotten Son to die on the cross so that mankind might have a path to be reconciled to God. I thank you for reaching out to what was a bruised and broken vessel and that you love me so much that you chose to heal that hurting, wounded child who saw no hope. Thank you for continuing to mold and shape me into a vessel fit for your service. May you continue transforming me into your image so that my life might bring glory to your holy name.

This dissertation is dedicated to the persecuted church comprised of believers around the world who suffer unimaginable atrocities and brutalities for their faith in Christ. This includes God's servants who risk their lives to travel and minister in places hostile to the Gospel. May God comfort and strengthen you as you fight the good fight of faith, knowing that your Redeemer is faithful to all He has promised.

Last, but certainly not least, this dissertation is dedicated to Israelis and Jews around the world who are suffering from the greatest loss of Jewish life in a single day since the Holocaust. As I was finishing the first draft of this dissertation, the nation of Israel experienced a horrific terrorist attack on October 7, 2023. May the God of your fathers bless you and keep you. May His face shine upon you and may He lift His countenance upon you and give you peace. עַם יִשְׂרָאֵל חַי עוֹד אָבִינוּ חַי. May you come to a saving knowledge of Yeshua, your long-awaited Messiah, who loves you with an everlasting love and longs for you to run into His arms where you may find peace for your soul.

Contents

ABBREVIATIONS

General Abbreviations

AD	*Anno Domini* (also Common Era, or CE)
ANE	Ancient Near East
BC	Before Christ (also Before Common Era, or BCE)
BLM	Black Lives Matter
DSW	Diversity-Social Justice-White Privilege Movement
LBTS	Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament

Journals

BibSa	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
CTJ	*Calvin Theological Journal*
HTS	*Hervormde Teologiese Studies*
HBTH	*Horizons in Biblical Theology*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JMS	*Journal of Men's Studies*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
SBJT	*Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*

Commentary Series

BST	Bible Speaks Today Commentary
BT2	Biblical Theology of Redemption
BTCP	Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIVAC	The NIV Application Commentary
SGBC	The Story of God Bible Commentary Series
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary Series
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary Series
TTCS	Teach the Text Commentary Series
WBBC	Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries Series

Monograph Series

HOTE	Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World

Reference Works

BDB	*A Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Edited by Francis Brown, R. Driver, and Charles Briggs. London: Oxford University Press, 1977.

GHCLOT *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures: Translated with Additions and Corrections from the Author's Thesaurus and Other Works.* Translated by Samuel Prideaux Tregelles. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957.

NDBT *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Edited by T. Desmond Alexander and Rosner, Brian S. Rosner. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020.

Other

ICA *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation."*

ABSTRACT

Liberation theologians view political liberation as the central theme of the historical Exodus event due to their interpretation of the text through the perspective of the oppressed and the oppressor. I reject the postmodern stance of liberation theologians, which overemphasizes political liberation and fails to consider the links between Yahweh's supernatural actions on behalf of the Hebrews in light of Yahweh's covenantal obligations to Abraham's descendants. This study argues against the use of liberation theologies as the paradigm for interpreting the historical Exodus event and asserts that a biblical theology of the Exodus motif reveals "covenant" as the interpretive key to understanding the historical Exodus event. I assert that the covenantal nature of the Israelite's deliverance from Egypt is the basis for elucidating the theological significance of liberation throughout the canon. I contend that the historical Exodus event was built upon the framework of covenant relationship and that deliverance from captivity came about due to the pre-existing Abrahamic covenant. I argue against the contention of liberation theologians that the overarching message of liberation in the biblical text is one of deliverance from political and societal oppression. I assert that the central message of liberation, as demonstrated in the Exodus motif throughout the entirety of the canon, is spiritual and eschatological liberation. This dissertation aims to demonstrate that the Exodus event in the history of the nation of Israel serves a greater purpose than liberation from socio-political oppression. Rather than being a narrative of deliverance from slavery, this epoch-making event in Israel's history serves as the underlying foundation of God's salvific plan for all mankind.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

Perhaps no other OT narrative has gained as much traction as the Exodus account among groups fighting for freedom from what they deem to be oppression in society. The historical account of the Hebrews' deliverance from Egyptian bondage has functioned as a catalyst for fanning the flames of social upheaval in communities ranging from Latin America to the Middle East, from Asia to America. Historically, such groups have approached the biblical text from a hermeneutical perspective which views the Exodus narrative as being primarily a story of political liberation from physical slavery and subsequently concludes that the central message of the cross is that Jesus came to liberate the oppressed from political bondage rather than from the bondage associated with sin. The Exodus narrative is the "golden calf" frequently used by liberation theologians as a political manifesto to bolster their arguments that freedom from political oppression is one of the central themes of the Exodus account and should therefore be used as a catalyst for social and political reform.

Noted liberation theologian James Cone has asserted that "Jesus' work is essentially one of liberation."[1] While on the surface, such a statement may seem benign and appear to be in line with Jesus' words in Luke 4:18, the "liberation" being spoken of by a large swath of liberation theologians is physical liberation from what they deem to be societal bondages and not the liberation from sin and death in Christ Jesus.[2] In referencing the kingdom of God being at hand in Mark 1:14–15, Cone notes the following concerning the kingdom:

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[1] James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 54.

[2] Although liberation theologians would not deny that eschatological liberation is a component of liberation in the Gospel, their writings tend to place greater importance on socio-political liberation and subsequently de-emphasizing the importance of eschatological liberation. In discussing Luke 4:18–19, Cone notes, "In the New Testament, the theme of liberation is reaffirmed by Jesus himself. The conflict with Satan and the powers of this

> [It is] the irruption of a new age, an age which has to do with God's action in history on behalf of man's salvation. It is an age of liberation, in which "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the good news preached to them" (Luke 7:22). This is not pious talk, and one does not need a seminary degree to interpret the message. It is a message about the ghetto, and all other injustices done in the name of democracy and religion to further the social, political, and economic interests of the oppressor. In Christ, God enters human affairs and takes sides with the oppressed. Their suffering becomes his; their despair, divine despair. Through Christ the poor man is offered freedom now to rebel against that which makes him other than human.[3]

The sentiments shared by Cone regarding God's activity on behalf of man demonstrate a biblical worldview that views salvation in light of freedom from socio-political oppression and promotes a liberation that deems man free to rebel against such oppressive systems. Sentiments such as these run throughout the various streams of liberation theology, which often view Christ's primary purpose as physical liberation from earthly bondages rather than liberation from sin and death.

A biblical-theological analysis of the Exodus motif throughout the canon will demonstrate the development of a pattern of liberation founded on covenantal relationship, which moves towards a progressive fulfillment of God's redemptive-historical purposes. This perspective best explains the repeated pattern of exile and deliverance seen throughout the nation of Israel's history. In support of this claim, I will explore the Abrahamic covenant, including analyzing the parallels and differences between the Abrahamic covenant and ANE treaties. I will

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world, the condemnation of the rich, the insistence that the kingdom of God is for the poor, and the locating of his ministry among the poor—these and other features of the career of Jesus show that his work was directed to the oppressed for the purpose of their liberation. To suggest that he was speaking of a 'spiritual' liberation fails to take seriously Jesus' thoroughly Hebrew view of human nature. Entering into the kingdom of God means that Jesus himself becomes the ultimate loyalty of humankind, for he is the kingdom. This view of existence in the world has far-reaching implications for economic, political, and social institutions. They can no longer have ultimate claim on human life; human beings are liberated and thus free to rebel against all powers that threaten human life." James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 20th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 25–26.

[3] Ibid., 6.

examine the shattering of the covenant relationship by exploring the themes of exile and deliverance for the unfaithful bride in Jeremiah and the promise of future restoration founded on covenant relationship. An examination of Christ as the eschatological agent in Matthew and the theme of fulfillment in Hebrews will demonstrate that the Exodus pattern in the NT further supports the contention that the historical Exodus contains eschatological elements which allude to a greater exodus seen in Jesus Christ. Rather than simply being a bedrock story foundational to the faith of the Jewish nation, the Exodus account is the foundational salvific event of the OT and an integral part of God's historical redemptive purposes foreshadowing the greater work Christ would accomplish in delivering mankind from sin, death, and the grave. An analysis of the Exodus motif will demonstrate the link between covenant and liberation in the text and explain how this theme develops in the OT and is built upon in the NT, coming to fulfillment in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Historical Reception of Liberation Theology

Catholic Denunciation of Liberation Theology

Since its emergence in the middle of the twentieth century in the context of Latin American socio-political struggles, liberation theology has faced critiques along many fronts, from the church to the academy. The Catholic Church was among the earliest to express opposition to liberation theology, as seen in their 1984 release of *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation."* This document was released by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the arm of the Catholic Church responsible for safeguarding Catholic doctrine and faith. The instruction warned pastors and theologians of the risks associated with accepting certain forms of liberation theology that the Catholic Church deemed damaging due to ideological deviations within such theologies. Although the document acknowledged the

importance of Christians caring for the poor and becoming involved in matters of justice for the oppressed, the instruction noted that the ideologies present in certain liberation theologies did more harm to the poor and oppressed than good.[4]

While acknowledging inequalities among the rich and poor leading to class struggles and the inequality historically faced by persons in poor countries, the Catholic Church asserted that the quest for justice in society must be guided by a discernment process that considers both theoretical and practical matters.[5] The Church warns of ideologies that distort the quest for liberation by stating, "So the aspiration for justice often finds itself captive to ideologies which hide and pervert its meaning, and which propose to people struggling for their liberation goals which are contrary to the true purpose of human life. They propose ways of action which imply systematic recourse to violence, contrary to any ethic which is respectful of persons."[6]

The Catholic Church asserted that various theologies of liberation originating from Latin America and third-world countries were poorly defined and delineated several areas of concern. Concern was expressed that different liberation theologies were geared so heavily towards giving preferential treatment to the poor and meeting their physical needs that matters of eternal consequence, such as salvation, were taking a backseat. Another complaint was that some appeared to equate delivering justice in a political and economic sense with the entire "essence of salvation."[7] Furthermore, the Marxist underpinnings of various liberation theologies were

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[4] These instructions were approved in audience with John Paul II on August 6, 1984. Citations here from the St. Paul's edition of the Vatican translation. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, pref., *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation,"* (Boston, MA: Daughters of St. Paul, 1984). Abbreviated here as *ICA*. Also available online at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19840806_theology-liberation_en.html.

[5] *ICA* II, 4.

[6] *ICA* II, 3.

[7] *ICA* VI, 4.

incompatible with biblical thought on society and humanity, with the Marxist analysis tools used being incapable of addressing the complex causes of poverty and inequality.[8] The Church also argued that the hermeneutic present in liberation theologies leads to a "political re-reading" of the biblical text, which leads to liberation theologians placing great importance on the historical Exodus, with an overemphasis on the political dimension of the Exodus event leading to a reductionist reading of the biblical text.[9]

The Explosion of Liberation Theology in North America

While the Catholic Church soundly denounced liberation theology, social, cultural, and political concerns in North America in the 1960s led to the adoption of liberation theology by the black church. Arising out of the turbulent years surrounding the civil rights movement, black theology exploded onto the scene among African American churches with the "Statement by the National Committee of Black Churchman" on July 31, 1966, and the publication of James H. Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power*.[10] Cone, one of the most well-known to emerge from the movement, defines theology as a "discipline that seeks to analyze the nature of the Christian faith in light of the oppressed" and asserts that "theology ceases to be a theology of the gospel when it fails to arise out of the community of the oppressed." [11] According to Cone, biblical tradition supports this sentiment in the historical Exodus event. Although Cone maintains that the

[8] *ICA* VII, 1-11.

[9] *ICA* X, 5.

[10] Michelle A. Gonzalez, *A Critical Introduction to Religion in the Americas: Bridging the Liberation Theology and Religious Studies Divide* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 52.

[11] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 24–25.

reasons why God chose Israel to be His elect are unclear, he notes that the election of the Israelites is inseparable from the Exodus itself.[12] Referencing Exodus 19:4-5 Cone notes:

> Certainly this means, among other things, that God's call of this people is related to its oppressed condition and to God's own liberating activity already seen in the exodus. *You have seen what I did!* By delivering this people from Egyptian bondage and inaugurating the covenant on the basis of that historical event, God is revealed as the God of the oppressed, involved in their history, liberating them from human bondage.[13]

Cone further attributes the rise of OT prophecy primarily to injustices within the Israelite community and notes that Israel's prophets are prophets of social justice. According to Cone, Yahweh's concern for social justice can be seen in the repeated emphasis by the prophets on themes such as political, social, and economic justice for the poor in society. Cone contends that Jesus reaffirms the importance of liberation in the NT due to Jesus' contention that the kingdom of God is for the poor, Jesus' condemnation of the rich, and Jesus' ministry among the poor. Cone refutes the notion that Jesus was speaking of spiritual liberation in these instances and concludes that Jesus' work was geared toward liberation for the poor in a physical sense and not a spiritual one.[14] Due to what he views as an overarching emphasis on liberation in the here and now and not spiritual liberation in a future eschatological sense, Cone concludes:

> In view of the biblical emphasis on liberation, it seems not only appropriate but necessary to define the Christian community as the community of the oppressed which joins Jesus Christ in his fight for the liberation of humankind. The task of theology, then, is to explicate the meaning of God's liberating activity so that those who labor under enslaving powers will see that the forces of liberation are the very activity of God. Christian theology is never just a rational study of the being of God. Rather it is a study of God's liberating activity in the world, God's activity in behalf of the oppressed.[15]

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[12] Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 25.

[13] Ibid., 25.

[14] Ibid., 25-26.

[15] Ibid., 26.

In describing the structure of his hermeneutical perspective, Cone explains that the Scriptures are primarily a story about the Israelites as a people group who maintained that Yahweh was a part of their history, beginning with the Hebrew slaves being delivered from Egyptian bondage.[16] While acknowledging there are many ways to view the Exodus story, Cone concludes, "the import of the biblical message is clear on this point: God's salvation is revealed in the liberation of slaves from socio-political bondage."[17] Due to his views on Christian theology and his insistence that the church's central mission is the liberation of the oppressed, Cone concludes with the impossibility of doing Christian theology without the poor in mind.[18] Thus, Cone acknowledges that he limits Christian theology to the oppressed community and concludes that the central message of the Scriptures is that "God has chosen to disclose divine righteousness in the liberation of the poor."[19] Anyone outside of a poor and oppressed community is incapable of hearing from God and being obedient to God's word of liberation due to his conclusion that theology cannot be separated from the cultural history of the oppressed group.[20] Furthermore, limiting theology to the oppressed community helps to identify heresy,

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[16] Cone's hermeneutical approach involves approaching the Scriptures through the lens of the oppressed community. Cone notes, "First, in a revolutionary situation there can never be nonpartisan theology. Theology is always identified with a particular community. It is either identified with those who inflict oppression or with those who are its victims. A theology of the latter is authentic Christian theology, and a theology of the former is a theology of the Antichrist. Insofar as black theology is a theology arising from an identification with the oppressed black community and seeks to interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ in the light of the liberation of that community, it is Christian theology. American white theology is a theology of the Antichrist insofar as it arises from an identification with the white community, thereby placing God's approval on white oppression of black existence." Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation,* 29.

[17] James H. Cone, *Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation, and Black Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 5.

[18] Ibid., 8.

[19] Ibid., 9.

[20] Regarding those who would question black religion, Cone notes, "Unless interpreters of black religion are willing to suspend their a priori definitions of reality and open themselves to another reality found in the social existence of black people, then their comments about the truth or untruth of black religion become merely an academic exercise which tells us far more about their own subjective interests than about the religious life of black people. If the interpreters are willing to hear what the people have to say about their struggle and the reality of Jesus

with Cone concluding that white North American theology is heresy not only in its speech about God but "in its separation of theory from praxis, and the absence of liberation in its analysis of the gospel."[21] While his enormous impact on black theology cannot be underestimated, the appropriation of the historical Exodus event as a catalyst for socio-political struggle did not originate with Cone nor liberation theology but had long been adopted by the black community in North America.

The Exodus Narrative in Colonial America

Long before the inception of liberation theology in the civil rights era, the black community had adopted the Exodus narrative as they struggled for freedom from slavery in colonial America. Jacob Stroyer, a former slave in the 1800's, who later became a minister, published his autobiography *Sketches of My Life in the South*, recounting how God delivered enslaved black persons from bondage in America. In his telling of the cruel fates suffered by

in the fight for freedom and proceed to develop their tools of critical analysis in the light of their identification with the goals and aspirations of the people, then and only then are they prepared to ask the right questions and to hear the right answers. For in the Christian story, truth is not an object but is the project of freedom made possible by the presence of God in the midst of the people. Only stories that invite an openness to other human stories are true." James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 138.

[21] Cone, *Speaking the Truth* 10–11. In the preface to *A Black Theology of Liberation*, originally published in 1970, Cone states the following regarding the need for Christian theology to become "black" theology. "In a society where persons are oppressed because they are black, Christian theology must become black theology, a theology that is unreservedly identified with the goals of the oppressed and seeks to interpret the divine character of their struggle for liberation. "Black theology" is a phrase that is particularly appropriate for contemporary America because of its symbolic power to convey both what whites mean by oppression and what blacks mean by liberation. However, I am convinced that the patterns of meaning centered in the idea of black theology are by no means restricted to the American scene, for blackness symbolizes oppression and liberation in any society. It will be evident, therefore, that this book is written primarily for the black community, not for whites. Whites may read it and to some degree render an intellectual analysis of it, but an authentic understanding is dependent on the blackness of their existence in the world. There will be no peace in America until whites begin to hate their whiteness, asking from the depths of their being: 'How can we become black?' I hope that if enough whites begin to ask this question, this country will no longer be divided on the basis of color. But until then, it is the task of the Christian theologian to do theology in the light of the concreteness of human oppression as expressed in color, and to interpret for the oppressed the meaning of God's liberation in their community." Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 6–7.

slaves under their masters, Stroyer writes that the voice of the Lord was heard in the North saying:

> Go quickly to the South and let my prison-bound people go free, for I have heard their cries from the cotton, corn, and rice plantations, saying how long before thou wilt come to deliver us from this chain?" And the Lord said to them, "Wait, I will send you John Brown who shall be the key to the door of your liberty, and I will harden the heart of Jefferson Davis, your devil, that I may show him and his followers my power. Then shall I send you Abraham Lincoln, mine angel, who shall lead you from the land of bondage to the land of liberty." Our fathers all died in "the wilderness," but thank God the children reached "the promised land."[22]

In Stroyer's account, he identifies the experience of black slaves in the United States with the experience of God's deliverance of the Hebrews in the biblical Exodus. As God called Moses to deliver his people from Egyptian bondage, in Stroyer's account, God wrought deliverance through abolitionist John Brown. Just as God hardened the heart of Pharoah, God hardened the heart of Confederate President Jefferson Davis and used President Lincoln as an instrument in leading slaves from their bondage to their wilderness journey through the civil war.[23] According to Thomas:

> In both the biblical and black Exodus narratives, however, the majority of people who entered the Promised Land were the children of slaves. Stroyer's reliance on the biblical story of Exodus exemplifies how Afro-Atlantic people embraced the story of God's emancipation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt to chart their journey to freedom in the New World. The Exodus narrative, the central cultural metanarrative of the Afro-Atlantic community, resonated because it encouraged Afro-Atlantic peoples to remember the story and reimagine themselves as citizens in their adopted homelands.[24]

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[22] Jacob Stroyer, "Sketches of My Life in the South, Salem 1879," in *From Bondage to Belonging: The Worcester Slave Narratives*, ed. Eugene B. McCarthy and Thomas L. Doughton (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 203–4.

[23] Rhondda Robinson Thomas, *Claiming Exodus: A Cultural History of Afro-Atlantic Identity, 1774-1903* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 1-2.

[24] Ibid., 2.

Identification with the children of Israel in Egyptian bondage provided slaves with a communal identity in their fight for freedom against their oppressors. While white Christians identified their journey across the Atlantic as their Exodus to the "New Israel" of America, enslaved Africans identified with the "Old Israel" and viewed the colonizers as the evil "Pharoah."[25] In the eyes of the enslaved, the historical Exodus proved the colonists incorrect in their assertion that God desired black persons to be slaves.[26] The Exodus story gave the enslaved the hope that just as Yahweh delivered the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage, he would faithfully deliver the enslaved from their colonial slave masters. According to Raboteau, "By appropriating the story of Exodus as their own story, black Christians articulated their own sense of peoplehood. Exodus symbolized their common history and common destiny. It would be hard to exaggerate the intensity of their identification with the children of Israel."[27] The historical account of the Exodus became so ingrained in the hearts and minds of enslaved black people that it permeated their religious experience. Raboteau notes:

> Sermons, prayers, and songs recreated in the imagination of successive generations the travail and triumph of Israel. Exodus became dramatically real, especially in the songs and prayer meetings of the slaves who reenacted the story as they shuffled in the ring dance they called the "Shout." In the ecstasy of worship, time and distance collapsed, and the slaves became the children of Israel. With the Hebrews, they traveled dry shod through the Red Sea; they, too, saw Pharaoh's army "get drownded" (*sic*); they stood beside Moses on Mount Pisgah and gazed out over the Promised Land; they crossed Jordan under Joshua and marched with him round the walls of Jericho. Their prayers for deliverance resonated with the experiential power of these liturgical dramas. Identification with Israel, then, gave the slaves a communal identity as special, divinely favored people.[28]

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[25] Albert J. Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones: Reflections on African-American Religious History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 28. The historical Exodus was evoked by the Puritans as they fled England, undertaking a "wilderness journey" in search of their "promised land" in the New World. Thomas, *Claiming Exodus*, 11.

[26] Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones*, 32.

[27] Ibid., 33.

[28] Ibid., 33–34.

With the abolition of slavery in 1865, enslaved black people saw God deliver them from slavery in the same way he had delivered the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage. Yet, freedom from slavery did not lead to formerly enslaved black people entering into their promised land as they had so heartily anticipated. Freedom from slavery did not automatically equate to freedom from oppression in American society.[29] Over the ensuing years, as black Americans continued to struggle for equal rights in American society, the Exodus story continued to be a bastion of hope for the heart and a catalyst for socio-political struggle. The Exodus story became firmly ingrained in the black Christian experience, highlighted in Martin Luther King's last sermon, where he proclaims,

> We've got some difficult days ahead. But it really doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop. Like anybody I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've seen the Promised Land. And I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we as a people will get to the Promised land.[30]

The Problem

The Resurgence of Liberation Theologies

With changes in socio-economic and political structures wrought by world events, such as the collapse of communist regimes, liberation theology appeared to be on the decline by the end of the 80s.[31] Yet, while liberation theology may have waned in popularity over the years due to world events over the last century, lasting tenets of their teachings can be seen springing forth with the rise of so-called social justice movements, particularly in Western societies. Various groups within society have appropriated the Exodus narrative to further their claims that God

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[29] Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones*, 34.

[30] Ibid., 35.

[31] José Fernando Castrillón Restrepo, "Liberation Theology and its Utopian Crisis," *Theologica Xaveriana* 186 (2018): 20.

would have believers stand with them in their fight for those they deem to be marginalized and oppressed. From the outset, liberationist teachings have secured entry into the church by adopting the Exodus narrative as a political manifesto intent on demonstrating that Yahweh's primary concern in the historical Exodus was freeing the Hebrew slaves from political bondage.[32] They frame their plight in terms related to the Exodus narrative, thereby implying that true believers should align with such groups to help bring liberation to these "oppressed groups."

While attempts are made to influence believers on an emotional level, inroads have also been made by theologians on a scholarly level which has led to the promulgation of various streams of liberation theology, such as Latin American Liberation Theology, Black Liberation Theology, Palestinian Liberation Theology, Feminist Liberation Theology, Womanist Liberation

[32] An early example can be seen in Cone's insistence that "If Jesus Christ is the Lord of the church and the world as white confessions claimed, then church institutions that claim the Christian identity must reflect their commitment to him in the congregational life of the church as well as in its political and social involvement in history." Cone, *Speaking the Truth*, 121. Cone also critiques the black church, which he accuses of deviating from their liberation heritage. He accuses black churches of being more concerned with building churches and pastors of being more concerned with pay increases than they are with "liberating the oppressed from socio-political bondage." Ibid., 122. Cone asserts that the church must be an agent for the implementation of justice in society if they are to be a witness to Christ's Lordship. He further contends that servanthood contains a political component that entails a call to action for Christians to get involved. Cone, Ibid., 123–24. Dr. Ken Dunnington, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Biola University who teaches on theological ethics, and Dr. Benjamin Wayman, James F. and Leona N. Andrews Chair in Christian Unity at Greenville University, accuse Christians of being ambivalent to social justice movements sweeping across the United States. In an article addressing the reasons Christians give for not becoming involved in social justice movements outside of the church, such as BLM and the Me-Too movement, they argue that the reasons are ideological and prove Christians are simply content with maintaining the status quo. Kent Dunnington and Ben Wayman, "How Christians Should — and Should Not — Respond to Black Lives Matter," *ABC Religion & Ethics* (ABC Religion & Ethics, June 3, 2019), https://www.abc.net.au/religion/how-should-christians-respond-to-black-lives-matter/11173976. The authors take issue with Christians refusing to support movements such as the Me-Too movement and BLM because of their beliefs that such organizations contradict Christian teaching, stating, "Finally, what of the claim that these movements are not worthy of Christian support since they often include policies that contradict Christian teaching. Some iterations of #MeToo, for example, are expressly committed to abortion rights. Some iterations of #BLM reject the enemy-love tradition embodied by Martin Luther King, Jr. — but, again, why should this undercut Christian support for these movements? Is there a principle that one cannot support any movement that includes policies with which one disagrees? Most conservative Christians who object to #BLM on such grounds do not similarly object to supporting a national political party, even though there is no national political party whose policy commitments are consistent with Christian teaching." Ibid. While the authors note that Christians should not "baptize whole cloth" the BLM movement, and should use wise restraint, they advocate that Christians should "join arms with social justice movements." Ibid. They further proclaim that BLM is an "unwitting prophet" that is calling the church to repent for failing to perform the gospel. Ibid.

Theology, LGBT Liberation Theology, and Queer Liberation Theology. At the heart of many of these theological systems is the belief that the central theme of the Gospel message is liberation from oppression, whether political, social, religious, or economic.

With the current climate of politicization of the Gospel and with a myriad of voices clamoring for Christians to get involved in a wide variety of social justice movements growing louder by the day, it is imperative that believers have a sound grasp of the true message of liberation as presented in the biblical text. Liberation theology's adoption of the historical Exodus narrative as their proof text in support of their contention that the primary thrust of the Gospel is political liberation "isolates the book from both its preceding and subsequent contexts, and thus it becomes a paradigm for how oppressed people can think about their plight and how to solve it."[33]

The Politicization of the Gospel

As complex social, geo-political, economic, and cultural issues have come to the forefront of Western consciousness over the last century, the merging of politics and religion has led to a theo-political movement with the emergence of a host of liberation theologies. In describing how the political activism of the last century contributed to the rise of liberation theologies, Thomas and Pinn note, "The 20th century produced the "perfect storm" of political protest, and these developments were not lost on the religiously and theologically minded."[34] For example, the twentieth century saw the rise of feminist liberation theology with the introduction of the teaching that women were a marginalized group in society who could now claim the status

[33] Stephen G. Dempster, "Exodus and Biblical Theology: On Moving into the Neighborhood with a New Name," *SBJT* 12.3 (2008): 6.

[34] Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, and Anthony B. Pinn, eds., *Liberation Theologies in the United States: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 2.

of an oppressed people group. Barger notes, “The recognition of women as an oppressed group and the possibility of a liberating theo-politic depended on a great number of ideas and historical changes converging.”[35] Such ideas and changes have often led to the division of individuals into distinct people groups and labeling such groups as marginalized and oppressed members of society, thus affecting the need to advocate on behalf of such groups in the name of social justice.[36]

While the tenets of liberation theology were adopted by a plethora of social activists in the 20th century, both within and outside of the church, the various streams of liberation theology failed to gain widespread acceptance among the academy. They were initially rejected by the church at large, resulting in a decline in the promulgation of such teaching in the later years of the last century. However, societal events within the last several decades have led to a resurgence of liberation theology which can be seen in the ideologies springing forth from

[35] Lilian Calles Barger, *The World Come of Age: An Intellectual History of Liberation Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 174.

[36] J. P. Moreland, Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, takes issue with the “diversity-social justice-white privilege movement (DSW),” currently being promulgated at secular universities, and notes the Marxist underpinnings of such teachings. In addressing the Neo-Marxist roots of DSW, Moreland notes that rather than dividing persons into categories based on factors such as class, Neo-Marxism divides persons according to their membership in groups based on factors such as race and sexual orientation. Persons who are members of a dominant class, such as heterosexual white males, are automatically classified as oppressors, while those outside of the dominant class, such as persons of color or members of the LGBT community, are classified as the oppressed. In addressing the teachings of Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, Moreland notes Gramsci’s acknowledgment that Marxist theory was incapable of destroying the West by analyzing class struggle based on economic factors due to the large middle-class population in America. As a result, Gramsci espoused a Neo-Marxism, which Moreland asserts as Marxist “because it reduces the individual to a mere member of a class, it dismisses ideas as mere attempts to gain or retain cultural dominance (today this is called intersectionality), and it sees class struggle for power as the central moving force that drives history and the evolution of cultures (sin, connection to God, and ideas have little or no place in this scheme). It is "Neo" because Gramsci cashed out the fundamental nature of class warfare, not in terms of economics, but in terms of dominance and power—the dominant class and those various groups who are victimized by the dominant class.” J.P. Moreland, “Christians, the Diversity-Social Justice-White Privilege Movement, and What It's Got to Do with Real Love,” *The Christian Post*, https://www.christianpost.com/voice/christians-the-diversity-social-justice-white-privilege-movement-and-what-its-got-to-do-with-real-love.html

various movements operating under the banner of "social justice." Barger describes this resurgence by noting:

> It seemed that after wreaking havoc on the sedate religious and political status quo that characterized post-World War II intellectual life, by the 1990's liberation theology had suffered an almost complete repudiation. It became passe among social thinkers, only to survive in obscure corners of the academy. In the new millennium liberation theology returned with a roar, alarming its critics and most of the public.[37]

The Mixture of Black Liberation Theology and Politics

A host of socio-political factors in the 21st century has led to a rise in ideologies emanating from teachings associated with the various streams of liberation theology. The Southern Poverty Law Center draws associations between matters of race today and the ancient Hebrews when they claim the historical Exodus event is analogous to the struggle facing people of color in the United States. They note, "The continued struggle of Black, Indigenous, People of Color in America can find clear similarities in the narrative of Judaism, particularly the book of Exodus. Persecution, displacement and enslavement mirror the BIPOC experience in many ways, both historically and systematically, here in America."[38] With rising racial tensions in the United States, socio-political concerns are increasingly coming to the public's attention both inside and outside the church walls.

Black Liberation Theology was thrust into the mainstream consciousness with the uproar over Rev. Jeremiah Wright's, former pastor to then-presidential candidate Barak Obama, fiery 2003 sermon where he states, "No, no, no, not God bless America! God damn America-that's in

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[37] Barger, *World Come of Age*, 3.

[38] "Radical Hebrew Israelites," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, accessed January 28, 2023, https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/radical-hebrew-israelites.

the Bible-for killing innocent people."[39] Current Georgia Senator Raphael Warnock, a student of noted black liberation theologian James Cone, defended Wright's position in a 2008 television interview and is a strong proponent of liberation theology, integrating his liberationist beliefs with his politics. In calling for the black church to become involved with political issues such as "the politically motivated and profit-driven prison-industrial complex," Warnock notes:

> If the black church will not give itself over to this work, then it will prove that it indeed has lost sight of its liberating heritage and reason for being. And if that is so, it deserves to die. If white churches and pastors will not stand in solidarity with the poor and against deep structures of racial injustice such as America's prison-industrial complex, "the new Jim Crow," then they will have demonstrated that they are every bit as much invested in the maintenance of white privilege and white supremacy as were their forebears of a different era. In this sense, a serious dialogue about the nature of piety and the content of protest must ultimately lead to praxis on the streets and in the world. Theology that is not lived is not theology at all.[40]

Warnock, who advocates liberation as the mission of the black church throughout his 2013 book, champions a host of social causes with which he asserts Christians should become involved due to his deeming such groups in society as oppressed and in need of liberation.

> The black church, however problematic that term may be for some people, must be clear about its mission because its souls and the nation's salvation depend on it. That is why the black church cannot afford to be radical on the question of racial justice and reactionary when it comes to justice and equality for women, gays and lesbians, brown "illegal" immigrants, and just about everyone and everything else. It cannot fully live out its vocation as a liberationist church and be a xenophobic church at the same time. Moreover, if the black church truly believes in salvation, "the broadening of communal space," and "the good and spacious land" about which the scriptures speak, then its distinctive voice must be heard on the issue of ecology and ecological justice. A church that is vocal about race but silent or closed to honest dialogue on these issues because it does not see

[39] Barbara Bradley Hagerty, "The Roots of Black Liberation Theology," NPR (NPR, April 2, 2008), https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=89310589.

[40] Raphael G. Warnock, *The Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 187–88.

> their interrelatedness loses its prophetic edge, theological integrity, and moral credibility.[41]

Much of Warnock's liberationist beliefs can be traced back to how he views the mission of the black church. Warnock notes,

> the sociological evidence suggests that the black church, even while continuing to focus on race and other issues of justice, has, in large measure, embraced a bifurcated understanding of salvation that privileges individual souls, not seeing the redemption of black bodies and the transformation of the whole of society as central to its vocation as an instrument of God's salvation. In this way, social action may be viewed as an important part of the church's outreach programs, but seldom is it reflected on theologically as an indispensable mark of the church's basic vocation.[42]

Warnock's view of salvation places as much emphasis on the transformation of society as he does on saving the individual soul. Warnock concludes that "part of what the black church needs is a deeper understanding of the relationship between the ministry of social activism, embodied in the civil rights movement, and the reality of a liberationist faith rooted not only in the black church's history but in scripture."[43] Warnock further contends that authentic Christian theology "illuminates the biblical basis for freedom fighting, as the theological core of salvation's work."[44] Unsurprisingly, Warnock points to the Exodus narrative as the starting point of the salvation story and asserts that the Hebrews were not focused on individual salvation but "communal" liberation. He denies that the Hebrews worship of Yahweh was apolitical and claims the Exodus motif throughout the OT demonstrates that the Hebrews maintained a continuing focus on liberation as salvation.[45]

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[41] Warnock, *The Divided Mind*, 189.

[42] Ibid., 177.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid., 178.

[45] Ibid., 178–79.

The Influence of Liberation Theologies on Social Movements

The influence of liberation theology movements in American society can be seen with the rise of social justice movements such as the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. In an article refuting the death of the black church in the United States, Terrence L. Johnson, current Professor of African American Religious Studies at Harvard Divinity School, attributes the rise of BLM to the influence of the black church and the way it has shaped black culture and thought. Addressing claims made by some that black churches and African American clergy were visibly absent from the BLM movement, Johnson denies that their absence represents the death of the black church and notes the history of the intermingling of religion and politics in the black church when he states, "From its conception, clergy weaved together religion and politics to create thick and thin versions of liberation theology that many white clergy found objectionable or theologically unsound."[46] Johnson draws further connections between liberation theology and the BLM movement when he states:

> The BLM movement emerges from this African-American religious context and the Black Church stands as a cultural site or epistemic resource for the movement. The BLM movement inherits its call to '(re)build the Black Liberation movement' from the Black Church's historical role in developing a theology of liberation based on social justice. I am not suggesting the founders of BLM turned to the church for assistance as they imagined their movement. However, the vocabulary and hermeneutical moves they employ resonate with the political vocabulary and ambitions of many progressive black churches. For instance, BLM's political shift away from a rights-based political project to a movement based on liberation reflects a core component of the church's legacy: Liberation does not always translate into the immediate acquisition of political rights, but it must be pursued without fear or trembling.[47]

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[46] Terrence L. Johnson, "Black Lives Matter and the Black Church," *Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs*, accessed February 2, 2023, https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/black-lives-matter-and-the-black-church.

[47] Ibid.

Johnson notes the influence of BLM on the black church when he acknowledges that the movement is causing black churches to rethink their views on gender and class in BLM's fight against the criminal justice system. He notes that "the church has not lived up to its ideals in relationship to women, and the gay, lesbian, and transgendered community."[48] Johnson concludes, "The BLM movement is a natural extension of the Black Church's historical commitment to social transformation, liberation, and justice."[49] In essence, Johnson maintains that the black church's legacy contributed to the formation of such an organization, but also asserts that black churches also have much to learn from the organization.

Gay, Lesbian, and Queer Liberation Theology

In the United States, debates over gender and sexuality have become increasingly contentious, and amid such issues, a host of newer liberation theologians have arisen. Mannion writes:

> Issues of gender and identity have increasingly emerged from the theological and ecclesiological 'closet' with the development of gay and lesbian theologies of liberation, championing the rights, perspectives, and experiences of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities. These theologies have become increasingly more developed in recent decades and the ecclesiological campaigns and challenges of these communities have come to dominate discussions across many different denominations. Such approaches have offered a new ecclesiological hermeneutic to a long hidden and denied form of sinful oppression and prejudice across the churches.[50]

Much as the LGBT movement has made advances in Western society, a host of gay and lesbian theologies have advanced over the last several decades, with many of them evolving out

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[48] Johnson, "Black Lives Matter and the Black Church."

[49] Ibid.

[50] Gerard Mannion, "Liberation Ecclesiology," in *The Routledge Companion to the Christian Church*, ed. Gerard Mannion and Lewis S. Mudge (London: Taylor & Francis, 2008), 425.

of past liberation theologies.[51] In discussing one such theology, queer liberation theologian, Robert Shore-Goss, LGBT activist and former Jesuit priest, notes that, "Queer theology is, in many ways, a branch of liberation theology, deriving from the roots of the Latin American, African American, and feminist liberation theologies, perhaps in closest resemblance to feminist liberation theologies because of the fact that heterosexism is embedded in cultural sexism."[52] Although each of these streams of liberation theology contain differences in their theological outlook and ultimate goals, what these various gay and lesbian liberation theologies all have in common is their claim that they are an oppressed group who are simply fighting for liberation from what they view as the elements in society which they declare to be oppressive. In discussing his view of queer liberation theology, Goss articulates it this way:

> If theology is not strategically and practically oriented toward human liberation, it is a waste of time and energy. Queer liberation theology is written and practiced in the struggle against not only homophobia, heterosexism, and AIDS-phobia but also an array of social oppressions including racism, classism, militarism, and ecological domination. Already immersed in critical feminist and gay/lesbian theological writings, I developed my own queer political theology from a hermeneutics of suspicion. Gay/lesbian theology was already moving into a new developmental state, a political queer-liberation theology reflecting the developments of queer and AIDS activism in our community. I believe that queer Christian theology has to be dissident, political, proud, erotic, defiant, and activist.[53]

The Exodus in Gay Liberation Theology

In his book, *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology*, Cleaver notes the importance of North American gay and lesbian Christians looking to Latin American Liberation theologies

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[51] Although an in-depth analysis of LGBT and queer theologies is beyond the scope of this paper, it should be noted that the evolution of each movement and their belief systems are multi-faceted and vary greatly among the various streams of LGBT theologies.

[52] Robert E. Shore-Goss, "Gay and Lesbian Theologies," In *Liberation Theologies in the United States: An Introduction*, ed. Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas and Anthony B. Pinn (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 189.

[53] Robert E. Goss, "Erotic Contemplatives and Queer Freedom Fighters," *JMS* 4.3 (1996): 4.

due to liberation theologies questioning of an objective theology.[54] The historical Exodus event undergirds much of LGBT liberation theologies and is used to support their contention that they are fighting for freedom from oppression for the homosexual community.[55] From the outset, Cleaver identifies the ancient Hebrews with the gay and lesbian community and draws an analogy between the formation of the nation of Israel and the modern formation of the homosexual community. In Exodus 1:9, Cleaver notes the fear generated by the king's rhetoric of the threat Egypt faces due to the size and power of the Hebrew nation as being similar to "the speeches of Senator Jesse Helms and the Reverend Lou Shelton and Lon Mabon and the other "family values" crusaders of today, with regard to the dangerous power of "militant homosexuals."[56] In addressing Moses hiding his face in fear of God when confronted at the burning bush, Cleaver opines:

> This gesture is generally interpreted as expressing a "primitive" fear that looking on the face of God is death. I offer another explanation, relying less on superstition and more on psychology. Could it be that Moses is afraid because he is face to face with one who knows who he really is, who sees through his attempt to pass as an Egyptian? We have already been told that when Moses first met Jethro's daughter, he was identified by the Midianites as an Egyptian. He dressed as an Egyptian. He spoke the language of Egypt. Moses had succeeded in hiding his true identity. This is the strategy we gay men and lesbians know as 'the closet.' It is often urged on us by our pastors as a solution to 'our' problem. Confessors tell us we should stay away from others of our kind, who are 'occasions of sin.' If we seek ordination, we are counseled to hide our sexual orientation, since few denominations ordain open lesbians or gay men. Everybody knows that we serve—in numbers exceeding our presence in the general population—in positions of leadership in the churches, as ordained clergy or as

[54] Richard Cleaver, *Know My Name: A Gay Liberation Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 10.

[55] Ibid., 30. While some of the goals of LGBT liberation theologies may differ in some respects to other liberation theologies in that LGBT theologies are often intent on a re-interpretation of biblical passages regarding homosexuality, the Exodus narrative remains a central component of their arguments. Cleaver refers to the historical Exodus as the "classic liberation story, the one all theologians of liberation have turned to." Ibid.

[56] Ibid., 29.

> musicians or what have you. Still, the disciplines of most Christian bodies demand that this fact be kept secret. Practically speaking, we prefer hypocrisy.[57]

In Cleaver's estimation, Moses was afraid of being a "closeted Hebrew," and when God gave Moses the command to free the Hebrews, God was not only freeing them but liberating a "closeted Moses" as well.[58] Cleaver makes mention that the Hebrews suffered through the plagues, except for the death of the firstborn, and notes that just as the Hebrews were willing to suffer through such plagues to be liberated, oppressed people groups in modern times must be willing to suffer and face risks for their liberation today.[59] Cleaver relates the cry of the Hebrews to return to Egypt in Exodus 14:10–12 to gays and lesbians being complacent in the church and being unwilling to fight for complete liberation due to their fear of persecution.[60] In concluding the Exodus narrative, Cleaver addresses the wilderness phase of their journey and asserts it comprised a four-step process to make the people into the nation of Israel.[61] Cleaver equates the forming process of the Hebrews in the wilderness wanderings to that of the formation of the gay and lesbian community. Just as the Hebrews spent forty years wandering to forget the patterns they learned in Egypt, so too must the gay and lesbian community forget their old patterns and

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[57] Cleaver, *Know My Name*, 31–32.

[58] Ibid., 32–33.

[59] Ibid., 33.

[60] Cleaver states, "And we gay men and lesbians within the churches, how often have we chosen not to rock the boat, contenting ourselves with that study commission simply because it was not more persecution? How often have we been willing to go along with exempting the churches from gay rights ordinances? How often have we depended on those in power to define our relation to the gospel—preferring the known sufferings of life in Egypt to the dangerous task of building our own future? God knew the people coming out of Egypt. Scripture tells us that they were led not by the shortcut, along the coast road, but by a route that took forty years. We prefer shortcuts. One shortcut is to say, "We're just like you. We'll get doctors and lawyers to tell you so." Then we prove it by reducing our movement for liberation to a system of commercial products and institutions—bars, publications, gyms, fashions, cruises. This, in turn, means we become accomplices in an economic system that causes untold suffering for others. Not surprisingly, these others fail to see us as comrades in the struggle for justice. We have created a new Egypt, where we can feel as if our liberation has already been won. Such outcomes are inevitable once gayness and lesbianism are conceived of as lifestyles rather than as membership in an oppressed class." Ibid., 35.

[61] Cleaver designates the four stages as the Passover, the crossing of the Red Sea, the institution of the covenant at Sinai, and the 40 years of wandering in the desert. Ibid., 37.

ways of thinking.[62] Cleaver maintains that this process is ongoing when he notes, “This process has never been finished for the people called Israel. It is only beginning for lesbians and gay men. In both cases, though, it begins with a setting apart, either by blood on a doorpost or, in our case, by medical and legal experts declaring, ‘These people are this kind, those people are that kind. These are the good ones, those are the bad ones’.”[63] Cleaver concludes his comparison of the formation of the Hebrew nation and the formation of the gay and lesbian community by noting that just as the Hebrews were formed into God’s people by their shared experiences, so too have the gay and lesbian community been formed into a people.[64] The basis of this new community for the Hebrews was a covenant with God which Cleaver relates to the *ekklesia*.

> A covenant, being a relationship, does not just happen once and for all. The fugitive slaves who formed themselves into one people at Sinai by their covenant made themselves not just former slaves but lovers. Creating this related, loving, covenanted people is part of the act of liberation. People are not liberated one by one, as the "buy yourself free" model would have it. Salvation is collective. By covenanting, we choose to be part of a gathered people, a people called out of the undifferentiated mass of humanity.[65]

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[62] Cleaver, *Know My Name*, 37.

[63] Ibid., 38.

[64] Ibid., 39. Cleaver further likens the gay and lesbian experience to that of the Hebrews when he notes, “there is now a division between gay and straight, as there is in Exodus between those passed over by the angel and those whose firstborn died. Those of us on the gay side have a shared history, as those passed over do—one that even includes plagues and attempts to eradicate us. Like Jews (and Communists and Gypsies and so many others), ‘homosexuals’ were marked for destruction by Adolf Hitler in order to cleanse the “Aryan blood” of Germany of all factors in the gene pool that caused degeneracy. We are still wandering in the desert, trying to figure out what it means not to be slaves anymore.” Ibid., 39.

[65] Ibid., 39. In relating how the gay and lesbian community have formed a covenantal relationship, Cleaver notes, “I experience my relation with the rest of the people of God not as belonging but as isolation. And isolation is central to how I experience oppression. It is the form of my oppression. Isolation means that I do not know where to look for others who share my oppression. Silence, masquerading as "discretion," means that I cannot look around the assembly at worship and feel others with whom I can connect on the basis of shared history. Outside the congregation it is easier (this is the very reverse of how things ought to be). Stonewall made this difference for my generation: it broke down our sense of isolation and replaced it with a sense not only of belonging but of common, self-conscious struggle. We became a covenanted people, journeying through a desert together. So we celebrate it every year, at the end of June, with parades and film festivals, with workshops and worship, for the same reason that Jews celebrate Passover: to renew ourselves as a struggling people who became, in a moment of hiStory *(sic)*, subjects of history—and yet are still becoming.”. Ibid., 39-40.

Under the umbrella of liberation theologies, there exists a wide range of liberation theologies from Latin American to Black, from Feminist to Womanist, from LGBT to Queer, to a plethora of other types, each comprised of different groups with differing agendas. A common thread running throughout such liberation theologies is their ideological belief that their group (the oppressed) are in a battle against elements in society, such as systems and institutions, which are oppressing them for a plethora of reasons, such as class, race, gender, sexuality, etc. Due to their strong emphasis on praxis, liberationist groups strongly advocate for radical and often-times militant socio-political activism to radically transform societies and eliminate those elements in society that they deem oppressive. The sacred and the secular converge in liberation theology, and a perusal of the writings of liberation theologians reveals that the historical Exodus event, which they maintain is primarily political in nature, is the foundation upon which many of their beliefs are built.

Proposed Solution to the Problem

As complex social issues such as liberation, oppression, and social justice become a routine part of discourse throughout the Western world, from the political arena to the halls of academia, from seminaries to the church pews, a proper understanding of liberation founded on the biblical text is more necessary than ever. Whereas in times past, the church at large may have been able to maintain a somewhat neutral position in socio-political matters, the influx of liberationist ideas in the mainstream sector has brought current events to the church's doorstep. Various social movements, from LGBT activists to feminists, from ecological groups to climate change activists, appear to spring forth almost daily, each with their own agendas and advocating on behalf of various causes. A cacophony of voices from all sectors of society can be heard clamoring for the church to get involved, the loudest voices often coming from groups promoting

unbiblical and ungodly causes. The rallying cry of many of these groups usually involves a call for social equality, freedom from oppression, and liberation. However, their usage of liberation in many instances is theologically and biblically incorrect and often advocates for acceptance and celebration of ungodly and sinful behaviors. In discussing the Exodus narrative and liberation, Levenson writes:

> Nothing in the Bible so readily invites the term "liberation" as the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. The essential question, however, is, in what sense ought the exodus to be seen as an instance of liberation, or, to pose the same question in other words, what is the character of the liberation typified by the exodus and how is this type of liberation to be distinguished from other phenomena to which the same term is presently applied?[66]

Questions such as these become increasingly crucial as liberation theologies continue to evolve and are appropriated by a plethora of groups who deem themselves members of an oppressed class. As newer forms of liberation theology are birthed in an increasingly hostile social climate in the West, and with the increase in cultural criticism within biblical studies, the academy and the church must be prepared to respond to current social issues with the truth of God's Word. As a bastion of truth, the church must stand prepared to respond to current social issues and shine the truth of God's light into the ever-darkening landscape of modern Western society. A study of the historical Exodus and the tracing of the Exodus motif throughout the biblical text will prove useful in bringing illumination to the true importance of liberation in the Bible, thus equipping the church to respond biblically to the current onslaught of social issues.

Scope of the Research

This dissertation offers an exegetical analysis of the historical Exodus narrative and will demonstrate that the theological theme of liberation in the Exodus motif is consistently linked

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[66] Jon D. Levenson, "Exodus and Liberation," *HBT* 13 (1991): 134.

with covenantal relationship throughout the canon.[67] The purpose of this dissertation is not to repudiate the many varied forms of liberation theology; however, it will address one of the foundational underpinnings of such theologies, which is the concept of liberation in the historical Exodus event. Throughout the many transformations liberation theology has undergone over the decades, taking on new shapes and forms depending upon the people groups and the nature of the conflict involved, one constant which has remained is liberation theologies overarching emphasis on Yahweh's liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage in support of liberationist arguments and to galvanize followers to radically engage in their social causes and movements. The identification of liberation theologies with the Hebrews in the historical Exodus becomes a critical issue in the often contentious debates surrounding the practices and aims of liberation theologies. This dissertation aims to produce a biblical theology of liberation as demonstrated in the historical Exodus narrative and further explore the theme of liberation as developed in the Exodus motif throughout the canon.

Thesis Statement

This dissertation will demonstrate that the Exodus motif, with covenant as the major unifying theological theme, is an integral part of God's salvation-historical plan culminating in an eschatological fulfillment of liberation from sin and death in Christ Jesus. I will further argue that the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage was not political in nature but covenantal in nature as demonstrated in the historical Exodus from Egypt and the Exodus motif throughout the canon.

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[67] The term "Exodus motif" in this dissertation extends beyond that of the historical Exodus and is being used to refer to God's pattern of liberating his people from bondage throughout the canon. As such, the use of the term "Exodus motif" throughout this dissertation begins with the historical Exodus, proceeds to God's actions in liberating the Israelites from Babylonian captivity in Jeremiah, and concludes with God liberating believers from the bondage of sin and eschatological death in the NT.

Method

A biblical-theological method centered on a redemptive-historical approach to interpretation will be the hermeneutical approach employed in this dissertation. The redemptive-historical approach taken here is best described by Gaffin, who notes that rather than being "marked by a fixed set of specific procedures, it is better characterized more loosely as a large-scale orientation or overall outlook on the revelation-historical content of the Bible" utilizing a variety of interpretive techniques and "procedures customarily included under the designation "grammatical-historical."[68] The goal will be to ascertain the theological significance of the Exodus motif by approaching the text in its original historical setting and context, utilizing a grammatical-historical hermeneutic, while maintaining canonical consciousness. This will encompass tracing the progression of God's redemptive truths as they unfold throughout history, as revealed through the Exodus motif throughout the canon.[69] This will involve analyzing individual texts in their original context, including factors such as historical, cultural, and linguistic elements, and analyzing them in light of how these revealed streams of truth flow together, demonstrating continuity between the testaments converging into a body of unified redemptive-historical truths throughout the entirety of the canon. Typological interpretation defined as: "the study of analogical correspondences among revealed truths about persons, events, institutions, and other things within the historical framework of God's special revelation,

[68] Richard B. Gaffin Jr., "The Redemptive-Historical View," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, eds. Stanley E. Porter, Jr., and Beth M.Stovall (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 176. The grammatical-historical method utilized throughout will consist of analyzing the text in its original historical setting for the purpose of interpreting the original authors meaning as intended for the original audience, taking into consideration factors such as grammar and syntax.

[69] For the purpose of this dissertation, the term canon refers to the Protestant canon, consisting of both the OT and the NT, which this author presupposes as the divinely inspired, authoritative Word of God, inerrant in the original autographs.

which, from a retrospective view, are of a prophetic nature and are escalated in meaning," will be utilized when warranted.[70]

The current state of biblical theology is comprised of various theories and practices, with the discipline having both its proponents and detractors. In relation to the biblical theological approach used in this dissertation, Klink and Lockett's division of biblical theology into five specific types is most helpful.[71] The approach throughout this dissertation aligns with the second category classified as *Biblical Theology as History of Redemption* (BT2). The goal of BT2 is to discover the overarching story present in the entire Bible as revealed through progressive developments throughout the historical narrative of the Bible. While recognizing the diverse nature of the individual books, BT2 recognizes a unity that presents a coherent whole.[72] In essence, the task of biblical theology is "wedded" to the academic discipline of hermeneutics. Having both been recognized as "independent academic disciplines" around the same time frame in the 18th century, the two disciplines are so intimately linked that "the viability of biblical

[70] G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 23.

[71] Edward W. Klink, and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 20–25. In dividing biblical theology into five types, Klink and Lockett address ongoing issues that have arisen in the field of biblical theology and how each of the five schools of thought approach such matters. These issues address "the relationship between the OT and NT; the *historical* diversity and the *theological* unity of the Bible; the scope of biblical theology and whether the sources should be restricted to the Christian canon or broadened to include noncanonical sources; the subject matter of biblical theology; and finally, whether biblical theology is a task for the church or for the academy." Ibid., 20-21. The types exist along a spectrum, with type 1 being the most historical moving towards type 5, which is listed as the most theological. Type 1 (BT1), classified as *Biblical Theology as Historical Description*, remains purely descriptive and is only concerned with what was meant historically to the original audience, with no concern for what it means today. Type 2 (BT2), listed as *Biblical Theology as History of Redemption*, strongly emphasizes history but primarily focuses on redemptive history. Type 3 (BT3), classified *as Biblical Theology as Worldview-Story*, which has been labeled as difficult to define precisely, attempts to find a balance between history and theology and is strongly concerned with narrative as a category. Type 4 (BT4), *Biblical Theology as Canonical Approach*, is both historical and theological in nature and attempts to draw a connection between theology and biblical studies. Type 5 (BT5), classified as *Biblical Theology as Theological Construction*, places a strong emphasis on the notion that biblical theology as a discipline belongs to the professing church and not the academy. Ibid., 21-25.

[72] Ibid., 60.

theology as a discipline depends on the ability to interpret the biblical texts 'on their own terms'." [73] This approach strongly emphasizes working inductively from the biblical text and allowing the text, from individual books to the entire canon, to set the agenda.[74] The natural result of such an inductive study lends itself to an intertextual study, where the biblical text itself draws the necessary connections.

Although precise definitions of biblical theology differ among the individual schools of biblical theology, D.A. Carson's definition falls within the category of BT2 and states,

> Biblical theology, as the name implies, even as it works inductively from the diverse texts of the Bible, seeks to uncover and articulate the unity of all the biblical texts taken together, resorting primarily to the categories of those texts themselves. In this sense it is canonical biblical theology, "whole Bible" biblical theology; i.e., its content is a theology of the whole Bible, not a theology that merely has roots in the Bible, or merely takes the Bible as the place to begin.[75]

Under this definition of biblical theology, canonical refers to whole-Bible theology rather than the development of the canon.[76] A whole-Bible theology places confidence in the integrity of the biblical text, including its historical elements, and recognizes the need to read the Bible as progressive revelation. Rather than being a history devoid of meaning, the biblical text is a unified, progressive history of God's redemptive purposes for mankind.[77] Furthermore, God not only lays forth his purposes for mankind but reveals elements of his nature through these historical accounts. Considering biblical theology's interconnected relationship with history, it requires a hermeneutical approach that seeks to understand each passage in its immediate (micro)

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[73]T. Desmond Alexander, and Brian S. Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (La Vergne: IVP, 2020), cviii.

[74] D. A. Carson, "Current Issues in Biblical Theology: A New Testament Perspective," *BBR* 5 (1995): 29.

[75] Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology*, 60.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid., 66.

context, which is accomplished by understanding the cultural, historical, and literal context of the individual passages. Once the text has been interpreted in its original context, it can then be viewed in the light of the entire canon (macro-context) to ascertain how it fits into the grand picture of God's redemptive purposes for mankind.[78]

Structure of the Research

Chapter 2 will consist of an analysis of the various hermeneutical principles and approaches utilized by liberation theologians, beginning with Latin American Liberation Theology and examining how such methods have developed over the decades as a plethora of groups have adopted the central tenets of liberation theology. The political and social situations that have given rise to these various liberation theologies will be addressed as well as the writings of significant liberation theologians, particularly in North America.

The hermeneutical approaches of liberation theologians have evolved over the decades and encompass a variety of methods depending on the individual groups involved. Earlier liberation theologies, such as Latin American Liberation theology, often utilized a liberation

[78] Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology*, 66. Proponents of BT2 differ in their approach to how they fit individual texts into the larger macro context of Scripture, with the various groups differing in the degree to which they place individual passages into its macro context. The Dallas school, arising from Dallas Theological Seminary, engages in a methodological approach which places passages within the corpus level of the text. The Chicago School, supported by many including D. A. Carson, is similar in many respects to the Dallas School, yet differs in their approach which advances beyond the corpus level and encompasses the entire canon. Typology is a hermeneutical tool utilized by the Chicago school to draw connections throughout the entirety of the canon. Ibid., 67-70. While the Dallas school recognizes the importance of a whole Bible synthesis, they relegate this task to the systematic theologians while the Chicago school maintains, "there is an interconnected progression from exegesis through biblical theology to systematic theology, where biblical theology serves as a "bridge between the two." Ibid., 70. The Philadelphia school, finds support in Vos, Murray, and Gaffin from the Westminster Theological Seminary, and focuses heavily on the macro context and sees a closer relationship between biblical and systematic theology than both the Dallas and Chicago schools. Ibid., 70-71. While the Chicago School emphasizes a redemptive-historical reading of the text, "the Philadelphia school is guided by Christological concern from start to finish-it is both the starting confession and the final goal. More so than the others, the Philadelphia school views biblical theology as redemptive-historical at its heart." Ibid., 72. As a result, the Philadelphia school maintains that "biblical theology regulates the exegetical task itself," while the Dallas and Chicago schools would maintain that "biblical theology is regulated by the preliminary step of exegesis." Ibid., 72.

hermeneutic that began with the experience of poverty, attempted to analyze the reason for poverty, and sought to determine a course of action to remedy the injustice. [79] According to Klein et al., "The collapse of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and Asia at the beginning of the 1990s dealt a near death blow to those forms of liberationist hermeneutics that were closely wedded to socialist economics."[80] With the increase in societal unrest over the last several decades leading to the rebound of liberation theologies, newer hermeneutical approaches to the biblical text have arisen. The hermeneutical approaches employed by the many branches of liberation theology will be explored to understand how such approaches impact liberation theologians' interpretation of the biblical text, in particular their view of liberation throughout the canon.[81]

Chapter 3 will delve into the nature of ANE covenants, emphasizing the suzerain-vassal relationship in ancient treaties to demonstrate the distinctiveness of Yahweh's divine-human covenant with Abraham. Unlike other ANE covenants, which often existed to establish legislation, it will be shown that undergirding the Abrahamic covenant was Yahweh's desire for relationship for the purpose of restoring mankind to the relationship that man had with Yahweh prior to the severing of the divine-human relationship which occurred as a result of the fall. An analysis of the primeval prologue to the Abrahamic covenant will reveal that the institution of the Abrahamic covenant was an integral part of God's redemptive-historical plans for mankind.

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[79] William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Third Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 145.

[80] Ibid., 148.

[81] I will argue against the various hermeneutical approaches utilized by liberation theologians, such as postmodern reader response methods of interpretation and the liberationist perspective that the biblical text should be approached through the lens of the oppressed and lived experience.

The foundational framework of the Exodus event is the Abrahamic covenant which God instituted to restore lost humanity to relationship with Yahweh, which was destroyed in the fall. The patriarchs and the Exodus are intimately linked with the Sinaitic covenant being historically and theologically a continuation of the promises given under the Abrahamic covenant.[82] Moo notes, "Rather than treating Egypt and Sinai as an interruption to the previous promises, their needs became a new opportunity for another manifestation of God's divine loyalty to his oft-repeated promise plan."[83] The basis of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage was the pre-existing Abrahamic covenant which Yahweh then built upon with the institution of the Sinai covenant, further cementing his relationship with the children of Israel.

Chapter 4 will consist of an exegetical analysis of Exodus 2:23-3:15, which will demonstrate that Yahweh's actions on behalf of the enslaved Hebrews were due to Yahweh's covenantal faithfulness. Yahweh's deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage is not based on political liberation but on the foundation of the Abrahamic covenant. The historical Exodus event "speaks of the liberation of Israel in the context of the inbreaking of the kingdom of Yahweh. At issue fundamentally in the Exodus story is the continuation of redemption history, the working out in history of the divine purpose embodied in the call of Abraham."[84] Yahweh's act of deliverance is not merely to save the children of Israel from oppression but to gather together his children to serve him. He was not simply delivering the children of Israel "from" bondage but redeeming them "to" relationship with himself.

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[82] Walter C. Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 69.

[83] Ibid., 70.

[84] John H. Stek, "Salvation, Justice and Liberation in the Old Testament," *CTJ* 13.2 (1978): 147.

Chapter 5 will focus on the covenant relationship as the overarching theme undergirding the book of Jeremiah, which will demonstrate that repentance and a return to covenantal relationship with Yahweh is the only hope for deliverance. In bringing a prophetic lawsuit against his unfaithful wife, Yahweh illustrates the intimate nature of the covenant relationship, which is aptly demonstrated through the marriage metaphor. Referencing the Exodus and the failure of their forefathers to remain faithful to Yahweh amplifies the historical shortcomings of the nation of Israel to maintain covenantal fidelity. While the theme of judgment is prominent throughout the prophetic text, the compassionate nature of Yahweh is on full display, with the themes of repentance and restoration interwoven throughout the text. Partial restoration awaits the nation, while full restoration of the covenantal relationship will be realized with the inception of the new covenant resulting in the bride being fully restored. Return from exile and liberation from bondage rests on the foundation of a restored covenantal relationship. Without the restoration of the covenantal relationship, liberation is not possible.

Chapter 6 will analyze the parallels between the life of Jesus and the historical Exodus event in the nation of Israel and demonstrate that Jesus fulfilled OT prophecies, both directly and typologically, and through his life and death paved the way for a greater future exodus. The development of the theme of the new Moses will be explored, and its theological significance will be examined. Matthew presents a consistent pattern of references to a past Exodus and a subsequent future eschatological Exodus, which will be fulfilled in Christ the Messiah. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus not only repeats the pattern of OT Israel but accomplishes in his life what Israel failed to achieve throughout her history. Whereas the historical Exodus brought the Hebrews out of physical bondage, the prophetic books demonstrate that the nation of Israel as a whole repeatedly failed to find true freedom in Yahweh. Although Israel had experienced

physical liberation, they never fully came to a place of spiritual liberation in Yahweh. The tragic result was a revolving history of exile, repentance, deliverance, and a return to exile.

Chapter 6 will further explore the themes of covenant and fulfillment which are interwoven throughout the text of Hebrews. Just as God fulfilled the covenantal promises he made to Abraham; God will fulfill his promises to believers in Christ. As High Priest, Christ's death satisfies the demands of God's justice and ushers in a new and better everlasting covenant through his blood. Whereas the history of the nation of Israel demonstrates a repeated failure to maintain the covenantal relationship with God (Heb 8:9–10) and a failure to receive the promises of God, the new covenant written in the hearts and minds of man provides an anchor of hope allowing believers to successfully complete their earthly wilderness wanderings. As a result of the new covenant in Christ's blood, believers have an eschatological hope for true liberation in Christ through reconciliation and remission of sins, and deliverance from death, culminating in an eternal unshakeable kingdom (Heb 12:27–28).

Chapter 7 will compile the research and demonstrate that the theological theme of liberation is always linked with the concept of covenantal relationship throughout the canon. Yahweh's deliverance of the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage was not a political action taken on behalf of an oppressed people group, but an act of mercy on behalf of his covenant people to restore covenant relationship with his children. An analysis of the Exodus motif throughout the canon shows a pattern of exile and restoration, demonstrating that liberation depends on a covenant relationship with Yahweh. Moreover, the liberation that Christ died to effect was eschatological in nature rather than socio-political in nature. While the universal church as a whole and believers as individuals should strive to fight on behalf of those who are actual victims of oppression in society, their greater aim should be to lead all mankind, both the

oppressed and the oppressor, to the foot of the cross where true liberation can be found in Christ Jesus. The ultimate goal of liberation in the Scriptures is not a physical deliverance from societal injustices and oppression but a spiritual liberation from the bondage of sin and eschatological death through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus.

CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF THE HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES OF LIBERATION THEOLOGY

As the hermeneutical approach employed by a myriad of liberation theologies varies among different liberation theologians, the goal of this chapter is not a detailed examination of specific hermeneutical methods but rather an analysis of several critical hermeneutical principles that run throughout the various streams of liberation theology. The goal of this chapter is not to critique liberation theology as a whole but to examine how the hermeneutical principles utilized by various liberation theologians influence their interpretation of the biblical text, specifically how such principles impact their interpretation of liberation in the Exodus. Of particular focus will be two of the most common hermeneutical principles utilized by liberation theologians. First to be examined will be the liberationist perspective that the biblical text should be approached through the hermeneutical lens of the oppressed along with the dangers inherent in such an approach. Second, the principle that the biblical text should be approached through the lived experience of the interpreter will be examined as well as the potential pitfalls of such an approach. The postmodern reader-response method of interpretation will be examined along with the fundamental errors undergirding such an approach. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how these hermeneutical principles impact liberation theology's interpretation of the historical Exodus event, thus influencing how they view liberation throughout the entirety of the canon.

Historically, traditional methods of biblical interpretation advocated an approach to the biblical text which sought to distance the interpreter from ideological interests and encouraged the interpreter to approach the text from as detached and objective a vantage point as possible.[1] However, recent decades have seen an advancement in "practitioners of social-scientific

[1] William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Third Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 144.

analysis" who disavow an objective reading of the text and take an activist approach to biblical interpretation.[2] According to Klein:

> In the 1970s and 1980s the two main representatives of this perspective were those who practiced liberation and feminist hermeneutics. In the 1990s and 2000s the former largely gave way to broader forms of cultural criticism, especially what has come most often to be called postcolonialism, while the latter has continued unabated. Each of these movements shares a common commitment to the liberation of the disenfranchised of this world and views goals or claims of "detached objectivity" as both a myth and a weakness for interpreters.[3]

Early Liberation Theology in Latin America

Arising amid the Latin American struggle for freedom from socio-economic and political injustices, the major thrust of Latin American liberation hermeneutics centered on examining the text through the lens of the poor and oppressed. A common thread tying together the works of early Latin American Liberation Theologians was the idea that practical application of the Scriptures to alleviate the suffering of the poor and oppressed in society was of the utmost importance and that action should take precedence over theological reflection.

Orthopraxis as the Starting Point

The following provides an example of beginning with an *a priori* starting point, then reading Scripture in that light. The starting point of theological reflection is not abstract concepts of God but the struggle of the poor for liberation in oppressive societies. In addressing the method of liberation theology, brothers Clodovis and Leonardo Boff, well-known liberation theologians immersed in the Latin American liberationist tradition, argue that liberation theology

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[2] Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation,* 144.

[3] Ibid. According to Klein et al., "In other words, if one is not part of the solution, one is part of the problem! If biblical scholars do not join the marginalized in their quest for full equality, human rights, and a decent life for all, irrespective of gender, race, sexual orientation, nationality, and so on, then they de facto remain aligned with the inhumane, oppressive, sexist, and racist powers of this world. In the last dozen years, lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgendered (LGBT) interpretation has grown from being a very small to a very significant piece of the hermeneutical mosaic." Ibid., 144-145.

itself is "pre-theological." Liberation theology is not merely concerned with "doing theology" but is primarily concerned with engaging in the liberation process in practice.[4] In essence, orthodoxy is relegated to second place, while orthopraxis takes center stage in the view of the liberation theologian. For the Boffs', practice lies at the heart of liberation theology.

> The essential point is this: links with specific practice are at the root of liberation theology. It operates within the great dialectic of theory (faith) and practice (love). In fact, it is only this effective connection with liberating practice that can give theologians a "new spirit," a new style, or a new way of doing theology. Being a theologian is not a matter of skillfully using methods but of being imbued with the theological spirit. Rather than introducing a new theological method, liberation theology is a new way of being a theologian. Theology is always the second step; the first is the "faith that makes its power felt through love" (Gal 5:6). Theology (not the theologian) comes afterward; liberating practice comes first.[5]

The centrality of practice bleeds over into liberation hermeneutics, where the textual meaning is sought, "but only as a function of the practical meaning: the important thing is not so much interpreting the text of the scriptures as interpreting life "according to the scriptures."[6] The aim of liberation hermeneutics is "to find contemporary actualization (practicality) for the textual meaning."[7] Discovering the meaning of the biblical text is not the primary goal as much as "liberative hermeneutics seeks to discover and activate the *transforming energy* of biblical

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[4] Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 22.

[5] Ibid., 22-23. While the Boffs' note that "the most appropriate and specific way for theologians to commit themselves to the poor and oppressed is to produce good theology," they assert that it is impossible to actually do theology without personal contact with the oppressed. Ibid., 23. In the estimation of the Boffs', "one point is paramount: anyone who wants to elaborate relevant liberation theology must be prepared to go into the "examination hall" of the poor. Only after sitting on the benches of the humble will he or she be entitled to enter a school of "higher learning." Ibid., 24. According to the authors, "Without a minimum of "suffering with" this suffering that affects the great majority of the human race, liberation theology can neither exist nor be understood. Underlying liberation theology is a prophetic and comradely commitment to the life, cause, and struggle of these millions of debased and marginalized human beings, a commitment to ending this historical social iniquity." Ibid., 3.

[6] Ibid., 34.

[7] Ibid., 24.

texts."[8] Although the Boffs' assert this hermeneutical approach is free from ideological preconceptions, they contend that the end goal is "finding an interpretation that will lead to individual change (conversion) and change in history (revolution)."[9] They note:

> Finally, without being reductionist, this theological-political rereading of the Bible stresses the *social context* of the message [emphasis original]. It places each text in its historical context in order to construct an appropriate-not literal-translation into our own historical context. For example, liberative hermeneutics will stress (but not to the exclusion of other aspects) the social context of oppression in which Jesus lived and the markedly political context of his death on the cross. Obviously, when it is approached in this way, the biblical text takes on a particular relevance in the context of the oppression now being experienced in the Third World, where liberating evangelization has immediate and serious political implications.[10]

The Liberationist Hermeneutic

The starting point in liberation theology is not the biblical text but the experience of injustice suffered by the oppressed in society. In discussing the three-step approach utilized by liberation theologians, Klein et al. note, "In the liberationist hermeneutic, the Bible does not normally come into play at the beginning of step one but only to aid in steps two and three. Particularly by focusing on the biblical narratives of liberation from oppression, with the Exodus as the OT paradigm and a socio-political understanding of God's kingdom as the NT paradigm, the liberationist takes heart from his or her conviction that God has a "preferential option for the poor."[11] In this stage, theologians approach the biblical text to engage in hermeneutical

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[8] Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 24.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 25.

[11] Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 145–46. Great debates arose among liberation theologians as to the best methods for bringing about desired changes in society. While some sought social change through peaceful means, such as Martin Luther King Jr.'s non-violent protests, others embraced non-biblical philosophies such as Marxism, with some fully supporting violent revolution in an attempt to overthrow existing social structures. Ibid., 146.

mediation only after they have a proper understanding of the oppressed.[12] In the hermeneutical mediation stage of the theological construct, the liberation theologian seeks to ascertain what the Word of God says about oppression and liberation.[13] According to the Boffs':

> The liberation theologian goes to the scriptures bearing the whole weight of the problems, sorrows, and hopes of the poor, seeking new light and inspiration from the divine word. This is a new way of reading the Bible: the hermeneutics of liberation. An examination of the whole of scripture from the viewpoint of the oppressed: this is the hermeneutics or specific interpretation (reading) used by liberation theology.[14]

According to the Boffs' this hermeneutical approach is seen as a theological exercise where a divine response is not expected. The Word of God holds a primacy place of value but not of methodology as there exists a "hermeneutical circle" between the biblical text and the poor.[15] Thus, owing to the scriptures revelation on the liberation of the poor of the world, the Word "can emerge only as a message of radical consolation and liberation."[16] In essence, the hermeneutics of liberation values application more than interpretation and accuses rationalistic exegesis of being more concerned with finding meaning in the biblical text. The purpose of the hermeneutical endeavor is not necessarily to find the meaning in the biblical text but to find

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[12] The overarching emphasis on liberation as deliverance from physical oppression can be seen in the theological framework of Latin American liberation theology which comprises three stages in the theological process. The first stage, comprised of a socio-analytical mediation, seeks to discover why persons are oppressed. The second stage, comprised of hermeneutical mediation, seeks to discover God's plan for the poor. The third stage, comprised of practical mediation, is concerned with taking action to overcome oppression. Liberation is defined as liberation from oppression, and in this beginning stage, liberation theology seeks to understand the condition of the oppressed and the forms of oppression they suffer. The initial question the theologian should seek to answer in this stage is why oppression exists and what causes it. That liberation from worldly oppression is the primary concern of such a theological system is evident in how oppression is defined during this stage. Instead of focusing on the "poor in spirit," the emphasis is placed on those who are poor in socio-economic terms. Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 24-25.

[13] Ibid., 32.

[14] Ibid. While the authors state that the hermeneutics of liberation is not the only legitimate approach to the biblical text, they note that for third-world interpreters it is the "hermeneutics of our times." Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 33.

[16] Ibid.

practical ways in which to apply the biblical text to the lives of the oppressed so that they may be liberated from their oppressors.[17] Approaching the text in such a manner "aims to find contemporary actualization (practicality) for the textual meaning."[18] Essentially, the Boffs' method of interpretation encompasses the reading of the biblical text from an *a priori* starting point rather than allowing the biblical text to establish the starting point for interpretation.

Emphasis on Exodus

Owing to their overwhelming focus on liberation, it is only natural that liberation theologians would place a greater emphasis on the biblical books that entail a message of liberation, with the book of Exodus maintaining the place of primacy.[19] The Exodus event is viewed first and foremost as a political event, subsequently leading to a full liberation which includes liberation from sin and death. However, not all liberation theologians add the caveat that the Boff brothers add that the liberation in Exodus includes liberation from sin and death.[20] While God is the father of all people, he is "most particularly father" for those that are oppressed, which can be seen in God's deliverance of the Israelites in Exodus 3:7–8.[21] Liberation theologians frequently point to Exodus 3:7–8 to demonstrate God's preference for the poor; however, they often fail to note or diminish the reason why God responded to the groanings of the Hebrews. If Yahweh rescued the children of Israel from Egypt because they were being

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[17] Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 33-34.

[18] Ibid., 34.

[19] The Prophets are favored by liberation theologians partly due to their "vigorous denunciation of injustices" and their "revindication of the rights of the poor." Ibid., 35. The Gospels are favored partly due to Jesus' liberating actions. Acts is favored due to its portrayal of a liberated believing community, and Revelation due to its description of the believers' struggle against the "monsters of history." Ibid.

[20] Ibid., 51.

[21] Ibid.

oppressed, as liberation theologians claim, it begs the question of why God delivered the Israelites but no other oppressed people groups in the ANE. The overemphasis on the political nature of the Exodus event by liberation theologians demonstrates how the *a priori* starting point influences their reading of the biblical text.

The Growth of Liberation Theology in North America

Much as Latin American Liberation Theology arose during a time of societal turmoil and amid the struggle for socio-economic and political reforms, liberation theology in North America emerged during a time of social upheaval amidst the civil rights struggle of the 1960s, resulting in a black theology of liberation. To understand the hermeneutical approach employed by Black Liberation Theology in North America, it is imperative that one grasp the social and cultural influences that contributed to early black religious thought in the United States.

Cone asserts that the culture of the theologian shapes their "understanding of the theological task."[22] This holds true for both white and black theologians, according to Cone. As white men were slaveholders, there existed no need for white theology to consider politics in their theology; thus, they failed to regard the "political suffering of black people as critical evidence for the shaping of their theological perspectives."[23] In notating the failures of white theology, Cone states:

> I would also contend that they missed the decisive ingredient of the gospel message. For if the essence of the gospel is the liberation of the oppressed from sociopolitical humiliation for a new freedom in Christ Jesus (and I do not see how anyone can read the Scriptures and conclude otherwise), and if Christian theology is an explication of the meaning of that gospel for our time, must not theology

[22] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 71.

[23] Ibid.

> itself have liberation as its starting point or run the risk of being at best idle talk and at worst blasphemy?[24]

James Cone and Black Religious Thought

The impact of living through the civil rights era undoubtedly greatly influenced how Cone approached the theological task, reflected in his insistence on approaching the biblical text through the lens of the oppressed.[25] Cone accused white theologians of being concerned with the "culture of the ruling class" while noting that "black people's religious ideas were shaped by the cultural and political existence of the victims in North America."[26] As a result, the social situation in which black people found themselves contributed to the formation and content of black religious thought. Arising out of a social situation where black persons were facing oppression in society and not being afforded rights equal to those of whites, the overarching focus of black religious thought became freedom from socio-political oppression. Black theology is centered on the idea of earthly liberation from oppression as "black theological reflections about God occurred in the black struggle of freedom."[27] The historical struggle of oppressed black people not only influenced how they approached the biblical text but also their view of salvation. According to Cone, "White thought on the Christian view of salvation was largely 'spiritual' and sometimes 'rational,' but usually separated from the concrete struggle of freedom

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[24] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 71.

[25] Cone acknowledges that when he began writing *A Black Theology of Liberation* in 1969, he was "deeply involved with the black struggle for justice and was still searching for a perspective on Christian theology that would help African-Americans recognize that the gospel of Jesus is not only consistent with their fight for liberation but is its central meaning for twentieth-century America." Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 12–13.

[26] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 73. Cone concludes, "Unlike Europeans who immigrated to this land to escape from tyranny, Africans came in chains to serve a nation of tyrants. It was the slave experience that shaped our idea of this land. And this difference in social existence between Europeans and Africans must be recognized, if we are to understand correctly the contrast in the form and content of black and white theology." Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

in this world. Black thought was largely eschatological and never abstract, but usually related to blacks' struggle against earthly oppression."[28]

Whereas, according to Cone, white theologians were afforded the luxury of focusing on theological ideas such as infant baptism and predestination, black persons built their faith through the telling of stories, such as God's deliverance of the Hebrews from bondage in Egypt. While white theologians focused on theological issues, black persons were more concerned with historical incidences of God delivering the Hebrews from their oppressors.[29] The socio-economic situation facing enslaved blacks prevented serious theological inquiry on such subjects leaving black persons to focus on the historical acts of God in liberating the Hebrews from bondage.[30] Hence, the social situation faced by black persons led to an all-encompassing focus on the historical Exodus narrative in the lives of black persons and in Black Liberation Theology. The form of black religion in story became an integral part of black theology, with their social realities leading to the acceptance of a theology that placed liberation from socio-political bondage center stage in their storytelling through preaching and songs of deliverance.[31] Within this framework, black people looked for both religious and secular themes that promised them release from their oppression.[32] Rather than approach the biblical text in an attempt to ascertain what the biblical text itself had to say, the biblical text was approached through the lens of their social situation, which was one of oppression. Cone writes:

> It was not simply through an exegetical study of the Bible that blacks decided to center their preaching on the Exodus and not on Paul's letter to Philemon; neither

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[28] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 74.

[29] Ibid., 73-74.

[30] Ibid., 74.

[31] Cone asserts, "The theme of liberation expressed in story form is the essence of black religion. Both content and form were essentially determined by Black people's social existence." Ibid., 79.

[32] Ibid.

> was it through exegesis that they centered their spirituals on the cross and resurrection of Jesus and not on his birth in Bethlehem. In view of their social situation of oppression, black people needed liberating visions so that they would not let historical limitations determine their perception of black being. Therefore when Christianity was taught to them and they began to read the Bible, blacks simply appropriated those biblical stories that met their historical need. That was why some themes are stressed and others are overlooked. The one theme that stood out above all other themes was liberation, and that was because of the social conditions of slavery.[33]

Cone's approach to the biblical text through a cultural context arising out of a social situation that views society as being comprised of the oppressed and the oppressor culminates in Cone's conclusion that a theology of the gospel arises out of the community of the oppressed. His overemphasis on socio-political liberation, with the historical Exodus as a proof text, influenced him to approach the biblical text from a sociological perspective and experiential lens rather than an exegetical one. In essence, Cone's interpretive approach begins with an *a priori* position and proceeds with his looking for Scriptures to support his position.

Rejection of "White" Theology

An *a priori* starting point for reading Scripture was adopted by many black liberation theologians due to the history of slavery in North America. One of the factors contributing to the rejection of what is often deemed "white Christianity/theology" by black liberation theologians is the ways in which the gospel was historically applied to keep enslaved persons in subjugation. The efforts by the Church of England in 1701 to convince slave masters to allow for religious instruction for slaves supported the notion that Christianized slaves would become better

[33] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 79. In light of these factors, Cone concludes that traditional theological concerns, including "Calvinistic problems as unconditional election and limited atonement," were not a concern to black persons and they "did not debate religion on an abstract theological level but lived their religion in concrete history." Ibid.

slaves.[34] Instead of introducing a Christianity that valued all humans as equals in the sight of God, Christianity was used to dehumanize slaves even further. The pamphlets put forth by religious societies to encourage slave masters to support the conversion of slaves asserted that Christianity was indeed compatible with slavery.[35] Raboteau notes:

> To prove the point, such tracts reiterated ad nauseam the verse from Ephesians 6:5: 'Slaves be obedient to your masters.' The missionaries thus denied that spiritual equality implied worldly equality; they restricted the egalitarian impulse of Christianity to the realm of the spirit. So, in effect, they built a religious foundation to support slavery.[36]

While missionaries experienced successes in converting slaves, enslaved black persons adopted their own forms of Christianity, which differed vastly from that of white Christianity of the time.[37] Rejecting white Christianity meant rejecting a form of Christianity that not only practiced slavery, but which used the Bible to promote acceptance of the practice. Raboteau notes, "Inevitably, the slaves' Christianity contradicted that of their masters, for the slaves knew that no matter how sincerely religious a slaveowner might be, his Christianity was compatible with slavery, and theirs was not. The division went deep; it extended to the fundamental interpretation of the Bible."[38] The end result was a rejection of methods of interpretation that

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[34] Raboteau, *A Fire in the Bones*, 19.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., 19–20.

[37] The historical Exodus's importance in enslaved black persons' religion in the New World cannot be overestimated. Raboteau notes, "The story of Exodus contradicted the claim made by white Christians that God intended Africans to be slaves. Exodus proved that slavery was against God's will and that slavery inevitably would end, even though the when and the how remained hidden in the providence of God. Christian slaves thus applied the Exodus story, whose end they knew, to their own experience of slavery, which had not yet ended, and so gave meaning and purpose to lives threatened by senseless and demeaning brutality. Exodus functioned as an archetypal myth for the slaves. The sacred history of God's liberation of his people would be or was being reenacted in the American South. A white Union Army chaplain working among freedmen in Decatur, Alabama, commented disapprovingly on the slaves' fascination with Exodus: "There is no part of the Bible with which they are so familiar as the story of the deliverance of Israel. Moses is their ideal of all that is high, and noble, and perfect, in man. I think they have been accustomed to regard Christ not so much in the light of a spiritual Deliverer, as that of a second Moses who would eventually lead them out of their prison house of bondage." Ibid., 32–33.

[38] Ibid., 27.

were deemed white and the acceptance of a hermeneutic which approached the biblical text in a cultural context derived from the lived experience of the black community. As black persons continued to struggle for equal rights after the abolishment of slavery, the hermeneutical method employed by theologians such as Cone developed to the point where the only acceptable hermeneutical approach to the biblical text was through the lens of the oppressed.[39]

Cone sought to distance himself from traditional, more conservative hermeneutical approaches, such as historical-critical analysis, as they were deemed too Eurocentric in their approach to the biblical text. Cone's disdain for any hermeneutical approach arising out of "white" theological systems led to his discarding any method of biblical interpretation which could be deemed Eurocentric. Bradley notes,

> James Cone and those who followed him jettison too many traditional orthodox Christian foundations in their desire to apply the Bible to the black experience and concomitantly often confuse interpretation methods with application methods. A culturally applied hermeneutic proceeds from a particular cultural anthropology and drives biblical exposition toward contextualization. A culturally applied hermeneutic seeks not to derive autonomous meaning from the text but rather to understand and apply meaning in particular social contexts.[40]

The argument that traditional hermeneutical approaches should be disavowed due to past abuses stemming from misinterpretations of the text fails in that the validity of a hermeneutical method is not determined by the failures of those who have utilized such methods of interpretation. Hermeneutical methods must be evaluated based on the principles employed in

[39] Hence, Cone proclaims white theology as being antichrist in that it fails to approach the text through the lens of the oppressed, while black theology is true theology in Cone's estimation as it seeks to interpret the Bible in light of the oppressed black community. Cone, *Black Theology of Liberation*, 29.

[40]Anthony B. Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 48.

such methods and not on the misinterpretation or misapplication of an individual interpreter.[41] Bradley notes:

> …the rejection of conservative hermeneutics on that basis alone presents a *non sequitur*. This objection establishes itself on a hasty generalization. To this objection one might reply, *abusus usum non tollit* (abuse does not negate proper use). "Conservative hermeneutics was not necessarily the problem, although one could build a prima facie case based on misapplications. The objection rather, should fall on *individual* abusers or traditions rather than on the hermeneutical principle as a whole. The principles themselves were not responsible for odious misuses of Scripture.[42]

The idea among liberation theologians that rejecting conservative hermeneutical principles will somehow prevent misinterpretation and subsequent misapplication of Scripture is illogical in that the hermeneutical principles employed by liberation theologians are highly subjective in nature. Such principles, which often place the reader as the authority in determining meaning, are inherently risky for not only faulty interpretation but the subsequent misapplication of the biblical text which may lead to the very abuse and harm which liberation theologians were initially trying to prevent.

The Eurocentric Argument

An argument frequently employed by black liberation theologians against the use of traditional hermeneutical methods is that such methods are too Eurocentric and that they fail to take into consideration the experiences of African Americans.[43] In addressing the wealth of

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[41] Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology* 50.

[42] Ibid.

[43] The claim that traditional conservative methods of interpretation are too Eurocentric runs throughout much of black theology. William H. Myers, Professor of New Testament and Black Church Studies at Ashland Theological Seminary, concludes that a Eurocentric approach leads to the "exaltation of one cultural world view over all others." William H. Myers, "The Hermeneutical Dilemma of the African American Biblical Student," In *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis, MN: 517 Media, 1991), 41. Myers takes issue with the scarcity of discussions on African American hermeneutical approaches. According to Myers, a Eurocentric approach is harmful to African American students in that it

literature on hermeneutical methodology available, although Myers notes there is much to appreciate in such works, he asserts that most of the material contains a subtle ideology that presupposes a Eurocentric worldview and hermeneutical approach to biblical interpretation.[44] According to Myers, "The books emphasize selected events in the history of interpretation (the Reformation, the Enlightenment); selected methodological concerns (biblical criticism in general and the historical critical method in particular); or selected hermeneutical motifs (authorial intent, inspiration, inerrancy, propositional revelation)."[45]

This raises the question of why certain hermeneutical motifs are considered part of a Eurocentric hermeneutic. Why would hermeneutical/interpretive matters such as authorial intent, inspiration, and inerrancy be considered a Eurocentric issue and not a theological concern that is relevant to a biblical scholar of any worldview or background? Bradley asserts that,

> the rejection of traditional hermeneutical principles rests on the assumption that those principles are not useful in an African-American context. To this, we may raise the description versus explanation objection. The notion that Eurocentric principles are inapplicable is meant to serve as sufficient explanatory evidence for rejection of all things white. However, several questions must be raised that are not articulated in the black liberation theologians' objections. Among them, what are the distinctions of a Eurocentric theology of methodology that are only

"suggests to all students that the Eurocentric way of interpreting the text is the normative way by which all other approaches are to be tested." Ibid., 41-42. Myers further asserts that the Eurocentric approach claims to be without cultural bias, which implies "that an African American reading of the text is culturally biased." Ibid., 42. While condemning Eurocentric approaches for supposedly exalting one culture above another, Myers insists the text must be approached through the lens of the oppressed community. This raises the question of how approaching the text through an African American reading will be any less guilty of the same cultural bias Myers accuses Eurocentric approaches of having.

[44] Myers raises concerns that the tools utilized under a Eurocentric model may not prove useful for the African American biblical student. Myers notes, "Tension may arise as students observe that many raise questions about the appropriateness of such tools in the "African American context. Yet, they recognize that the Eurocentric approach is not without merit, especially the critical techniques (both Higher and Lower Criticism) that they mastered in formal theological study." Myers, "The Hermeneutical Dilemma," 42. Myers notes the difficulty in finding a model which can incorporate these useful techniques in the Eurocentric approach and ultimately concludes, "The easiest— though most dubious— response to this dilemma may be to repudiate and discard all or most of the critical methodologies in academia and to replace these with learnings garnered on the firing line in the ministerial context." Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 41.

> applicable to Anglocultural constructs? How specifically is the authority of Scripture an impediment to African-American Christians? What makes a datum Eurocentric? How exactly does biblical orthodoxy perpetuate ecclesiastical colonialism? In many instances, expressing objections against Eurocentric theology simply knocks down straw men. What African-American critics have failed to do is explain how Eurocentric theology is applicable to Anglo contexts and not applicable to their own. How is the systematizing of the providence of God, for example, applicable to Anglo-American culture and not applicable to an African-American context?[46]

Assessment of the Critique of the European Hermeneutic

From the perspective of the black liberation theologian, traditional hermeneutical methods are incapable of identifying and addressing matters that are of importance to the black community as they fail to consider the needs and issues faced by different cultures.[47] However, the view held by some black theologians that a Eurocentric hermeneutic fails in addressing matters of concern to black persons does not negate the usefulness of conservative hermeneutical approaches nor determine the ultimate validity of such approaches. That conservative hermeneutical approaches have not been utilized to address the societal concerns of a particular demographic in the way some black biblical scholars would like are not sufficient grounds for declaring a traditional hermeneutical approach to be inadequate. Furthermore, the emphasis on a particular theological subject, such as inspiration and inerrancy, does not delegitimize various traditional hermeneutical methods. If a hermeneutical method can be judged as invalid simply because those who utilize such methods focus on specific areas of theological concern, then the almost singular focus of liberation theologians on liberation from socio-political liberation would invalidate their hermeneutical approaches as well.

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[46] Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology*, 51.

[47] According to Bradley, "The charge against Anglo theologians is that they determine what the polemical issues are for everyone without acknowledging the possibility of a different perspective on what those polemical issues would, in fact, include." Ibid., 50.

"Lived Experience" as the Criterion for Biblical Truth

In an attempt to understand their experiences, the early black church sought to interpret the Bible through their lived experience of slavery. Rather than examining their lived experience through the lens of the Scriptures, black Christians interpreted the Bible through the lens of the black experience. An *a priori* reading of the biblical text through the lived experiences of a group of persons runs the risk of importing meanings into the text that were never intended. Instead of seeking to determine the original author's intended meaning to their original audience, meanings in the text were derived from the social contexts of modern biblical readers.[48] Considering the social situation in which black slaves found themselves in colonial America, it is only natural that they would have viewed the Exodus event as a story of socio-political liberation, as enslaved blacks were fighting for socio-political liberation themselves. In this instance, *a priori* reading of the text leads to a hyper-focus on the socio-political aspects of the Exodus narrative which overemphasizes liberation from oppression throughout the biblical text.

Grounding one's hermeneutical method in their own social experience limits their interpretation of the text to their own lived experience. The danger inherent in an *a priori* approach is that the interpreter may import meaning onto the text, which the text never carried, or may lead to an overemphasis on certain aspects while leading to the neglect of Scriptures which do not align with their personal experience. Cone himself acknowledges the risks associated with focusing so intently on the lived experience of black persons when he notes:

> I realize that my theological limitations and my close identity with the social conditions of black people could blind me to the truth of the gospel. And maybe our white theologians are right when they insist that I have overlooked the universal significance of Jesus' message. But I contend that there is no

[48] While all modern believers should seek to apply the biblical text to their lives, to properly apply the biblical text, one must first interpret the text properly. The argument here is not against *application* in modern social contexts but against *interpretation* through the lens of modern social contexts. A better hermeneutical approach would be to interpret the biblical text through the social context of the biblical authors.

> universalism that is not particular. Indeed their insistence upon the universal note of the gospel arises out of their own particular political and social interests.[49]

Cone's hermeneutical approach fails in that all objectivity of authority of Scripture is lost when the biblical text is not the starting point for interpretive truth. That Cone's hermeneutical starting point is experience is noted when he states:

> There is no truth for and about black people that does not emerge out of the context of their experience. Truth in this sense is black truth, a truth disclosed in the history and culture of black people. This means that there can be no Black Theology which does not take the black experience as a source for its starting point.[50]

A hermeneutical approach that has lived experience as the starting point of interpretation relegates Scripture to second place in the interpretive process while lived experience becomes the primary factor in determining truth. Approaching the text in such a subjective manner leaves the text open to misinterpretation and allows for the cherry-picking of Scriptures that fit the needs of the interpreter. Essentially the text can be made to say whatever the interpreter or community needs to hear from the text. Cone's hermeneutical starting point of lived experience relegates the Bible to a place of secondary importance, as can be seen when Cone notes:

> I still regard the Bible as an important source of my theological reflections, but not the starting point. The black experience and the Bible together in dialectical tension serve as my point of departure today and yesterday. The order is significant. I am black first—and everything else comes after that. This means that I read the Bible through the lens of a black tradition of struggle and not as the objective Word of God. The Bible therefore is one witness to God's empowering presence in human affairs, along with other important testimonies. The other testimonies include sacred documents of the African-American experience…[51]

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[49] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 150.

[50] Ibid., 40-41. The assertion that there is no truth for black persons that does not arise from their lived experiences subjugates the Bible to "lived experience."

[51] Ibid.,12. Cone lists these sacred objects as being "the speeches of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr., the writings of Zora Neale Hurston and Toni Morrison, the music of the blues, jazz, and rap. Liberating stories, myths, and legends are also found among men and women of all races and cultures struggling to realize the divine intention for their lives. I believe that the Bible is a liberating word for many people but not the only word of

Although Cone acknowledges the Scripture as a "primary source of theological discourse" and notes the importance of exegesis, in Cone's estimation the history and culture of oppressed peoples carry just as much weight as the Scriptures if not more.[52] According to Cone, the sources one uses to accomplish the task of theology are of the utmost importance, but once again, experience holds a place of pre-eminence over and above the Scriptures. Cone notes,

> Identifying the right source is more complicated. Of course, the sources include Scripture and tradition as they bear witness to the higher source of revelation as particularized and universalized in Jesus Christ. But also with equal and sometimes greater weight, the sources must include the history and culture of oppressed peoples. In the United States and its cultural dependencies that must mean people of color—black, yellow, red, and brown. Here the theologian asks: How have black people understood their history and culture, and how is that understanding related to their faith in Jesus Christ? The places to go for answers are the black sermon, prayer, song, and story of theological expression.[53]

Owing to his own personal experiences and his thoughts on the black experience in America, Cone approaches the Exodus through the lens of the oppressed and takes what he needs from the Exodus event that will speak to him personally. Cone's hermeneutical approach contributes to his understanding of the Exodus event as a story primarily about socio-political deliverance, thus leading to a hyper-focus on physical liberation from oppression.

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liberation. God speaks not just one Word in only one Story but many liberating words in many sacred stories." Ibid. It is significant that Cone places his race above every other factor to the point that he does not identify as a Christian first but as black first and foremost. Rather than finding his identity in Christ, Cone finds his identity in the color of his skin. In Cone's view, race reigns supreme taking a pre-eminent position in his life and theology while the gospel of Christ takes a backseat.

[52] Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 31. According to Cone, "To be an exegete of existence means that Scripture is not an abstract word, not merely a rational idea. It is God's Word to those who are oppressed and humiliated in this world. The task of the theologian is to probe the depths of Scripture exegetically for the purpose of relating that message to human existence. Because theologians are exegetes, they are also prophets. As prophets they must make clear that the gospel of God stands in judgment upon the existing order of injustice." Ibid.

[53] Ibid.,32.

The Dangers of Lived Experience as a Hermeneutical Approach

When lived experience becomes the foundation of a hermeneutical approach, the biblical text is held hostage to the interpreter and biblical truth becomes subject to change depending on the interpreter and their own individual needs. Fawcett notes that "elevating experience to the level of truth evaluator is a very dangerous decision, for experience is changeable, ambiguous, and open to deception."[54] Truth, by its very nature, cannot be subjective as it would cease to be the truth. Moreover, what happens when the lived experience of different people leads to different interpretations? Does the lived experience and subsequent biblical interpretation of an individual or group take precedence over the lived experience and interpretation of someone from a different ethnic background or group?

The following will address De La Torre's interpretive approach, which follows a reader-response hermeneutic that emphasizes finding a "Jesus" in the Scriptures that De La Torre needs to see in the text for his own purposes. Further explanation of the reader-response hermeneutic will be discussed later in the chapter. De La Torre's Hispanic political theology denigrates the "European White God" and calls for a Hispanic Jesus.[55] De La Torre asserts that "the purpose of religious and critical thought concerning the personhood of Jesus is to serve humanity by transforming the normative oppressive social structures to a more justice-based reality preached by Jesus."[56] According to De La Torre,

> For Jesús to be congruent with the Hispanic quest for liberation from oppressive structures, Jesús must unashamedly be Hispanic….There is no one true Jesus that can be objectively known; there are only subjective interpretations of Jesus. The social, cultural, political, and global economic power of Euroamericans allows

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[54] Bruce G. Fawcett, "A Critical Analysis of Some Hermeneutical Principles Found in Latin American Theologies of Liberation," *JETS* 37 (1994): 580.

[55] Miguel A. De La Torre, *The Politics of Jesús: A Hispanic Political Theology*. Lanham (MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015), 7.

[56] Ibid., 5–6.

> them to impose their subjective interpretation of Jesus as the objective Truth (with a capital T) for everyone else, including Latino/as. What would happen if rather than denying that we do indeed create Jesus in our own image, we embrace this methodology? What if we recognize that there is no such thing as some universal Jesus upon which every Christian can agree? What if we radically employ a hermeneutical suspicion to Christology-not simply to debunk the normative Eurocentric understanding of Jesus to construct a new Jesus?[57]

De La Torre's assertion that there are only subjective understandings of Jesus demonstrates that De La Torre is implementing a reader-response approach to the biblical text not for the purpose of understanding the biblical Jesus but through a subjective approach designed to construct a Jesus that fits the needs of the Hispanic community. [58] Just as Cone acknowledged the danger present in his relying too heavily on the black experience, De La Torre concedes the risks associated with his creation of a Jesus in the image of Latinos. De La Torre states:

> No doubt a danger exists in our quest for a Jesús created in the image of Latino/as where twenty-first century ideas of the Hispanic community are projected upon a two thousand-year-old historical figure in order to justify the praxis our community advocates. While every interpretation of Jesus or Jesús reflects the life of the author, our task is to remain as faithful as possible to the biblical narrative while exploring aspects of the text that might indicate how Jesús would understand and sympathize with the plight of today's Latino/as. In defiance of Rudolf Bultmann, we must not hesitate to reconstruct the story of Jesús because of the shortcomings of historical exegesis, thus solely concentrating on the Christ of faith. Reading the text with our own Hispanic eyes has the potential of freeing the text from the institutionalized Eurocentric church by reinterpreting the text through a more liberative lens.[59]

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[57] De La Torre, *The Politics of Jesús*, 7.

[58] Ibid., 8. Although De La Torre's Jesus is Hispanic, his Hispanic Jesus is not available for all Hispanics. De La Torre's Jesus is only available to the oppressed and those who stand in solidarity with the oppressed. According to De La Torre, "I recognize that not all Hispanics are monolithically dispossessed, the Jesús being constructed here focuses only on those relegated to the underside of history and those who stand in solidarity with them (including Euromericans seeking their own liberation and salvation). The Jesús of privileged Hispanics is no different from the Jesus of the dominant culture that justifies a status quo detrimental to the disenfranchised and, thus, for the sake of our own salvation must be rejected." Ibid.

[59] Ibid.

Just as Cone ignored the risks associated with transforming Jesus into a version that fits into his lived experience as a black man, De La Torre ignores the risks associated with creating a Jesus in his own image as a Hispanic man. Yet, De La Torre takes it a step further than other liberation theologians who argue for a preferential option for the poor and goes so far as to argue for "a preferential option in the creation of Jesus."[60] The Jesus being created in theologies such as these is not the Jesus of the Bible, but a Jesus created in the image of man. Implementing such a hermeneutical approach raises the question of if the truth of who Jesus is can be changed to fit the needs of an individual or community, then what other compromises will eventually be made? Will the biblical text become devalued next? One could argue that is exactly the path that De La Torre has taken when he states,

> While I recognize the biblical text is not for everyone, and at times is highly problematic-advocating sexism, classism, ethnic cleansing, and heterosexism-still, within its pages I believe are liberative gems that can propel humanity toward justice. The quest then is to avoid the dominant culture's biblical read that might be complicit with the uncritical hermeneutics held by those with power and privilege. The audience of this book is therefore those who believe Jesus Christ can make a moral contribution to the establishment of justice. And even if the reader rejects Jesus as Lord, participates in a different religious tradition, or claims to be a humanist, agnostic, or atheist, the fact remains that how Jesus has been constructed for the past two millenniums undergirds a global worldview that impacts everybody, especially as the religious justifier of conquerors and colonizers.[61]

Just as Black Liberation Theology rejects traditional hermeneutical approaches due to their claim that such methods are too Eurocentric, De La Torre seeks to avoid traditional hermeneutical approaches due to his associating such methods with those of the dominant culture which De La Torre would deem to be the oppressors. In De La Torre's estimation, traditional interpretations are associated with the hermeneutics of those who retain power and privilege,

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[60] De La Torre, *The Politics of Jesús*, 8.

[61] Ibid., 10.

which automatically makes such interpretations suspect. However, instead of utilizing a sound hermeneutical approach, De La Torre advocates for a methodology where the interpreter creates Jesus in his own image. Such an approach risks devaluing the Bible and distorting the true image of the historical Jesus. Whether intentional or unintentional, Jesus can be re-created to fit the image of the interpretive community or to support the ideological leanings of the interpreter.

Gay Theology Without Apology

Gary Comstock provides another example of the dangers associated with approaching the text through lived experience and how the Bible can be made to fit the image of the interpreter. Comstock developed his Gay Liberation Theology based on his lived experiences as a gay man. In introducing his book, *Gay Theology Without Apology*, Comstock notes, "The 'gay theology without apology' that I develop here examines the Bible and Christianity not with the purpose of fitting in or finding a place in them, but of fitting them into and changing them according to the particular experiences of lesbian/bisexual/gay people."[62] In essence, Comstock's reader-response hermeneutic allows him to shape the Scriptures to mean what he needs them to mean to him personally. Comstock disavows traditional methods of interpretation and instead looks for words of affirmation in the Scriptures, which Comstock maintains traditional methods have obscured.[63] Comstock readily acknowledges that he approaches the biblical text on his own terms, "from the point of view of my own experience, interests, needs, and biases," and advises others to "approach and develop theology from their own experience, interests, needs, and concerns."[64] Although Comstock fails to identify a hermeneutic beyond his "own terms" the

[62] Gary David Comstock, *Gay Theology Without Apology* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 1993), 4.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

postmodern reader-response theory that the reader is responsible for determining meaning is readily apparent in his approach.[65] Approaching the biblical text in such a manner carries a significant risk of faulty interpretation.

Comstock places the Exodus event and the wilderness struggles as one of the central events out of which the life of a Christian is born. In his estimation, the Exodus event is an ethical norm, functioning as a principle that demonstrates that pain inflicted on one person by another is impermissible. As such, "Both the Exodus and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are events or stories about overcoming and transforming pain, suffering, and death. Christians as people who are born of these events, therefore, are not those who bear or endure pain; they are those who transform it."[66] In Comstock's view, the Exodus is primarily a story about the liberation of people who are suffering at the hands of another. Furthermore, Comstock maintains that the Bible itself is homophobic and notes that he uses both the Exodus event and Jesus to "counter and criticize the Bible's bias."[67]

The Weakness of Identity as a Requirement for Biblical Interpretation

The methodological approach utilized by liberation theologians varies among the wide swath of liberation theologies. While some liberation theologians do identify their hermeneutical approach, one is at times hard-pressed to find an identifiable hermeneutic in the writings of many liberation theologians. However, there are several hermeneutical principles that most liberation theologians have in common. Perhaps the greatest commonality between the various branches of

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[65] Comstock notes that he is not suggesting everyone will have the same concerns as he does and that he is not suggesting everyone must accept his findings. Comstock takes care to note that the gay theology he puts forth is not a "definitive gay theology," but rather his attempt to put forth a "particular gay theology." Comstock, *Gay Theology Without Apology*, 5.

[66] Ibid., 10.

[67] Ibid., 13.

liberation theology is the insistence that the biblical text be approached through the lens of the oppressed, although who exactly constitutes the oppressed varies among liberation theologians. As seen throughout the chapter, this approach greatly influences their interpretation of the Exodus and undergirds many of their theological systems.

If biblical hermeneutics is to be recognized as a scientific discipline, any methodology that requires an interpreter to be a member of a distinct social group based on factors such as socio-economic class, race, or sexuality must be questioned as to its validity. Asserting that membership in or identification with a social or racial group is required for an interpreter to properly understand the biblical text essentially transfers the authority of the text to the social status of the interpreter and is not a sound hermeneutical principle.

The notion that one has to disavow their own skin color, culture, and worldview and become oppressed, or at the least adopt the mindset of an oppressed person, in order to have the ability to interpret the biblical text and understand God's truths utterly nullifies the truth in Galatians 3:26–29 that social class and ethnic identity are abolished in Christ.[68] If white persons can only receive the truth of the gospel and liberation by disavowing their whiteness and adopting a form of blackness in accordance with Cone's black theology, then salvation comes not through Christ but through identification with an ethnic group. Furthermore, a hermeneutic that restricts understanding to a specific class or group of people limits interpretation to anyone outside of the oppressed group. Ethnic identity and social status are not requirements for proper

[68] Such designations are not abolished in the sense that they cease to exist and matter in society, but that believers who have put on Christ all have equal standing in Christ. The argument being proffered here is not that one must check their life experiences at the door when it comes to biblical interpretation. As much as any faithful exegete would like to believe they are capable of setting aside all their presuppositions when approaching the biblical text, realistically, even the most faithful of interpreters will be hard-pressed to abandon all of their presuppositions. A person's life experiences can be a valuable tool in helping them appreciate text elements that others may overlook. However, such factors should be used as a tool and not as a hermeneutical starting point or the primary method of interpretation, or else one runs the risk of importing foreign meaning into the text based on their own personal life experiences.

exegesis, and any hermeneutical approach that maintains that an interpreter must be a member of an oppressed class or ethnic group must be rejected as an interpreter's ethnic identity or social status does not confer on them any special qualifications to interpret the Word or exclude them from being able to rightly divide the Word of truth.

The Overemphasizing of Socio-Political Liberation

Insisting on the utilization of a hermeneutical lens of the oppressed places such a heavy emphasis on the liberation of the oppressed in a socio-political context that the interpreter runs the risk of downplaying the spiritual aspects of liberation or of ignoring elements in the text that do not align with the interpreter's view of liberation.[69] Klein articulates the problems posed by liberation hermeneutics:

> They often do not seem adequately to preserve the spiritual element of salvation. Mark 8:36 stands out poignantly: "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?" They may overlook that "the poor" in Scripture are consistently not all the physically dispossessed or oppressed but those who in their need turn to God as their only hope. Liberationists often create a de facto canon within the canon and ignore or deem as not as authoritative those texts that do not support their agenda.[70]

The Exodus narrative was a defining moment in the history of the nation of Israel, not merely because the Israelites were freed from Egyptian bondage but because it brought them into covenant relationship with Yahweh, the God of their fathers, thus being an intricate part of God's salvific plan for mankind. While one cannot deny that there were political implications present in the historical Exodus narrative, as the Exodus motif is traced throughout the canon, it becomes apparent that there are spiritual realities and eschatological elements connected with liberation in

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[69] Critics of liberation theology have long argued that the biblical texts utilized by liberation theologians are "endlessly repetitive and highly selective." Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Thiselton Companion to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 782.

[70] Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 148.

the Exodus event which are often ignored by liberation theologies.[71] This is evidenced when Tracy notes,

> When Christian theology is tempted to flee to other-worldly theology, it is able to turn to neo-Platonism and even to some strands of the Wisdom traditions of both Testaments. But it cannot turn to the Exodus. For Exodus demands a resolutely *this-worldly spirituality* as it demands an historical and political, not a private or individualistic understanding of Christian salvation-as-total-liberation. Finally, when Christian theology is tempted to despair of biblical realism for its political theology one can turn to the narrative of Exodus. For Exodus disallows both millenarianism and despair.[72]

Tracy errs in that he dismisses the spiritual aspects of the Exodus narrative as demonstrated throughout the Exodus motif in the entirety of the canon. Rather than viewing the Exodus as an integral part of God's salvation-historical plan with spiritual and eschatological implications for all mankind, Tracy focuses exclusively on the political aspects of the Exodus and how they can be applied in a physical sense. While the Exodus narrative does contain political elements which may be applicable to modern societal ills, Tracy errs in focusing so heavily on these aspects that he ignores the individualistic salvific elements of the Exodus. The argument regarding the theological implications of the Exodus will be the subject of the rest of this dissertation. Therefore, further comment on the theological aspects of the Exodus is reserved until later.

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[71] Leonardo and Clodovis Boff contend that the "fundamental expression of oppression is socio-economic poverty and assert that "we need to start from here, from this "infrastructural" oppression, if we want to correctly understand all forms of oppression and see how they relate to each other." Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 25. The debate over what constitutes oppression in Western societies has continued to evolve with both academics and activists coming to differing conclusions on what they view as the fundamental expression of oppression. Whereas in times past, liberation theologians focused primarily on the poor in society as the oppressed, newer liberation theologies have focused on other groups in society that they deem to be oppressed regardless of economic status. For instance, some liberation theologies focus on race, gender, and sexual identity regardless of one's economic station in life.

[72] David Tracy, "Exodus: Theological Reflection," in *Exodus-A Lasting Paradigm,* ed. Bas van Iersel and Anton Weiler (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987), 119. Tracy links salvation with political and social struggle when he notes, "Christian salvation is not exhausted by any programme of political liberation, to be sure, but Christian salvation, rightly understood, cannot be divorced from the struggle for total human liberation-individual, social, political and religious." Ibid., 123.

The Necessity of a Sound Hermeneutical Approach

The hermeneutical principles discussed thus far link together the various streams of liberation theology. The idea that the text must be approached through the lens of the oppressed or that of lived experience entails serious risks of misinterpretation and subsequent distortion of biblical truths. One of the results of interpreting the text through the lens of experience or oppression is that liberation theologians tend to typologically apply the biblical text to their own lives, particularly the Exodus event. For instance, queer theologians see themselves as the Israelites who are struggling to "come out" and be accepted by the church. While a person's lived experience may provide valuable insights when engaging with the biblical text, the lived experience of any group or person does not supersede objective biblical truth. Biblical interpreters should not interpret the Bible through their lived experience but examine their lived experience in light of scriptural truth. Using lived experience as the gauge for interpreting the Word leads to an eisegetical reading of the biblical text where the text can be made to say whatever the interpreter wants it to in order to support their own theological agenda.

The Lack of an Exegetical Approach in Liberation Theology

As seen throughout this chapter, many liberation theologians outright downplay the need for an exegetical approach to the biblical text, and some who do note the importance of exegesis advocate for scientific exegesis to evolve and change its focus. Brazilian liberation theologian Carlos Mesters takes issue with exegetes whom he claims become acquainted with biblical facts through head knowledge rather than practical experience. Mesters places the poor and oppressed at the center of theology and encourages a hermeneutical approach where the common people's reading of the Bible should be the starting point for biblical interpretation. Mesters contends that interpreters should adopt the actual interpretation itself of the poor and oppressed communities.

Taking his approach beyond the hermeneutical lens of the poor and oppressed, Mesters notes that the common people are the ones who experience the same suffering from which the Bible originated, and thus, their lived reality becomes the criterion for biblical interpretation.[73] According to Mesters, "The people's main interest is not to interpret the Bible, but to interpret life with the help of the Bible. They try to be faithful, not primarily to the meaning the text has in itself (the historical and literal meaning), but to the meaning they discover in the text for their own lives."[74] Mesters' reader-response hermeneutic is not exegetical in nature but eisegetical in that the reader is the one who shapes the meaning of the biblical text. According to Mesters,

> Despite all its failing and uncertainties, the people's interpretation of the Bible is making an important contribution to exegesis itself. This contribution has to do with the directness and clarity of the people's vision. The people have regained the correct vision with which Christians should read and interpret the Bible. This vision, this popular interpretation of the Bible, does not read the Bible through the lens of exegetical scholarship and interpretation and is indeed an alarm signal to exegetes. Exegetes must work to enhance this vision of the people. For too long exegetes have tried to shape and alter people's vision of the Bible, rather than using that vision as a starting point. When exegetes and others have managed to throw the people's vision of the Bible out of focus, darkness has fallen upon the living words of the biblical text.[75]

Mesters explains that the common people's approach is not as concerned with the meaning of the text itself but with the meaning the text has for the person reading it. He notes that, "At the start people tend to draw any and every sort of meaning, however well or ill founded, from the text."[76] Over a period of time, people will develop an interest in the intrinsic meaning, and from this point, the person will benefit from an understanding of the historical and

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[73] Carlos Mesters, *Defenseless Flower: A New Reading of the Bible* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 8.

[74] Ibid. 9.

[75] Ibid., 10–11.

[76] Carlos Mesters, "The Use of the Bible in Christian Communities of the Common People," in *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics*, eds. Norman K. Gottwald and Richard A. Horsley (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 14.

cultural context of the Bible. Yet, even then, the purpose of such study is to find how the text can best be applied to the common person.[77] Mesters concludes that, "In this framework scientific exegesis can reclaim its proper role and function, placing itself in the service of the biblical text's meaning "for us."[78]

Mesters contends that since most exegetes do not live the life of captivity that the oppressed do and do not take part in their struggle for liberation, they may have a collection of biblical facts but are unable to see the biblical text in the same way that the common people do.[79] Mesters claims he is not trying to express that scientific exegesis is useless or that the common person's interpretation is infallible. Mesters equates exegesis with the letter of the law and the people's interpretation as the spirit of the law and notes that both must work together as two train rails that carry the train of interpretation. Yet, while noting the importance of both train rails, the scientific exegesis Mesters is promoting is not the traditional view of biblical exegesis but exegesis with a new focus and destiny. Mesters equates the common people with the little ones in Matthew 11:25-26, whom God reveals his will to over and above the learned ones in the passage.[80] In referencing these verses, Mesters notes,

> Those statements were certainly not prompted by lofty considerations about the historico-literal meaning of texts or the mechanisms of social oppression. The gift the Father gives the "little ones" does not compete with the science of the "learned and clever," but strips science of its supposed neutrality and gives it a new support and a new destiny. And the destiny of the scientists, the exegetes, is not to impose an understanding of the Bible on the "little ones" or to shape or alter their vision of the biblical texts. Rather the exegetes are to be at the service of the poor and their vision of the Bible. The destiny of these "learned and clever"

[77] Mesters, *The Bible and Liberation*, 14.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Mesters, *Defenseless Flower*, 17.

[80] Ibid., 18-21.

> ones is to cooperate with the poor and to clarify, enhance, and sharpen their vision.[81]

Therefore, while Mesters notes that scientific exegesis and the people's interpretation must work together, the version of exegesis Mesters promotes is not the traditional view of exegesis, which seeks to bring out the meaning of the biblical text. Mesters' version of exegesis is one that is subordinate to the people's interpretation of the text. This is demonstrated in Mesters' insistence that the new destiny of the exegete is not to alter the people's interpretation of the text but to support their vision. In Mesters' estimation, the true meaning of liberation in the Bible can be discovered by members of the oppressed community. This becomes apparent when he notes, "But it is only within this hard life the people lead in 'captivity' and within this journey towards liberation that we can find a hidden meaning of the Bible which can give a new support and a new goal to the science of exegesis."[82]

A Critique of Mesters' Hermeneutical Approach

Mesters does note that one of the risks involved with the common people's interpretation is the danger of a subjective interpretation of the text. He further notes the risk of reading the Bible for the sole purpose of confirming one's preconceived notions. Lastly, Mesters notes the danger associated with attempting to apply the biblical text to modern problems without a proper understanding of the historical context of the biblical text.[83] Mesters' solution for addressing

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[81] Mesters, *Defenseless Flower*, 18–19.

[82] Ibid., 19.

[83] That readers are concerned with how the biblical text can be made relevant to address the ills afflicting modern society is not a bad thing. The argument being presented here is that a better hermeneutical approach would be to determine the author's intended meaning, and once this task has been completed, revealed truths can then be applied to the life of believers and communities. In essence, proper interpretation should proceed attempts at application.

these dangers is proper exegesis and a community-based reading of the Bible.[84] Mesters' contention that proper exegesis can be used as a safeguard against subjective interpretation fails in that he has already noted that exegesis is subordinate to the common people's interpretation of the text and that the goal of the exegete should be to support the people's interpretation and not change it.

Reader-Response Method of Interpretation

Mesters' assertion that meaning is determined by the oppressed community aligns with literary theorist Stanley Fish's contention that meaning is not embedded in the text but is determined by the reader's response to the text. Fish notes that literature is an open category and that what constitutes literature is determined by the community, with the reader being responsible for creating meaning.[85] Fish denies charges of subjectivism and insists that the reader is not a free agent who can make literature as they please but is "a member of a community whose assumptions about literature determines the kind of attention he pays and thus the kind of literature "he" "makes."[86] Fish notes,

> The quotation marks indicate that "he" and "makes" are not being understood as they would be under a theory of autonomous individual agency. Thus the act of recognizing literature is not constrained by something in the text, nor does it issue from an independent and arbitrary will: rather, it proceeds from a collective decision as to what will count as literature, a decision that will be in force only so long as a community of readers or believers continues to abide by it.[87]

In essence, Fish asserts that interpretive communities are responsible for determining meaning and Mesters contends that such communities provide interpretive safeguards. One

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[84] Mesters, *The Bible and Liberation*, 15–16.

[85] Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 11.

[86] Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

might ask though, if interpretive communities are capable of providing hermeneutical restraint, how does one account for false teachings that have spread among people groups throughout history due to improper interpretation of the Word? A community of people is capable of wrong interpretation in the same manner as a single individual. Consensus does not equal correctness in interpretation. As discussed previously in this chapter, many of the early biblical societies and slaveholders in colonial America reached a consensus that the Bible approved of slavery and used these teachings to subjugate black slaves. Yet, modern Christians denounce the slaveholders interpretation and application of the biblical text. While the early European settlers equated the Exodus event with their coming to American shores as their promised land, those brought to America in chains equated their slavery to that of the Israelites in Egyptian bondage. Both groups read their own situation into the Exodus event and came away with vastly different interpretations of the Exodus, with each community believing they were reading the text correctly. Such an example shows that the community itself is not a hermeneutical safeguard against false interpretation as different people groups will interpret the text in a way that is meaningful to their community's needs.

Furthermore, throughout history, false teachers have interpreted the Bible erroneously, leading to the formation of cults claiming the moniker of Christianity. Standing in agreement on what the biblical text meant did not prevent members of such communities from misinterpreting the biblical text with sometimes disastrous consequences. Fish's attempts to defend his theory by pointing out that the community will be the safeguard against arbitrary interpretations fails in that the consensus of a group of people provides no guarantee of proper interpretation. Just as a sole interpreter is capable of misinterpretation due to personal bias or sinfulness, a community of

people is just as capable of interpreting the text in a manner that confirms their own bias or meets their own particular needs.

The Dangers Inherent in Reader-Response Methods of Interpretation

Mesters and many of the liberation theologians discussed throughout this chapter are similar in that their hermeneutical approaches have much in common with postmodern reader-response theories of interpretation. In reader-response theory, emphasis is placed on the reader who takes an active role in interpretation. Instead of the text retaining meaning, meaning is determined by the reader or the interpretive community. Interpretive approaches such as these place the reader in a place of supremacy over the biblical text, as it is the reader who takes the primary role in creating meaning within a text. The biblical text is devalued, and the importance of the reader is elevated. The danger in such an approach is that one may read their own personal concerns, or that of their interpretive community, into the text. In such an approach, the reader has the last word, and texts which disagree with the reader's viewpoint or agenda can be glossed over, ignored, or read into.[88] In describing such approaches, Vanhoozer notes, "The text is hapless and helpless, inert and mute, until taken up by a reader. But what is to stop the reader from projecting his or her own voice into the mute text? Can the text ever have an independent say? The text in the age of the reader resembles a ventriloquist's dummy: it serves as an opportunity for projecting one's own voice."[89]

If the reader rather than the text is responsible for creating meaning, then the author's intended meaning is essentially banished in favor of the meaning derived by the reader. Neither

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[88] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? the Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 64.

[89] Ibid.

the author nor the text controls meaning. The reader not only determines meaning but essentially creates meaning. What the author intended to say essentially becomes irrelevant, as the meaning is determined by the interpreter. Such an approach leaves the biblical text open to a dizzying array of interpretations with no means for judging the validity of the interpretation. Vanhoozer provides an apt analogy here.

> Humpty Dumpty, in response to Alice's question whether he can make words mean different things, replies that it is a matter of "which is to be the master," words or readers. The postmodern critic concurs with the hermeneutics of Wonderland: dictionaries carry no sacred or metaphysical authority, only that of majority rule. Texts mean what interpretive communities take them to mean. So, which is to be the master? More pointedly, who changes whom? This is perhaps the basic issue: Can a text transform its reader, or is transformative power the exclusive prerogative of the interpreter?"[90]

If meaning is not embedded in the text but determined by the reader, then the biblical text ceases to be the repository of meaning and the standard by which to judge true from false interpretations. How is one to judge an interpretation if not by the meaning embedded in the text itself? Hirsch's work on the theory of interpretation and hermeneutics highlights the notion that the goal of interpretation should be to discover the author's intended meaning of the text. While arguing that ethical and moral interpretation should guide the interpreter along a path of seeking to discover the author's intended meaning, Hirsch notes that this argument is not convincing to some and so he appeals to the consequences which arise from public interpretation.[91] Hirsch notes:

> As soon as anyone claims validity for his interpretation (and few would listen to a critic who did not), he is immediately caught in a web of logical necessity. If his claim to validity is to hold, he must be willing to measure his interpretation against a genuinely discriminating norm, and the only compelling normative

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[90] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 64.

[91] E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 26.

> principle that has ever been brought forward is the old-fashioned ideal of rightly understanding what the author meant.[92]

How is one to judge an interpretation if not by the meaning embedded in the text itself? If meaning is found in the reader's or community's response, then how does one judge the validity of their interpretation? For instance, Palestinian Liberation Theology's interpretation of liberation in the Scriptures would differ greatly from Gay Liberation Theology's interpretation of the biblical text in many areas. How is one to evaluate truth claims if the measuring rod for truth is not the Scriptures? The Exodus event has been interpreted in vastly different ways throughout history often arising within the context of groups fighting for liberation, with varying groups interpreting the texts in ways that support their community's interests. The only way to rightly judge truth claims is to deduce the author's intended meaning in the text. Hirsch expands upon the theory of authorial irrelevance this way:

> For, once the author has been ruthlessly banished as the determiner of his text's meaning, it very gradually appeared that no adequate principle existed for judging the validity of an interpretation. By an inner necessity the study of "what a text says" became fashionable to talk about a critic's "reading" of a text, and this word began to appear in the titles of scholarly works. The word seemed to imply that if the author had been banished, the critic still remained, and his new, original, urbane, ingenious, or relevant "reading" carried its own interest.[93]

The New Criticism which arose in American literary criticism during the 1940's-50's had serious hermeneutical implications for interpretation as such theories subjugated the text and elevated the interpreter. Not only was there a denial of authorial intent which downplayed the original author, but the Bible could be devalued even further if one accepted the semantic autonomy of the text.[94] Undoubtedly Paul Ricoeur's contention that semantic authority greatly

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[92] Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 26.

[93] Ibid., 3.

[94] Moises Silva, "Contemporary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation," in *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 285.

impacts the hermeneutical endeavor influenced later generations of interpreters. Ricoeur draws a distinction between the communicative event occurring between the speaker and hearer on a face-to-face level versus the communicative act between a writer and reader. Whereas spoken discourse makes the act of discovering meaning much easier, the act of communication becomes much more difficult when the relationship is that of writing-reading.[95] Ricoeur concludes that,

> With written discourse, however, the author's intention and the meaning of the text cease to coincide. This dissociation of the verbal meaning of the text and the mental intention of the author gives to the concept of inscription its decisive significance, beyond the mere fixation of previous oral discourse. Inscription becomes synonymous with the semantic autonomy of the text, which results from the disconnection of the mental intention of the author from the verbal meaning of the text, of what the author meant and what the text means. The text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author. What the text means now matters more than what the author meant when he wrote it.[96]

One of the problems inherent in such an approach is that semantic autonomy essentially divorces not only the author from the text but the text from history as well.[97] There are theological implications present in such an approach when it comes to analyzing the Exodus narrative. If the historical circumstances surrounding the Exodus are not a matter of concern, then liberation theologians are free to interpret the Exodus in any manner they see fit. The biblical text is devalued in that the meaning derived from the interpreter is made to carry more weight than the meaning of the biblical author. Furthermore, as previously noted there remains no concrete way to judge the accuracy of the many varied interpretations of the Exodus. This presents serious problems when one considers the plethora of ways in which liberation

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[95] Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 29–30.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, 285.

theologians have interpreted the Exodus. Hirsch highlights the problems raised by semantic autonomy when he notes:

> To banish the original author as the determiner of meaning was to reject the only compelling normative principle that could lend validity to the interpretation. On the other hand, it might be the case that there does not really exist a viable normative ideal that governs the interpretation of texts. This would follow if any of the various arguments brought against the author were to hold. For if the meaning of a text is not the author's, then no interpretation can possibly correspond to *the* meaning of the text, since the text can have no determinate or determinable meaning.[98]

Postmodern theories of interpretation which divorce the author from the text and the text from history leave the biblical text open to an infinite number of potential interpretations with no possible way to judge the validity of interpretations. One must wonder if the ability of the Bible to impart God's revealed truths to mankind is essentially lost when meaning is determined by man or the community instead of by the Bible itself.

Eisegesis vs. Exegesis

While at one time eisegetical approaches to the biblical text would have been viewed as antithetical to sound hermeneutical principles, developments in the field of hermeneutics have led to not only the acceptance but the promotion of eisegetical approaches over and above exegetical approaches. Latin American liberation theologian J. Croatto advocates for a re-reading of the Exodus, which is eisegetical in nature. According to Croatto the "hermeneutical circle, the biblical kerygma of liberation should grow in meaning, and that growth should also affect other texts and our understanding of the whole Bible."[99] Croatto contends:

> Any reading in fact, far from being an extraction of the fixed meaning of a text (the traditional concept of exegesis), is a *production of meaning*. Linguistics and

[98] Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, 5–6.

[99] Jose Severino Croatto, "The Socio-historical and Hermeneutical Relevance of the Exodus," in *Exodus: A Lasting Paradigm*, ed. Bas van Iersel and Anton Weiler, Concilium (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1987), 130.

> semiotics, as well as hermeneutics, contribute to this, as I have analysed elsewhere. Therefore, any reading of the biblical theme of the Exodus done from within situations of oppression and processes or movements of liberation, is an exploration of its reserves of meaning, of its inexhaustible fruitfulness. It is a re-reading, which implies reinterpreting the archetypal event so that it tunes in with new events. It is an eisegetical act.[100]

Croatto contends that the hermeneutical starting point for understanding God is the Exodus event itself. According to Croatto, "the Exodus is established as a radical datum, exceedingly profound, in which both Israel and we ourselves must interpret God and ourselves. The Exodus becomes an inexhaustible "reservoir-of-meaning." For this reason its "donation-of-meaning" is unlimited, hence its unique hermeneutical possibilities for Latin American Theology."[101] Furthermore, movements that have utilized the Exodus theme historically have hermeneutical relevance, and the history "of the biblical text and of the movements that use the Exodus theme thus becomes the archetype for new events."[102] In essence, the ways in which movements have used Exodus in the past add to the permanent validity of the Exodus itself. It is not the external form of the Exodus event that carries meaning; therefore, the "external form of the Israelite Exodus" is placed on a secondary level in the hermeneutical process.[103] Croatto's thesis is that, "the Exodus event—it does not matter how much of what is related actually 'happened'—released and releases meaning to the extent that it enters into a process of hermeneutical circularity with socio-historical practice."[104]

In Croatto's estimation, the meaning of the Exodus event is not tied to its meaning in the biblical text but is intimately linked with the ways in which those struggling against oppression

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[100] Croatto, *Exodus: A Lasting Paradigm*, 131.

[101] Jose Severino Croatto, *Exodus: A Hermeneutics of Freedom* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1981), 13.

[102] Croatto, *Exodus: A Lasting Paradigm*, 125.

[103] Ibid., 126.

[104] Ibid.

have appropriated the Exodus historically. The Exodus theme running through the canon demonstrates that the *meaning* of the Exodus for the Israelites was more important than the Exodus event itself.[105] Just as the Exodus theme throughout the canon acquired more relevance and validity, "liberation movements have taken their inspiration from the Exodus as *paradigm*."[106] Thus, in Croatto's hermeneutics, the meaning of liberation and the Exodus is not confined to the Bible but is always growing in accordance with the history of the oppressed as they struggle for liberation. Croatto notes,

> The Bible is not a 'deposit' of revelation, from which ever identical contents can be drawn out. This is an archaic, anti-hermeneutical concept, which can only be sustained by an academic, doctrinaire or authoritarian reading of the Bible. The 'learned', the academics, those who hold power in the Church, are not those who decide the meaning of the biblical text. Their contribution is minimal, however great it may be on the technical level. The authentic reading of the biblical message is done from socio-historical practice, from where faith discovers God acting. In the case of the Exodus as paradigm for movements of liberation, this means that they are what help towards a deeper understanding of its salvific meaning, and they are what makes this grow.[107]

As a result of Croatto's eisegetical approach, liberation from socio-political bondage becomes the overarching focus of the Exodus motif throughout the canon, while the spiritual and eschatological elements of liberation in the Exodus motif are greatly diminished. This is evident when Croatto notes, "Finally, it must be said that the hermeneutical appropriation of the Exodus by theologies of liberation concerned with socio-political or cultural questions has put a stop to the other, individualistic and spiritualistic, appropriations of it made by earlier centuries."[108]

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[105] Croatto, *Exodus: A Lasting Paradigm*, 127-130.

[106] Ibid., 127.

[107] Ibid., 130.

[108] Ibid.

A Better Hermeneutical Approach

A variety of hermeneutical principles and approaches utilized by various liberation theologians have been explored throughout this chapter. Having pursued some of the weaknesses inherent in such approaches, one would be remiss if other hermeneutical methods with more potential were not presented. A better hermeneutic would be a more traditional exegetical approach to the text, which seeks to find meaning in the text through a detailed analysis of the original languages and historical-cultural context. The only true way to measure the accuracy of an interpretation is to measure an interpretation against the meaning embedded in the biblical text. Therefore, it is imperative that one discover the original author's intended meaning as the goal of biblical interpretation should be to recover the meaning inherent in the text itself. Vanhoozer notes,

> Many methods have been proposed for recovering the original meaning of the biblical text: the grammatico-historical method, form criticism, and redaction criticism, to name a few. Despite their differences, which stem from different views about how the text came to be and about its history, these approaches agree that recovery of original meaning alone makes for authentic interpretation. For if the author is the point of origin, then "original meaning" is identical with "author's meaning." The original meaning alone is the *authentic* meaning, the author's actual, authoritative meaning.[109]

Rather than reading one's own interests into the text for ideological purposes, the interpreter would be better served by an exegetical approach to the text in an attempt to locate meaning in the text for the purpose of discovering the message the biblical author was attempting to convey. Rather than an eisegetical approach that imports meaning into the text, the interpreter would be better served by utilizing an exegetical approach that seeks to export meaning from the text. The approach advocated here asserts that meaning is to be found in the original author's

[109] Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 46.

meaning in the text and denies the postmodern notion that meaning is derived from the reader or the interpretive community. Such an approach places the Scriptures in the place of authority and provides a means by which to judge the validity of an interpretation. Therefore, the goal of interpretation would be to let the text say what it wants to say before contemporary applications are sought. The desire of liberation theologians to apply the biblical text to contemporary circumstances to relieve suffering and address true oppression is a noble endeavor. However, the best way to apply biblical values is to first understand the biblical truth embedded in the text. The idea is not to ignore the relevance of the text to the modern reader but to first identify the meaning of the text in its historical-cultural context.

Summary and Conclusion

As mentioned at the outset and throughout this chapter, the methodological approach running throughout the various streams of liberation theology varies widely depending on the theologian. From postmodern reader-response theories to a hermeneutic of suspicion, from the utilization of a Marxist analytical framework to a feminist or queer hermeneutic, the hermeneutical approach employed by liberation theologians is far from uniform. However, all begin with an *a priori* position that dictates meaning and allows for selective reading as needed. One of the central issues with the hermeneutical principles and methods employed by the liberation theologians in this chapter is that such methods lead to a devaluing of the biblical text. The meaning of a biblical text is no longer found in what the Bible says but is determined by what the individual interpreter wants it to say in their particular circumstance. The Bible is no longer the criterion for determining biblical truth and judging theological systems. If the task of biblical interpretation is to interpret the meaning of the Bible in order to discover God's truths as revealed to mankind throughout the biblical text, that these truths may be applied in the life of

the church and the individual believer, the subjective approaches utilized by various liberation theologies fail in that such theologies utilize hermeneutical principles and methods which lead to faulty interpretation of the biblical text, especially in relation to the Exodus event. This should come as no surprise in that many of the liberation theologians mentioned in this chapter readily acknowledge that they do not approach the biblical text in an exegetical manner for the purpose of discovering what the text itself has to say but in an effort to take from the biblical text what is necessary to help them in their individual causes and movements.

Perhaps more so than any other theology, liberation theologies have appropriated the Bible in such a manner that the biblical text has become little more than an ideological tool used to promote their individual causes and movements in an effort to affect societal change as well as change within the church and theological systems. The historical Exodus remains the most potent tool in their fight against what they deem to be oppressive societal and religious structures, and their views on liberation in the Exodus are the foundation upon which their theological systems are built. Having a sound understanding of the hermeneutical principles employed by liberation theologians throughout this chapter provides the insights necessary for understanding why liberation theologians have concluded that the overarching message of liberation in the historical Exodus is one of deliverance from socio-political bondage and their failure to grasp the importance of covenant and of spiritual and eschatological liberation inherent in the Exodus motif.

Two of the central issues in the debate over hermeneutical approaches in liberation theology are whether an objective reading of the text is possible and exactly where meaning is found. Postmodern hermeneutical approaches, such as reader-response theories of interpretation, essentially boil down to whether meaning is to be found in the biblical text or if the reader

determines meaning. Socio-scientific analysis in biblical interpretation not only denies that objectivity is possible but views the attempts at objectivity as being a weakness for the interpreter. While the various streams of liberation theology may have good intentions in seeking to find ways to apply biblical principles to alleviate suffering, their hermeneutical approaches often lead to a subjective interpretation of the biblical text with little obvious concern for accuracy in interpretation. The diminishing importance of an objective approach to the biblical text and the promotion of subjective interpretive methods and principles is a critical flaw in liberation theology's hermeneutics. One obvious consequence of this error is that liberation theologians have historically interpreted the Exodus event to be primarily an account of deliverance from socio-political bondage, resulting in the spiritual and eschatological elements in the Exodus narrative being downplayed or in some instances ignored altogether.

Exegetical analysis and proper hermeneutical principles are crucial elements that are necessary components of sound biblical interpretation, and their importance cannot be overstated. Vanhoozer notes, "Biblical interpretation is the soul of theology. Truth is the ultimate accolade that we accord an interpretation. Christian theology therefore succeeds or fails in direct proportion to its ability to render true interpretations of the word of God written."[110] Utilizing interpretive techniques and hermeneutical methods that place meaning in the hands of the interpreter instead of in the biblical text exceedingly runs the risks of subjective and faulty interpretations. One cannot counter incorrect or even heretical interpretations if there is no standard of objective truth by which to judge. While dispensing justice is an important component of the Christian life, to dispense justice in a biblical manner, one must first exegete

[110] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Lost in Interpretation? Truth, Scripture, and Hermeneutics," *JETS* 48 (2005): 89.

the Scriptures in order to come to a proper understanding of themes such as oppression, liberation, and what true justice means from a biblical standpoint.

CHAPTER THREE: COVENANT AND THE PATRIARCHAL ERA'S PROVISIONS FOR SALVATION

Introduction

While liberation theologians would assert that deliverance from socio-political bondage is the basis of the historical Exodus, the argument being proffered in this dissertation is that the catalyst for liberation in the historical Exodus was covenantal in nature in accordance with God's salvation-historical purposes. This is not to deny that there is a socio-political element to the Exodus narrative as the Hebrews cried out to God due to their suffering and oppression under the Egyptians and God responded to their pleas. The argument being presented is that God did not intervene merely due to the Hebrews' status as an oppressed people, but primarily due to his covenantal obligations under the Abrahamic covenant. Yahweh's covenants are the theological thread that ties together liberation in the historical Exodus with the pattern of liberation in the Exodus motif throughout the canon, thus demonstrating that God's acts of deliverance on behalf of the children of Israel throughout their history are covenantal in nature. This chapter will explore the nature of covenants in the world of the ANE and examine how covenants functioned in the event space of ancient Israel. The goal of this chapter is to explore the development of Yahweh's divine-human covenants in the history of the nation of Israel to lay the foundation for the argument being presented in this dissertation that liberation in the Exodus motif is founded on covenant relationship with Yahweh. An analysis of the link between the Abrahamic covenant and Yahweh's deliverance of the Hebrew captives will demonstrate that the basis of God's deliverance in the historical Exodus is the pre-existing Abrahamic covenant, subsequently demonstrating that the impetus for God's deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage was covenant and not socio-political oppression. Further connections will be made between the Adamic covenant and the Israelite's deliverance from Egypt which supports the

contention that liberation obtained through covenantal relationship throughout Israel's history is moving towards a progressive fulfillment of God's redemptive-historical purposes for mankind.[1] Far from being an isolated event of liberation for an oppressed people group, the historical Exodus is part of a larger biblical narrative that continues the redemptive arc which Yahweh instituted after the fall of mankind. The relationship between the covenantal stipulations contained in the law and how these stipulations influenced the suzerain-vassal relationship will be discussed as well.

Covenants in the World of the ANE

Weinfeld notes that "the Middle East was the cradle of covenant formalities in the ancient world."[2] Covenants, often referred to as treaties, were a widespread practice in the ANE ranging from international treaties between nations to individual covenant relationships such as marriages. Whether political in nature or on the level of interpersonal relationships, covenants functioned to cement a binding agreement between parties. While the Hebrew word for covenant, *bĕrît*, occurs some 287 times in the OT, its lexical meaning remains uncertain despite countless semantic studies of the word.[3] While the majority of scholars concur with the primary meaning of *bĕrît* being "compact, binding agreement," others maintain the "basic meaning is rather, "obligation, commitment."[4] According to Joosten, "the word designates the binding commitment taken on by one or both of the parties to an agreement, or even a unilateral

[1] The themes of exile and deliverance in the Exodus motif in relation to the breaking of the covenantal relationship with Yahweh will be developed throughout the remainder of this dissertation.

[2] Moshe Weinfeld, "Covenant Terminology in the Ancient Near East and Its Influence on the West," *JAOS* 93 (1973): 190.

[3] Jan Joosten, "Covenant," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Law,* ed. Pamela Barmash (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 8.

[4] Ibid.

decision."[5] When evaluating the meaning of *bĕrît* within the biblical text, contextual meaning must be considered over lexical meaning as "the status of the parties engaging in the *bĕrît*, the motivations, contents, and purposes of the agreement all contribute to define the contextual reference of the word."[6]

ANE Treaty Forms

Covenants in the ANE existed in a variety of forms from personal covenants made between individuals to political and international treaties made between rulers and nations. Biblical covenants consisted of either parity covenants, made between parties of equal social standing, or disparity covenants made between persons of unequal social status.[7] The biblical text provides an example of personal covenants in David and Jonathan entering a covenant relationship with one another in 1 Samuel 18:1–3. The marriage relationship between a husband and wife was covenantal in nature as seen in Malachi 2:14.[8] Jacob and Laban entered into a covenant in Genesis 31:44–55 providing guidelines for future familial relationships. Covenants were made between a ruler and his subjects as seen in David's covenant with the elders of Israel in 2 Samuel 5:3. Treaties were often made between rulers of clans or empires to secure benefits, such as peace and protection. Biblical examples of political covenants/treaties can be seen in Abraham making a covenant with Abimelech who was seeking favor from Abraham for himself and his descendants in Genesis 21:27–32. Abimelech sought out Isaac who entered into a

[5] Joosten, "Covenant," 8.

[6] Ibid., 8–9.

[7] Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God's Grand Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 22.

[8] Samuel Greengus, "Covenant and Treaty in the Hebrew Bible and in the Ancient Near East," in *Ancient Israel's History: An Introduction to Issues and Sources*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and Richard S. Hess (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 93–94.

covenant with Abimelech in Genesis 26:26–29. Solomon and Hiram entered into an alliance that brought peace between the two in 1 Kings 5:12.[9] The men of Jabesh sought to make a covenant with the Ammonites for their protection in 1 Samuel 11:1.

The Solemn Oath

Covenants in the ANE often entailed animal sacrifices which encompassed the cutting of the animal into pieces for the purpose of inviting a deity or several deities as witnesses to the solemn oaths being sworn between the two parties. The cutting of the animal represented an ominous sign of future judgment against one failing to uphold the oath. The deities by which the oath was sworn were responsible for punishing the failed oath-taker.[10] A biblical witness to a deity imposing judgment upon a failed oath taker is presented in Jeremiah 34 where Zedekiah, facing defeat by the Babylonians, entered into a covenant with the inhabitants of Jerusalem.[11] When those who were initially liberated are brought back into subjugation, God proclaims certain destruction on the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. In verse 16, God accuses those who violated the covenant of polluting his name, and in verse 18 makes mention of their failure to perform the words of the covenant which they made when they cut the calf into pieces and passed between the parts. This example demonstrates that not only was God concerned with

[9] Greengus, "Covenant and Treaty," 97.

[10] One such example is the long list of divine witnesses included in the treaty between Hittite King Suppiluliuma I and Huqqana of Hayasa. In § 6 (A i 35-40) the treaty states, "I have now placed these words under oath for you, and we have now summoned the Thousand Gods to assembly in this matter." Gary M. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, ed. Harry A. Hoffner, Jr., WAW 7 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1996), 24. Sections § 7 and § 8 provide a long list of the divine witnesses to the oath, ranging from gods of the elements, such as sun and storm gods, to gods of natural elements, such as gods of the mountains, seas, and land, deities of armies and war, to deities of heaven and earth. Ibid., 24-25. The consequences of failing to abide by the oath by being disloyal to the king are provided in § 10 which notes, "And the oath gods shall not neglect this matter in regard to both of you, and they shall not make it permissible for both of you. They shall destroy both of you together and thereby fulfill the wishes of My Majesty." Ibid., 25.

[11] Greengus, "Covenant and Treaty," 94.

ensuring the children of Israel obeyed their covenantal obligations to him but also expected the Israelites to uphold the oaths they had made among themselves when such oaths were made before God and in God's name (v. 15). A further example includes God's admonishment and subsequent punishment of Zedekiah for breaking the treaty with Nebuchadnezzar in Ezekiel 17:19. That the Israelites recognized the seriousness of breaking an oath when sworn to by God is demonstrated in Joshua 9:18-20. Although the Gibeonites used guile when they persuaded Joshua and the men of Israel to enter into league with them, Joshua refrained from breaking the oath by noting that they could not break the oath they had sworn by the God of Israel lest they face Yahweh's wrath.

Perhaps one of the greatest biblical examples of the oath is Yahweh's cutting of the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15:6. In seeking to reassure Abraham that his promises to Abraham would come to pass, God seals his oath to Abraham with the cutting of the covenantal sacrifice. While the lesser party was generally the one required to pass between the carcass and swear the oath, Yahweh himself passes through the carcass in the form of the smoking furnace and the burning lamp.[12] Barrett notes, "The bloody graveyard is the most serious way God can ensure his word will not falter. By passing through the carcasses, God makes a self-declaration: should he break his covenant word to Abraham, so too will God be torn in two. These curses of the covenant will fall on God's own head."[13] The cutting of the covenant along with Yahweh's suzerain oath demonstrates that the covenant is initiated by Yahweh and is both unilateral and unconditional.[14]

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[12] Matthew Barrett, *Canon, Covenant and Christology: Rethinking Jesus and the Scriptures of Israel* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity, 2020), 51.

[13] Ibid., 51–52.

[14] Ibid., 52.

Covenantal Form: Suzerain-Vassal Treaties

Although scholars differ regarding whether the form of biblical covenants more closely relates to that of the neo-Assyrian model or suzerainty treaties, comparative studies of ANE treaties demonstrate that the biblical covenants contain similarities to both treaty forms.[15] Suzerain-vassal treaties were made between an ANE ruler or king who exercised authority over his vassals who were obligated to obey the stipulations laid forth in the treaty. Yahweh's covenant with the Israelites as expressed in the structure of Deuteronomy is remarkably similar to the structure of Hittite suzerain-vassal treaties. Both Hittite treaties and the book of Deuteronomy begin with a preamble introducing the name of the king and provide a historical account of what the king has accomplished on behalf of the vassal. God declares himself as the God who has brought the children of Israel out of slavery in Deuteronomy 5:6. The historical prologue was a salient portion of the treaty as it detailed the historical deeds the Hittite king had performed on behalf of the vassal which the vassal was unable to accomplish for themselves. The reminder of the benevolence shown by the suzerain in performing such deeds was meant to instill a sense of gratitude and devotion on the part of the vassal.[16] Mendenhall notes, "the mutuality of the covenant is present even in these treaties, but it is most important to see that the vassal is exchanging *future* obedience to specific commands for *past* benefits which he received without any real *right*" [emphasis original].[17] Yahweh's calling to remembrance his mighty deeds on behalf of the Israelites is a prominent feature of his dealings with the nation which can

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[15] Christopher B. Hays, *Hidden Riches: A Sourcebook for the Comparative Study of the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing, 2014), 186.

[16] George E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: The Biblical Colloquium, 1955), 32.

[17] Ibid. The historical prologues in ANE treaties were not "stereotyped formulae" but consisted of detailed descriptions of specific actions taken by the suzerain. Ibid. Yahweh's mention of how he had delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage becomes a frequent reminder throughout the prophetic corpus in relation to the pattern of exile and deliverance in the history of the nation.

be seen from the outset in his remarks to Moses on Mt. Sinai where Yahweh makes mention of what he did to the Egyptians and how he bore the Israelites on eagles' wings and brought them unto himself (Exod 19:4). The idea of God calling to remembrance his acts in delivering the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and its connection with their covenantal obligations is a crucial component of liberation in the Exodus motif which will be further developed throughout this dissertation.[18] Suffice it to say such connections can be seen throughout the OT canon (Josh 24:5–7; Judg 6:8; 1 Sam 10:18; Neh 9:9–12; Jer 11:1–8, and Ezek 20:6).

Covenantal Stipulations: Blessings and Curses

Following the introduction, Hittite treaties contained laws or obligations which the vassal was required to obey, the most important being the demand for loyalty to the king.[19] Similarities are seen in the biblical commandment of Deuteronomy 5:7 which allows for no other god to be placed before Yahweh. Finally, secular political treaties contained a list of blessings for those who maintained covenant faithfulness as well as a list of curses for those who fail to observe the

[18] The connection between the required obedience of the vassal in a covenant relationship with the suzerain will feature prominently in the analysis of liberation throughout this dissertation, particularly in chapter five.

[19] The treaty between Hittite King Suppiluliuma I and Huqqana of Hayasa demands loyalty to both the King and his dynasty as well. In § 2 and § 3, Huqqana is obliged to acknowledge only the king as overlord and to benevolently recognize his sons. Beckman and Hoffner, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 23-24. § 4 (A i 22–30) states, "And if you are not well-disposed to the person of My Majesty, the soul of My Majesty, and the body of My Majesty, and do not hold me in a protective embrace in the same way as you are well-disposed to your own person, soul, and body, and hold yourself in a protective embrace, and if the concerns of My Majesty have not taken precedence for you-or if you ever hear evil concerning My Majesty from someone and conceal it from me, and do not speak of it to me, and do not point out that person but even hide him, you will transgress the oath." Ibid., 24. The treaty further outlines blessings associated with obedience to the treaty stipulations and curses associated with disobedience. In § 34 (A iv 41'–44') the king promises that if the men of Hayasa benevolently protect him that he will in turn protect the men of Hayasa and their male relatives, as well as the land itself. However, § 37 (A iv 50'–59') notes the king will treat them badly if they do evil against him as he will then be free from the oath which was sworn before the gods. The treaty further notes that if the men of Hayasa and Mariya fail to observe the words of the oath then the oath gods will thoroughly eradicate not only them but their wives, children, families, households, animals, and lands. Ibid., 29.

obligations of the covenant.[20] The laws outlined in Exodus-Leviticus outline the stipulations placed on the children of Israel detailing blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience to the covenant.[21] According to Block,

> In the Scriptures all covenants involving God are fundamentally monergistic suzerain-vassal pacts: God the divine Suzerain initiates the covenant; God chooses the covenant partner; God declares the terms; God determines the consequences for the subjects depending on their responses to him and his revealed will (blessing for fidelity, curses for rebellion); and God identifies the signs of the covenant…[22]

The blessings and curses associated with covenantal obedience or disobedience directly impact the idea of liberation in the Exodus motif. Israel's history as a nation demonstrates that Yahweh implemented judgments on the nation through subjugation to foreign powers due to Israel's continual breaking of the covenantal bond. Mendenhall notes, "The contrast between Yahweh's precedent acts of benevolence and Israel's disobedience means the bringing of the

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[20] Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 22-23.

[21] Enns acknowledges that not all scholars subscribe to the belief that the book of Deuteronomy directly reflects the Hittite treaties. Ibid., 24.

[22] Block, *Covenant: The Framework*, 23. Mendenhall would disagree with Block's assertion that all biblical covenants are in the form of suzerain-vassal treaties. Mendenhall contends that God's covenant with Abraham and Noah is of a different form than that of suzerainty treaties. Mendenhall notes, "It is not often enough seen that no obligations are imposed upon Abraham. Circumcision is not originally an obligation, but a *sign* of the covenant, like the rainbow in Gen. 9. It serves to identify the recipient (s) of the covenant, as well as to give a concrete indication that a covenant exists" [emphasis original]. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant*, 33. Thus the fact that no binding obligations are placed on Abraham and Noah would make it of a different form than suzerainty treaties. The Mosaic covenant on the other hand does impose specific obligations on the Israelites which they must follow to maintain the covenant relationship with Yahweh. Ibid., 33. Whether God's covenants were unilateral or bilateral, thus affecting the conditionality of the covenant, comes to the forefront in the debate over the eternal covenant in Isa. 24:5. According to Mason, "Scholars traditionally propose one of four possible covenant backdrops to Isa. 24:5: (1) an original creation covenant; (2) the Noahic covenant; (3) the Mosaic covenant; (4) a combination of covenants." Steven D. Mason, "Another Flood? Genesis 9 and Isaiah's Broken Eternal Covenant," *JSOT* 32, (2007): 178. Mason, who contends the covenant with Noah was conditional and bilateral, argues against the traditional view that the Noahic covenant is encapsulated in Gen. 9:8-17. Mason maintains that a structural analysis of Gen. 9 reveals "that there is both a literary and conceptual basis for reading the two pericopes of Genesis 9 together as two sides of the עוֹלָם בְּרִית, which produces and reflects an authentic conditional component to the Noachic eternal covenant." Ibid., 184. The interpreter's position on which covenant is being referred to will largely depend on whether they view the destruction depicted in Isa. 24:1-13 as universal in scope or if the destruction centers on the land of Judah, specifically Jerusalem, with the covenant being the Mosaic covenant. Dan G. Johnson, *From Chaos to Restoration: An Integrative Reading of Isaiah 24-27* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), 25.

curse-and the curses under the covenant always include destruction of the state."[23] Freedom from foreign oppression and liberation from captivity were only wrought by repentance and re-establishment of the covenantal relationship with Yahweh. The pattern of exile, oppression, and deliverance and the link between liberation from oppression and covenantal relationship will be further developed as this dissertation progresses.

Establishing Legislation vs. Covenant Relationship

While a lengthy discussion of the law is not warranted here, a brief consideration of how Israel's legal code functioned in relation to the Sinaitic covenant is necessary as the Israelites' continued disobedience to the law directly impacted their covenant relationship with Yahweh.[24] God's covenants with Israel were unique in that they were covenants instigated by Yahweh as the divine ruler and the children of Israel as vassals whereas international suzerain treaties in the ANE were established between human rulers. However, the Sinaitic covenant was similar to other ANE covenants in that "scholars have shown that enactments of the covenant between YHWH and the Israelites expressed in Exodus-Leviticus and the renewed covenant for the next generation in Deuteronomy are structured like ANE suzerainty treaties, with law collections constituting the stipulations."[25] When God established the covenant at Sinai, he did not prescribe laws merely to govern Israelite society but to make a way for the Israelites to maintain their relationship with a holy God. If the nation of Israel were to follow the laws given by Yahweh

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[23] Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant*, 47.

[24] The present focus on the law in relation to maintaining a covenant relationship with Yahweh will prove to be relevant in future chapters regarding the pattern of exile and liberation in the Exodus motif. Future chapters will demonstrate that liberation in the nation of Israel's history was not due to their status as an oppressed group at various times throughout their history but was founded on repentance and a renewal of the covenantal relationship with Yahweh.

[25] Roy E. Gane, *Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 50.

their society would certainly have functioned in an orderly and moral manner; however, a crucial connection existed between obedience to God's laws and the covenant relationship.

The legal code in Exodus was remarkably similar to the laws contained in a variety of law collections in the ANE, from fragmentary Sumerian legal texts such as the Urukagina to the code of Lipit-Ishtar dating to the third and second century B.C. Similarities also exist between the legal code in Exodus and the laws of Hammurabi of the eighteenth century B.C., the Hittite law collection of the seventeenth century, and Middle Assyrian law codes dating to the twelfth century. A review of these ancient law codes reveals that the legislation which helped to fashion the shape of Israelite society closely resembled that of other ANE nations.[26] For instance, both the Babylonian legal code and the Israelite law contained strong prohibitions against murder; however, the reasons behind the laws differed. Whereas Mesopotamian kings established laws to ensure an orderly society in an effort to please the gods and demonstrate the king's ability to maintain order, "for the Israelites, Yahweh their God was the source of all law and the foundation of all societal norms."[27] The pagan gods of ancient societies were not moral nor were they concerned with creating moral citizens, but with preserving an orderly society.[28]

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[26] John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary:* Old *Testament* (Westmont: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 24.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid. Further examples of close parallels between the legal code in the biblical text and the laws of Hammurabi can be seen in the prohibition of bearing false witness and the consequences thereof. In § 1 of the Babylonian code if a man brings an accusation against another man which is considered a capital crime and fails to prove the crime, the accuser is put to death. § 2 notes that a man who charges another man with sorcery and fails to prove the charges is also put to death. § 3 also affords the death penalty to a man who bears false witness against another in a case involving life if he fails to establish the validity of his testimony. § 11 affords death to the owner of lost property who fails to produce witnesses that can identify his property as he is deemed to be attempting fraud. References drawn from the online edition of Robert Francis Harper, trans. *The Code of Hammurabi about 2250 BC* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1904), https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/hammurabi-the-code-of-hammurabi. These sections in the Babylonian law code closely parallel the legal code in Deu. 19:15-21 which details that one found guilty of bearing false witness should suffer the same fate that he had thought to impose on the one he brought false accusations against. The idea behind such laws in both the biblical text and the Babylonian legal code is the principle of *lex talion* which deems that an individual who injures another person is to be penalized in the same

> The point is, then, that the law given at Sinai does not necessarily prescribe new laws. Its actual legislation may be very much like the laws that Israel had been living under in Egypt and is clearly similar to the laws that governed other societies of the ancient Near East. What is new is the revelation of God that is accomplished through the institutionalization of the law as part of the covenant between God and Israel. Comparing the law of the Bible to the ancient Near Eastern law collections can help us to understand both the concept of law and order as well as the philosophical and theological underpinnings of the law. [29]

Not only did Israel's law allow for the maintenance of a civilized society, but the law also revealed the character and nature of God to the Israelites, which provided a means for the Israelites to become a holy people, thus ensuring that they could maintain their relationship with a holy God. The legal collection contained in the Pentateuch is intricately linked with the covenant thus, "the illocution becomes stipulations of a covenant agreement rather than legislation of a society."[30] Walton and Sandy note that, "The literature of the Pentateuch, with its covenantal context, carries the perlocution for Israel that they should adhere to the torah so that they might remain in covenant relationship with Yahweh and that he might remain dwelling in their midst."[31] Unlike other ANE legal codes which were instituted partly to provide guiding principles for the establishment of an orderly society, the stipulations of the covenant served a greater function in the newly established nation of Israel. Essentially obedience to the law allowed the nation to have fellowship with Yahweh. The consequences for breaking the law were so severe because trespassing against God's laws could lead to an annulment of the covenant,

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manner in which they injured the victim. Therefore, since the falsely accused would have suffered death if convicted of such crimes, the one guilty of bearing false witness would suffer the same penalty that would have befallen the individual if they were deemed guilty of the crime of which they were accused, which in the above instances would have resulted in the penalty of death. G. R. Driver and John C. Miles, eds., *Legal Commentary*, vol. 1 of *The Babylonian Laws* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 62–63.

[29] Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *IVP Bible Background Commentary OT*, 24.

[30] John H. Walton and Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 220.

[31] Ibid.

thus severing the nation's relationship with Yahweh. Gane surmises, "The covenantal framework is crucial for understanding the function of OT law. The law is not a self-standing phenomenon: it contributes to preservation of an ongoing divine-human relationship that provides important benefits for God's people."[32] Obedience to the law as a form of covenantal loyalty helped not only to maintain the relationship with Yahweh but to secure the blessings outlined in the covenant. Blessings and protection from Yahweh were dependent on maintaining the stipulations outlined in the covenant. Failure to keep the stipulations of the covenant would lead to the wrath of God resulting in judgment in the form of captivity. God himself allowed the Israelites to become oppressed by foreign invaders to bring them back to a place of repentance. Only when true repentance occurred could the covenantal relationship be restored, subsequently leading to liberation.[33] Thus, the repeated pattern of exile in the history of the nation of Israel was due to their failure as vassals to remain loyal to Yahweh as suzerain, demonstrated by disobedience to the stipulations of the covenant. The legal codes contained in the covenant were to be viewed as treaty stipulations and not legislation in accordance with Yahweh's role as Israel's suzerain king.[34]

Covenant: The Foundational Framework of the Exodus Event

Dempster asserts that there are several "hermeneutical dead ends" concerning the interpretation of the historical Exodus event.[35] One such hermeneutical dead end is overlooking

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[32] Gane, *Old Testament Law*, 50.

[33] Repentance leading to the restoration of the covenantal relationship will be discussed in detail in chapter five.

[34] John H. Walton, and Harvey J. Walton, *The Lost World of the Torah: Law as Covenant and Wisdom in Ancient Context* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), 48.

[35] Stephen G. Dempster, "Exodus and Biblical Theology: On Moving into the Neighborhood with a New Name," *SBJT* 12.3 (2008): 4–6.

"the fact that the Exodus story is part of a larger biblical narrative-it does not begin the biblical narrative but is the continuation of a narrative that precedes it."[36] By divorcing the Exodus from the larger biblical narrative, the interpreter runs the risk of failing to recognize the cosmic implications present in the continuation of the preceding narrative.[37] Analyzing the Exodus within the larger historical narrative of the Pentateuch, through events both preceding and following the Exodus is a sound hermeneutical principle that demonstrates the interconnectedness of the historical Exodus with the covenant promises made to the patriarchs.

Primeval Prologue to the Abrahamic Covenant

To fully grasp the overwhelming significance of Yahweh's covenants, it is imperative that one journey back in time to the days of God's earliest dealings with mankind. Man, created in the image and likeness of God, was the pinnacle of God's creation, destined to rule over God's creation until he sinned against God and all of creation entered a state of corruption. When sin entered the world due to the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the harmonious divine-human relationship that God desired with his creation was disrupted. Yet, even amid such an estrangement, God provides hope in the form of a future seed that will bruise the heel of the serpent. Even while pronouncing judgment God offers an eschatological hope for the future of mankind in the Messianic seed of Genesis 3:15. Though mankind is now under the curse of sin and death, the protoevangelium provides a way for sinful mankind to reconcile and re-establish a relationship with a holy God.

As evidenced by the primeval period of Genesis 1–11, the sinful inclination of mankind after the fall led man further and further away from God (Gen 6:5) attested by events such as the

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[36] Dempster, "Exodus and Biblical Theology," 6.

[37] Ibid.

flood in Noah's day and God's separation of the nations at the tower of Babel. Von Rad notes, "The pre-patriarchal history, ending in the Tower story, is inseparably bound up with the opening of the redemptive history, with its promise of a blessing for Israel and, through Israel, for "all the races on the earth."[38] While the path mankind was traveling led further away from God, in his infinite mercy and grace, Yahweh had already set a divine plan in motion to restore the fallen race. From the preservation of Noah and his family through the flood, to God's calling of Abraham, God's ultimate plan of reestablishing the divine-human relationship could not be thwarted. Covenant was the medium through which God implemented his divine plan to restore mankind to the relationship with God which was lost in the fall.

The Call of Abram as the Historical Prelude to the Exodus

God's call of Abram in Genesis 12:1–3 begins another stage in God's redemptive-historical purposes for mankind. One of the purposes of the covenant can be seen in God proclaiming that through Abram all nations of the earth would be blessed. In Exodus 19:5–6, God declares that the if the children of Israel were to *obey* his voice and keep his covenant then they would be a peculiar treasure unto God, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. As Yahweh's holy nation, Israel was destined to showcase God's glory to the world thus becoming a witness to all of humanity. That Messianic implications are present in God's promise of all the world being blessed through Abram is evident in Galatians 3:8 where Paul links the heathens being justified through faith with the promise to Abraham that through him all nations would be blessed. Israel was to be a light to the nations (Isa 49:6) revealing that Yahweh was the one and only God. Walton notes,

[38] Gerhard Von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and other essays*, trans. E.W. Trueman Dicken (New York: MacMillan, 1966.), 65.

> As a kingdom of priests, Israel was to mediate both the revelation from God and access to the presence of God. Peoples were to stream to Jerusalem (come to its light) to gain access to God's presence (manifested in Jerusalem) and to learn of God's revelation of himself. As a result of their mediation, everyone would know Yahweh is God. Consequently, we can conclude that at least one of the reasons that God made a covenant with Israel was to reveal his plans and purposes to them, and through them, to the world. Indeed, all of the special revelation of God is mediated through Israel (their history, the law, prophecy, and yes, Jesus, born an Israelite of the tribe of Judah).[39]

The covenants were an integral part of God's plan to restore lost humanity to himself, and God's promises to Abraham of blessings for the nations of the world were brought to fruition through ancient Israel. Thus, God's intervening when Abraham's descendants found themselves in Egyptian bondage is directly linked with God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 that all nations of the earth would be blessed through him. Abraham's descendants had a direct part to play in God's unfolding redemptive purposes. According to Walton,

> At the time of his appearance at Israel's side and on its behalf in the early chapters of Exodus, and reflected again prominently in the context of the exile, Yahweh's desire was always "Then you will know that I am Yahweh, and that Yahweh is God" (combining the elements of the frequently repeated refrain throughout the early chapters of Exodus). In this familiar formula we see God's agenda-that through the covenant he would reveal himself to Israel, and through Israel he would be revealed to the world. Israel was thus given a status of a participant in Yahweh's plan and purpose.[40]

Israel had a crucial role to play in God's redemptive plan but before they could be used for such purposes God had to make them a nation of people who were fit to represent him to the world. First, the Hebrews needed be delivered from Egyptian bondage, and subsequently, God intended to make the newly created nation into a people who were set apart from the pagan nations to represent him. The Exodus was not merely an act of physical deliverance, but an act

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[39] John H. Walton, *Old Testament Theology for Christians: From Ancient Context to Enduring Belief* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 107.

[40] Ibid., 109.

intended to bring spiritual change to Abraham's descendants as well. While there are socio-political components to the historical Exodus account, greater purposes in line with God's redemptive plans were inherent in God's deliverance of the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage. While the deliverance of the Hebrew slaves benefitted the newly established nation of Israel, there were universal implications of the historical Exodus that would eventually reach beyond one single nation and extend to all of humanity. Israel's deliverance and subsequent formation as a nation was a potent witness to the world of Yahweh's sovereignty. Even greater purposes can be seen in relation to God's redemptive plans in God's preservation of the Abrahamic lineage that would bring forth the promised seed, thus providing a way for all of humanity to experience liberation from the bondage of sin and death through the reconciliation brought about by the death and resurrection of Christ.

The Abrahamic Covenant and God's Redemptive Plan

The revelation of God's ultimate redemptive purposes for mankind as developed in the Abrahamic covenant demonstrates that the Messianic expectation which began in seed form in Genesis 3:15 continued to grow with the implementation of the Abrahamic covenant. That the Exodus is intimately linked with events in Genesis becomes readily apparent in the first verse of Exodus which begins with the conjunction "and" and proceeds to show how God's promises to Abraham are being fulfilled in the book of Exodus. The opening chapter of Exodus further links back to Genesis with the recitation of the names of the sons who went down to Egypt (Gen 46:8) and shows God's promises to Abraham already being fulfilled in that the children of Israel had grown mighty and filled the land of Egypt (Exod 1:7). The deliverance of the children of Israel was rooted in events that took place many years before the Hebrews found themselves enslaved

under Pharoah. Ultimately, God's salvific plan for mankind had its roots in Egyptian soil long before Abraham's descendants found themselves walking on the sands of Egypt.

Yahweh granted the Hebrews freedom from Egyptian bondage, not due solely to their oppressed status but to their status as the people of Yahweh. Yahweh chose to intervene on behalf of the Hebrews due to his status as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore, the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage is inseparable from the Abrahamic covenant. The linking of the Abrahamic covenant and Yahweh's deliverance of the children of Israel is seen early on in Exodus 2:24 which records that when God heard the groaning of the children of Israel he remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. According to Kaiser,

> To "remember" in biblical terms was not a mere cognitive function of calling something to one's mind, but it also involved actively carrying out and responding to what one had just recalled to mind. Hence, the author of Exodus connected the patriarchs and the exodus periods directly; for him the Sinaitic covenant was theologically and historically a continuation of the Abrahamic promise.[41]

Yahweh intervened on behalf of the Hebrews due to a preexisting relationship with their forefathers as seen in God's instructing Moses to inform the children of Israel that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had sent him unto them in Exodus 3:15–16, 2:23–24, 6:2–8. Had God not made irrevocable promises to Abraham concerning his descendants then God would not have been obligated to intervene on behalf of those in Egyptian bondage. This is demonstrated in Deuteronomy 7:6–8 where God states that he did not choose the Israelites because of their size and specifically states that he redeemed them out of the house of bondmen because he loved them, *and* he intended to keep the oath that he had sworn unto their fathers. The outworking of God's promises to Abraham is seen in the deliverance of the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage

[41] Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 69–70.

and their subsequent formation as a nation in Sinai. The seed promise of Genesis 3:15 continues to move forward along the path of God's redemptive-historical purposes for mankind in the Abrahamic covenant and the subsequent Sinaitic covenant.

Mediator of God's Blessings

God did not enter into a relationship with Abraham and his descendants merely for their own benefit as demonstrated in God's promise that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham (Gen 12:3). While there were certainly natural blessings promised to Abraham, such as the enlargement of Abraham's physical seed and land promises, even greater blessings were inherent in God's promises that would reach beyond the nation of Israel and benefit all of mankind. Abraham was both the recipient of God's blessings and the mediator of God's blessings. Although the covenant entailed promises for natural/national Israel, God's blessings through Abraham were universal in scope eventually culminating in the birth of the Jewish Messiah whose death and resurrection would lead to a renewed humanity for all who believed. Throughout the Exodus narrative, a series of events take place which culminate in the Passover as a "model of divine salvation."[42] Here is how Köstenberger and Alexander describe God's deliverance of the Hebrews and their formation into a holy nation:

> This pattern of divine deliverance shapes significantly the eschatological hope of the Israelite prophets. Not only do they proclaim punishment on the Israelites for their moral and spiritual failings, but vitally the prophets offer hope of restoration beyond judgment. In doing so they anticipate that the *missio Dei* will extend far beyond the nation of Israel to encompass the whole world, fulfilling God's promise to bless all the nations of the earth through a royal offspring of Abraham [emphasis original].[43]

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[42] Andreas J. Köstenberger and T. Desmond Alexander, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity, 2020), 33.

[43] Ibid. The development of the pattern of divine deliverance leading to eschatological hope in the prophetic corpus will be built upon throughout this dissertation. Chapter five will explore the hope for the restoration of the

While redemption from the power of evil is an important aspect of the Exodus story, this by itself does not restore humans to the status that Adam and Eve lost when God expelled them from the Garden of Eden.[44] God's deliverance of the enslaved Hebrews in fulfillment of his covenantal promises to Abraham was another step forward in God's redemptive plan that would ultimately restore lost humanity to the status from which Adam fell. In discussing how pre-patriarchal history ended in despair at Babel and how hope was restored through the promise that all nations would be blessed through Israel, Von Rad notes, "the ultimate purpose of the redemption which God will bring about in Israel is that of bridging the gulf between God and the entire human race."[45] The subsequent Sinaitic covenant was another link in the chain of covenants that further served God's redemptive purposes. Dempster notes that the Sinaitic covenant, "is clearly a further development of the covenant with the patriarchs, who were elected not just so that they and their families would be blessed with a private relationship with God but that this blessing might flow through them to the world."[46] The blessing that would flow to the entire world through Abraham's descendants was the promised seed of Christ the Messiah.

Exodus and Oppression

Dempster notes that a second hermeneutical dead end that arises when the historical Exodus is isolated from its "preceding and subsequent contexts," is the tendency for the Exodus to become "a paradigm for how oppressed peoples can think about their plight or how to solve

covenantal relationship and return of the exiles from captivity in Jeremiah, along with the promises of a new covenant in Jeremiah 31.

[44] Köstenberger, and T. Desmond Alexander, *Salvation to the Ends*, 31.

[45] Von Rad, *Problem of the Hexateuch*, 66.

[46] Dempster, "Exodus and Biblical Theology," 13.

it."[47] According to Dempster, "While there is much in this book that deals with oppression, to view the Exodus as simply a political manifesto or as a devotional guide is to ignore its larger context. That context shows that in many ways Israel needed far more than just a political and economic salvation or spiritual guidance."[48] According to the Boffs', for liberation theologians, the Exodus event is viewed first and foremost as a political event. While the Boffs' add the caveat that this liberation includes liberation from sin and death, not all liberation theologians do so with many liberation theologians downplaying the spiritual aspects inherent in the historical Exodus.[49] The Boffs' assert that while God is the father of all people, He is "most particularly father" for those that are oppressed which can be seen in God's deliverance of the Israelites in Exodus 3:7–8.[50] Liberation theologians frequently point to Exodus 3:7–8 to demonstrate God's preference for the poor; however, they often fail to note or diminish the reason why God responded to the groanings of the Hebrews. If Yahweh primarily rescued the children of Israel from Egypt because they were being oppressed, as liberation theologians claim, it begs the question of why God delivered the Israelites but no other oppressed people groups in the ANE. In antiquity, the social structures of ANE societies at the most basic level were hierarchical, with an elite ruling class that sat atop the social hierarchy ladder.[51] The Laws of Hammurabi demonstrate the societal division based on class, which in ancient Mesopotamia was comprised of "three legal statuses: the highest (*awilum* = "man," or free citizen), the lowest (*wardum* =

[47] Dempster, "Exodus and Biblical Theology," 6.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 51.

[50] Ibid.

[51] John F. Robertson, "Social Structure and Mobility, Ancient Near East," in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History,* eds. Roger S. Bagnall, Kai Brodersen, Craige B. Champion, Andrew Erskine, and Sabine R. Huebner (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah01179.

"slave"), and an intermediate status (*mushkenum*), which remains poorly understood. Sources frequently attest the enslavement of "free" individuals who defaulted on a debt, or their sale of children as payment."[52] If class and socio-economic differences led to economic disparities and various forms of subjugation, such as slavery, in societies throughout the ancient world, one may ponder why Yahweh chose not to liberate such persons from their oppression. If Yahweh was "most particularly father" of the oppressed and favored the oppressed above all others, one might ask why Yahweh failed to bring deliverance to the many who suffered under the social hierarchies of ancient societies. If the biblical witness reveals liberation of the oppressed as a central theme, as liberation theologians proclaim, then one should consider why Yahweh stepped into time and intervened to alleviate the oppression of the Hebrew children but not the myriad of other persons suffering from oppression throughout the world of the ANE. The biblical text provides the reason in Exodus 2:23–25 which clearly states that when God heard the groanings of the children of Israel he remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The catalyst for Yahweh's deliverance of the children of Israel was not political, it was covenantal. Yahweh responded to the cries of the children of Israel in Egypt due to the covenantal promises he had made to Abraham. While God may have been moved by the oppressed state of the Hebrews and sought to relieve their suffering, his obligation to act was founded on the covenant.

The argument being presented is not that God does not care for the oppressed as the scriptural witness clearly demonstrates that Yahweh is greatly concerned with matters of oppression. When confronting the rebellion of Judah in Isaiah 1:17, God commanded the nation

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[52] Robertson, "Social Structure and Mobility," https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444338386.wbeah01179.

to seek justice and correct oppression. In Zechariah 7:9–10, God instructs the people to execute true justice and show mercy, including not oppressing the widow, fatherless, sojourner, or poor. Extending justice and judgment is more acceptable to God than sacrifice as seen in Proverbs 21:3. There are a plethora of verses throughout the prophetic corpus which attests to God's concern for justice and the oppressed, such as Isaiah 58:6–10, Jeremiah 7:5; 21:12, Ezekiel 45:9, Amos 5:24, and Micah 6:8. The above verses demonstrate that God is most certainly concerned with the proper administration of justice and with relieving the suffering of the oppressed in society.

Hermeneutical "Blind Spots"

What is being argued here is that the *a priori* approaches utilized by liberation theologians cause "hermeneutical blind spots" which affect their ability to see the overarching role that the Exodus plays in God's redemptive plans beyond physical liberation in a natural sense. The *a priori* approach utilized by liberation theologians causes them to focus almost exclusively on the oppression the Hebrews suffered in Egypt, thus they do not see beyond the socio-political aspects of the historical Exodus to the spiritual and eschatological elements of the Exodus. According to Croatto, "the hermeneutical appropriation of the Exodus by theologies of liberation concerned with socio-political or cultural questions has put a stop to the other, individualistic and spiritualistic, appropriations of it made by earlier centuries."[53] The problem with sentiments such as these is that the Exodus becomes merely a story of socio-political liberation where crucial elements that factor into God's actions in the Exodus, such as the covenantal foundations of the Exodus, are either downplayed or ignored altogether. Furthermore,

[53] Croatto, *Exodus: A Lasting Paradigm*, 130. Croatto does not elaborate on what "individualistic and spiritualistic" interpretations he is referring to.

such approaches fail to consider the Exodus in light of the progression of God's revealed truths in salvation history.

In Croatto's hermeneutical approach, the text is viewed as monosemic when the author produces the text but once the text is produced it becomes polysemic as soon as "it becomes distanced from its production."[54] In Croatto's estimation, "the author *dies* in the very act of producing his work" [emphasis original].[55] As the meaning of the text is no longer found in the meaning embedded in the text, the reader is free to determine meaning based on their own personal circumstances. Such a reading is not intended to reproduce the meaning embedded in the text but to produce a new reading in line with the needs of the reader. According to Croatto, reading the biblical text "from another cultural standpoint, by other recipients, without the regulating presence of the author, is a re-reading, a new definition of its meaning that has no reason to coincide with the original meaning."[56] Considering Croatto's stance that the Exodus has inexhaustible reservoirs of meaning and that the meaning of the Exodus is tied to the ways in which oppressed groups have appropriated the Exodus historically, it logically follows that the overwhelming focus of the historical Exodus becomes one of liberation from socio-political oppression.[57] This becomes evident in Croatto's assertion that "the texts that develop the theme of liberation, so well summed up in the account of the Exodus, have no better readers than the oppressed who seek their own liberation."[58]

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[54] Croatto, *Exodus: A Lasting Paradigm*, 131.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., 132.

[57] See chapter two, "Eisegesis vs. Exegesis" section.

[58] Croatto, *Exodus: A Lasting Paradigm*, 131.

An inherent risk in utilizing such an *a priori* approach is that the readers, perhaps believing themselves to be oppressed in some manner, will read their own interests into the text, and fail to recognize the spiritual and eschatological elements present in the text. The meaning of the biblical text is diminished when the goal of interpretation becomes "what the text means to me" rather than seeking to determine what the biblical author originally meant and then seeking to apply the text to situations of oppression in the present day. Failure to consider the Exodus, both in its original context and in light of preceding and subsequent events in the biblical text, hampers the interpreter's ability to make critical connections between God's covenants and how they are intimately connected to the historical Exodus. Thus, the Exodus may be reduced to an account of physical liberation from socio-political oppression rather than being recognized for the crucial role the Exodus event plays in the grand narrative of God's salvific plans for mankind.

Summary and Conclusion

That deliverance from oppression is an important component of the Exodus narrative cannot be overlooked. However, the Exodus event was a vital part of a much larger biblical story linking together God's ultimate plans for liberation not just for the nation of Israel but liberation from sin and death for all of mankind. Dempster notes,

> Exodus language becomes the grammar used to express future salvation. Whether it is Hosea speaking of Israel going up from the land (Hos 1:11 [2:2 MT]), Isaiah of leading the people through the sea again (Isa 11:15), Micah of Yahweh leading an exodus of crippled outcasts (Mic 4:6-7), Jeremiah of a new covenant (Jeremiah 31-33), the Exodus language of salvation is the way Israel construed its understanding of the future.[59]

[59] Dempster, "Exodus and Biblical Theology," 4.

The historical development of liberation in the Exodus motif is inextricably linked with God's covenants building upon God's redemptive purposes.[60] With Adam's original sin and the fall, access to God's presence was lost. God as suzerain began a series of redemptive-covenantal promises in Genesis 3:15, proceeded forward through his dealings with Noah to Abraham in Genesis 15, and further solidified such promises to Moses in Exodus 20. God's covenant with Abraham was grounded in God's redemptive-historical purposes as seen in God's promises to Abraham in Genesis 17:4-6 and 22:18 that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's seed. As such, the Abrahamic covenant was the impetus that spurred God to action when he heard the cries of the Hebrew slaves in Egypt. The argument that God intervened in the historical Exodus due to his covenantal promises to Abraham in accordance with his redemptive-historical purposes in no way minimizes his concerns for the suffering of the Hebrews in Egypt. However, as suzerain Yahweh was bound to act on their behalf due to the stipulations of the covenant he had cut with Abraham. Yahweh's obligation to intervene on behalf of the Hebrew slaves was solely due to the promises he had made to Abraham, which were redemptive in nature. This demonstrates that covenant was the major unifying theological theme that brought about the historical Exodus and not the oppression of the Hebrews.

Beginning with God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:13–14 that his descendants would be afflicted in Egypt for four hundred years before God brought them out, the theological theme of fulfillment can be seen running throughout the book of Exodus linking God's covenantal promises in Genesis to their fulfillment in Exodus. In discussing God's fulfillment of the covenantal promises, Kaiser notes, "Most reassuring of all is the fact that God remembers

[60] The notion that God's pattern of liberation throughout the canon is best revealed through his covenant dealings with the nation of Israel will be further developed in future chapters.

(2:24). The promises he had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob some four hundred to six hundred years earlier began coming to fruition as Israel left Egypt for the Promised Land. The covenant at Sinai was but another step in God's fulfillment of the promises to the patriarchs (3:15–17; 6:2–8; 19:3–6)."[61] The theology of redemption in the book of Exodus is not only the story of redemption in the historical Exodus, but an integral part of God's redemptive story which would extend beyond the borders of national Israel to the entire world.

God's continued covenantal dealings with mankind, beginning in primeval history, through to the historical Exodus, and proceeding to the Davidic covenant demonstrate a continuity of revelation that contributes to the shaping of the future hope in the Messianic vision in the OT canon. The institution of the covenants was an integral part of God's salvific plan for mankind to restore them to the fellowship which was lost subsequent to the fall. These redemptive promises continue to progress throughout the OT ultimately culminating in the coming of Christ the Messiah who fulfills the promises made in the Law and the Prophets. Each of God's covenants were eschatological in nature in that they progressively revealed God's redemptive truths to the nation of Israel pointing forward to the long-awaited promised seed that would usher in God's eternal kingdom.

That liberation theologians are concerned about applying the biblical text in an effort to relieve the suffering of the oppressed in society is a commendable goal. Moreover, their focus on praxis and applying the Word in practical ways to assist those who are truly suffering is to be applauded. The arguments offered by liberation theologians that theology is incomplete if it only remains on a theoretical level and not a practical one is a valid argument and churches would be

[61] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Exodus," in *Genesis-Leviticus*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, EBC 1 (Grand Rapids: Harper Collins Christian, 2008), 404.

wise to express more concern for caring for the oppressed in practical ways in accordance with the biblical mandate in Isaiah 1:17 to do good, seek justice, relieve oppression, and bring justice to the fatherless and widow.

While the concern of liberation theologians for relieving oppression is a biblical concept, their failure lies in the use of an *a priori* approach which greatly impacts their reading of the Exodus. Their *a priori* approach to the Exodus is flawed in that this position continually leads to them interpreting the Exodus through the lens of the oppressed, thus causing all their interpretations of liberation in the Exodus to be almost entirely focused on oppression from socio-political bondage in the natural. The arguments presented in this chapter and throughout the remainder of this dissertation will demonstrate that a better approach to understanding the Exodus will be to start with a biblical-theological analysis of the text which will then allow for conclusions to be drawn about what truly constitutes liberation in the Exodus motif throughout the canon. Chapter three has drawn the connections between the historical Exodus and God's covenants and the remainder of the dissertation will demonstrate that the historical Exodus is a foundational part of the overarching biblical story of God's redemptive plan, not merely an attempt to relieve temporal suffering, but a way to allow for all mankind to reconcile with God, thus opening the way to eternal life for all people.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE HISTORICAL EXODUS: EXPOSITION OF EXODUS 2:23–3:15

Introduction

As the foundational salvific event in the OT, the historical Exodus played a crucial role in the formation of the nation of Israel and God's redemptive-historical purposes for all of mankind. A compelling narrative, rich with themes of oppression, liberation, and fulfillment of covenantal promises, the book of Exodus masterfully portrays the dynamic struggle between an earthly ruler and the true sovereign King who rules over the kingdoms of this world. From the plagues in Egypt to the journey through the Reed Sea, from the institution of the Passover to the wilderness wanderings, the biblical drama played out in the book of Exodus has captured the attention of generations of believers, both Jewish and Christian alike. Moreover, the Exodus narrative has long been used as a rallying cry among groups that claim to be fighting against societal oppression. Among such groups, the historical Exodus has primarily been portrayed as a story of an oppressed people group obtaining liberation from socio-political oppression and journeying to Canaan with the intent to establish a society built on equality. While the historical Exodus does contain elements of oppression, as seen in the enslavement of the Hebrews under harsh taskmasters, inherent in the historical Exodus are theological themes that encompass greater spiritual truths that move beyond liberation in the physical sense so often portrayed by liberation theologians. The liberation of the Hebrew slaves from Egyptian bondage was not merely a part of the history of the nation of Israel, but an integral part of God's salvific purposes that would ultimately have far-reaching consequences for all of mankind. These truths are especially evident in the covenantal nature of the book of Exodus. The book of Exodus is not only a covenantal book in that God instituted the Mosaic covenant with the newly formed nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai but also in the fulfillment of God's covenantal promises to Abraham, Isaac,

and Jacob (Exod 6). Perhaps no other book in the OT demonstrates the truths of God's faithfulness as the covenant-keeping suzerain than the book of Exodus. From start to finish, the book of Exodus is a book of the fulfillment of God's covenant promises stretching back across the sands of time to promises made to the patriarchs in Genesis. Likewise, the Mosaic covenant had its part to play in God's salvific purposes until the promised seed of Abraham arrived to fulfill the law (Gal 3:15–29). In discussing how the book of Exodus fits into the overarching Pentateuchal revelation, Cole notes, "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."[1]

The events contained within the Book of Exodus are not merely a historical recounting of a band of nomads escaping Egypt and undertaking a journey for the purpose of a better future. Far from being an isolated event with no relevance to anyone outside of the ancient nation of Israel, the Exodus is part of a larger narrative extending from the Book of Genesis to the Book of Revelation. The full significance of the historical Exodus is not found in the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt but in the role that the event played in God's redemptive-historical purposes for all mankind. Masterfully interwoven into the tapestry of God's salvific storyline, the Exodus narrative is another step in a journey of reconciling God and man to the relationship which was lost due to the advent of the fall in Genesis. Just as the Israelites marched over the Jordan and into the promised land, God's redemptive promises progress forward through the historical Exodus en route to the eschatological promised land of the new heavens and new earth.

[1] Alan R. Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 15.

In chapter two I argued that the liberation theology reading of Exodus theology in Scripture is based on a faulty hermeneutic. In chapter three I argued that the impetus for God's deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage was the pre-existing Abrahamic covenant. In chapter four an exegetical analysis of Exodus 2:23–3:15 will be conducted to deduce the theological significance of liberation in the historical Exodus event. This chapter will explore the primary factor which motivated God to intervene on behalf of the enslaved Hebrews and will demonstrate that God's *remembrance* of the covenant is the key to unlocking the significance of liberation in the historical Exodus. The goal of this chapter is to link liberation in the Exodus with God's covenantal promises in Genesis, thus demonstrating that the covenant is the foundational framework upon which the historical Exodus is built, further strengthening the argument throughout this dissertation that the covenantal nature of the Israelite's deliverance from Egypt is the basis for elucidating the theological significance of liberation throughout the entire canon. The argument being presented here is not that God was unmoved by the cries of the enslaved Hebrews suffering under oppression, but that there are greater spiritual implications present in the historical Exodus, which refute the contention among liberation theologians that the Exodus was primarily a revolutionary political act against oppressive political and economic structures. Such arguments eclipse the covenantal connection and the role that the Exodus plays in the grand scheme of God's redemptive-historical purposes.

Exegetical Analysis of Exodus 2:23–3:15

The inter-connectedness of the books of Genesis and Exodus is immediately demonstrated from the opening words of Exodus in verse 1:7 with the multiplication of Abraham's progeny in the land of Egypt in fulfillment of God's covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Genesis 15:5, 22:17–18, and 35:11–12. Thus, Genesis and Exodus are

intimately connected, both historically and theologically. As such, the events which follow in God's liberation of the Hebrews must be contextualized within God's overarching redemptive-historical purposes in line with God's promises to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him. With the rise to power of a new king who knew not Joseph, the children of Israel found themselves subjected to harsh taskmasters who afflicted them with heavy burdens, thus the descendants of Abraham found themselves suffering under Egyptian bondage (Exod 1:8–14) in fulfillment of God's words to Abraham in Genesis 15:13. The place which had once sustained God's people in a time of famine and allowed for the expansion of Abraham's seed had evolved into an iron furnace of affliction (Deut 4:20).

God *Remembers* His Covenant (2:23–25)

Whether the Hebrews were merely crying out in anguish to express their suffering or crying out to a particular god for help remains unknown as verse 23 simply states they cried out without noting who the Israelites may have cried out to. As the Hebrews engaged in the worship of false gods while in Egypt (Josh 24:14), the possibility exists that the people were calling out to false gods they were familiar with. However, there was only one God capable of delivering the children of Israel and it is this God, the God of the patriarchs, which heard and answered their cries. Following the cries of the people in verse 23, four verbs follow in verses 24–25 with God as the subject: God *heard*, God *remembered*, God *looked*, and God *knew*.[2] Amid their suffering, God heard the impassioned cries of the Hebrews and was stirred to the remembrance of his covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 2:24). The Hebrew verb *zāḵar*, translated *remember*, occurs 169 times in the Qal in the OT, with God as the subject a total of 73 times.[3] In

[2] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Exodus*, SGBC (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian, 2021), 84.

[3] Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 80.

Hebrew thought, *zāḵar*, denotes more than just a mental act of recalling something to mind. Inherent in the idea of remembering is the notion of *acting* in relation to what is remembered. The emphasis on remembering is not that of a psychological experience where one merely recalls something to memory but denotes direct action on behalf of another taken by the one who remembers.[4]

> God's remembering always implies his movement toward the object of his memory. This action varies in nature, and can be physical or forensic. The objective side of memory is accompanied, in differing degrees, by an internal reaction on God's part. The essence of God's remembering lies in his acting toward someone because of a previous commitment.[5]

The connotation of remembrance in verse 24 is that Yahweh's remembrance of his covenant with the patriarchs spurs him to act on behalf of the enslaved Hebrews to bring about the fulfillment of his promises to the patriarchs. That *zāḵar* entails more than just a mental act can be seen in God's remembrance of Noah in Genesis 8:1 where God *remembered* Noah and then acted on his behalf causing the flood waters to recede. While destroying Sodom and Gomorrah, God *remembered* Abraham and subsequently saved Lot from the midst of the overthrow of the cities (Gen 19:29). When Moses interceded on behalf of the Israelites in the golden calf incident, God ceased his planned destruction when Moses called for God to *remember* the covenantal promises he made to the patriarchs (Exod 32:9–14). In Genesis 30:22, God *remembered* Rachel and opened her womb. In 1 Samuel 1:11, Hannah called out to God asking him to not only *remember* her but to give her a child with verses 19–20 noting that God *remembered* Hannah and she conceived. The biblical witness draws a connection between God *remembering* and *acting* demonstrating that remembrance in the Scriptures becomes the catalyst

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[4] Brevard S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel*, SBT (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1962), 31–32.

[5] Ibid., 34.

for God to divinely intervene on behalf of his people. Thus, God's remembrance in Exodus 2:24 was the impetus that caused him to act on behalf of the enslaved Hebrews in accordance with the covenantal promises made to the patriarchs.[6]

> But, in the text of Exodus, the whole movement of salvation that culminates in the Sinai covenant is a fulfillment of divine promises stemming from the covenant of Abraham (Exod. 3:15-17). Indeed, the whole biblical history of salvation is seen in terms of promise and fulfillment: this is what gives the Sinaitic covenant depth and roots in the past, since, in it, God is 'remembering' his covenant with Abraham, and thus, in a sense, reiterating it.[7]

That God's actions on behalf of those in Egyptian bondage were inseparable from his covenant with the patriarchs was demonstrated in God's promise to Moses to intervene on behalf of the enslaved Hebrews in Exodus 6. When God told Moses of his plans for liberating the Hebrews, God informed Moses that he had previously met with the patriarchs and established a covenant with them (Exod 6:1–4). God further explained that he had heard the cries of the Hebrews and would redeem them and then stated that he would bring them into the land which he swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exodus 6:5–8). It is God himself who drew the connection between the forthcoming liberation of the Israelites and the covenant he had previously established with the patriarchs, thus demonstrating fidelity in his covenant relationship with Israel's forefathers and meeting his obligations as the divine suzerain. The liberation of the Hebrew slaves was not only historically connected to God's covenant with Abraham regarding land promises but theologically connected with the furthering of God's progressive redemptive promises as revealed in the Abrahamic covenant. First God *heard* and *remembered* verse 24, then God *looked* and *perceived* verse 25, all of which culminates in God

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[6] Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction*, 28.

[7] Ibid.

acting. While the Exodus may have begun with remembrance as a mental act, the event climaxed with God's acting to deliver the Hebrews from their bondage in accordance with his covenantal obligations.

The Burning Bush (3:1–5)

Wandering through the backside of the desert, Moses finds himself far from the once-privileged life he lived as the son of the pharaoh's daughter. While the day may have seemed routine, with Moses tending the flock of his father-in-law, an intimate experience with the God of his forefathers would forever alter the course of his life. A miraculous encounter with Yahweh would transform the shepherd of the sheep into God's future leader of Israel responsible for shepherding God's chosen people from Egypt to the promised land in fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham.

Out of the midst of the burning bush the angel of the Lord (YHWH) in verse 2, appeared to Moses, but when Moses turned aside to look verse 4 states that God (*'ĕlōhîm*) is the one who called out to him. The use of the name YHWH, the first instance in Exodus, in connection with the angelic messenger and burning bush in verse 2, along with the use of Elohim in verse 4, in connection with the voice that called out to Moses from the bush demonstrate that it was God who was present in the burning bush and that God was the one calling out to Moses.[8] The account presented here suggests that the angel of the Lord was more than an angelic messenger and was likely a supernatural manifestation of God similar to God's previous interactions with other OT saints. When the angel of the Lord called out to Abraham in Genesis 22:11–16 as he prepared to sacrifice Isaac, the angel of the Lord stated, "By myself I have sworn" (v. 16) and

[8] Wright, *Exodus,* 97.

proceeded to promise Abraham that all nations of the earth would be blessed through his seed verse 18 (Gen 22:11–16, KJV). It was God who swore an oath to Abraham and promised covenantal blessings which entailed the coming of the promised seed that would redeem mankind. In Genesis 31:11, when the angel of God spoke to Jacob through a dream, verse 13 notes that the angel refers to himself as the God of Bethel. When Manoah encounters the angel of the Lord in Judges 13, he tells his wife in verse 2 that they would surely die as they had seen God.[9] In referencing the numerous encounters individuals had with the angel of the Lord in the OT, Hamilton notes, "Several of these references speak of the angel/God/Lord as if interchangeable and undistinguishable, reinforcing the idea that the Lord himself is the angel, and the angel is the Lord himself."[10] This idea is further reinforced when Exodus 3:4 records that God is the one who called out to Moses from the bush, and in verse 6 when God introduced himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These verses and the totality of the scriptural witness support the notion that a manifestation of God is being spoken of in Exodus 3:2 rather than a created angelic being.

Having his attention arrested by the sight of the burning bush, Moses turned aside to investigate the wonder before him (v. 4). Thus, the door was opened for an encounter with the only God capable of bringing the enslaved Hebrews out of Egypt and into the land promised to their forefathers. God's presence turned the scene from the location of a mere scrub brush in the desert to a place of holiness. Hence, God commanded Moses to remove his sandals as the place upon which he was standing was holy ground (v. 5).[11] God not only initiated the divine

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[9] Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*, 85.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Scholars offer a plethora of explanations for God commanding Moses to remove his shoes. Hamilton notes one possibility being the practice among some religions of removing one's shoes before entering sacred spaces

encounter by calling Moses (v. 4), but God also instructed Moses on the proper way to approach him (v. 5), which was with reverence for the holy nature of God.

The Covenantal Connection (3:6–9)

In verse 6, the once proud prince of Egypt now finds himself hiding his face from God. Yahweh begins his commentary with Moses in verse 6 by declaring that he is the God of thy father (singular) and that of the forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, thus linking his connection with Moses all the way back to the patriarchs. God proceeded to inform Moses that he had both seen the affliction of the children of Israel and heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters (v. 7). God is not an uncaring God divorced from the suffering of his children but a God who *hears*, *sees*, *observes*, *knows* (v. 7), and is now prepared to deliver the children of Israel (v. 8) in honor of promises made to the patriarchs long ago. The anthropomorphic terms used to describe God's actions in no way impose human limitations on God but rather highlight that God is not only concerned with human affairs but directly intervenes when he chooses to.[12]

Verse 8 highlights God's plans to fulfill not one, but two of the promises he made when he cut the covenant with Abram. First, God announced his intention to deliver the children of Israel from the hands of the Egyptians in fulfillment of Genesis 15:12–14. The covenantal connection is further established in verse 8 where the land is referenced three separate times. God informs Moses that not only will he *bring the people out of* Egypt but that he intends to *bring the people up to* a *land*, a good *land*, and a large *land* flowing with milk and honey, thus

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as a show of respect towards the deity. Ibid., 89. Hamilton further notes, "Many commentators have noticed that in the portions of Exodus dealing with priestly vestments (28; 39), mention is made of a covering for every part of the body except for the feet. This suggests that when the clerics enter the holy place for ministry, they do so barefoot." Ibid., 90. Cole notes the practice of early Sumerian priests who carried out their cultic practices while naked. Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction*, 72. Regardless of any traditions that may have existed at the time, what makes this encounter notable is that it is God who issues the command and God who declares the ground holy.

[12] Kaiser, "Exodus," 435.

demonstrating God's intentions to fulfill the covenantal promises made to Abraham in Genesis 15:18–21 and 17:7–8 that Abraham's seed would be given all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. God's land promise to Abraham was a crucial component of God's redemptive-historical plan in that the land promise was made in connection with God's promise to Abraham that through his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed.[13] In noting the connection between God's promise of the increase of Abraham's seed and the promise of the land, Goldingay introduces the possibility that "moving to a new land was mainly a means to another end, that more importance attaches to the destiny that awaits there, of becoming a great nation, gaining a name and becoming a blessing."[14]

That God begins the conversation with Moses by declaring himself God of the patriarchs links his planned act of deliverance with the promises he made in the Abrahamic covenant. This is further supported in Deuteronomy 7:8 which states, "But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deu 7:8, KJV). While the cries of the Hebrews would have moved the heart of God as he loved the Hebrews, in these verses in Deuteronomy Yahweh fulfills his role as the divine suzerain when he indicates that he acted on their behalf not only out of love but to fulfill the oath he had made to their forefathers. Although ANE regimes were often repressive and leaders often ruled with an iron fist, Yahweh did not intervene on behalf of every oppressed people group in the same miraculous way he did for the enslaved Hebrews.

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[13] John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 208.

[14] Ibid., 208-209.

That God was concerned about oppression is demonstrated by the laws that he gave to the people which if followed would have prevented oppression in Israelite society. Moreover, the prophetic corpus demonstrates God's wrath against those who oppress the poor as demonstrated in Amos 2:6, Isaiah 10:1–3, Jeremiah 7:5–7, Zechariah 7:8–10, and Micah 2:1–3 Yet, God specifically chose to intervene on behalf of the oppressed Hebrews and not any other oppressed group in Egyptian society. As Egypt was a powerful nation, other oppressed persons or people groups likely lived throughout the land of Egypt at the time. Yet, Yahweh chose only to free the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage. This begs the question of why Yahweh chose to intervene on behalf of one people group but not all the oppressed groups in Egypt or any other nation of the time. God chose the Hebrews not merely because they were in bondage but due to the love he had for their forefathers as evidenced by Deuteronomy 10:15 where God notes he chose their seed above all others. Block notes that the statements made in Deuteronomy 7 and 10 both "suggest that YHWH's passion for Israel preceded his election of them, but the Deuteronomy 7 reference explicitly excludes any utilitarian considerations driving his choice of this people out of all the peoples on earth."[15] Wright aptly sums up the various elements of the Exodus when he states, "The exodus will be the monumental demonstration of God's rectifying justice against the perpetrators of oppression, God's compassion for their victims, and God's faithfulness to his covenant promise-all of which are implied in the statements that God saw and heard all that was going on and that God remembered and knew who these people were."[16]

[15] Block, *Covenant*, 135.

[16] Wright, *Exodus*, 84.

The Mission of Moses 3:10–12

Moses' miraculous encounter with God in the burning bush does not prevent Moses from questioning God when he is commissioned by God (v. 10) with the task of approaching Pharaoh on behalf of Yahweh. The man who was so quick to intervene on behalf of his suffering brethren in Exodus 2:11–12 now expresses hesitancy in stepping forward when God calls him to go forth (v. 11). God offers Moses the greatest possible reassurance in verse 12 when God informs Moses that he will be with him as he confronts Pharaoh. While Moses may be weak and incapable of confronting Pharaoh in his own strength, Yahweh's reassurance that he would accompany Moses should have resolved any doubt or fear on Moses' part. What Moses could not accomplish on his own merit, God could. Kaiser sums it up aptly when he notes,

> If God has assured Moses that the divine personal presence will accompany him in this assignment, it should render Moses' objection devoid of merit. Who Moses is is not at all as important as who God is. The contrasts cannot be sharper or more telling than the divine provision found in this promise, which incidentally is found around one hundred times in the OT.[17]

Not only does God reassure Moses that he will be with him as he confronts Pharaoh, but God further confirms his intentions to deliver the children of Israel when he informs Moses that he will provide him with a sign (v. 12). God's promised sign that he will bring the people to this self-same mountain to serve him after he has brought the people out of Egypt should serve to instill a sense of trust and faith in Moses.[18] This sign also portends the future covenantal relationship God would establish with the children of Israel on Mt. Sinai. Cole notes, "The great covenant and the law-giving at Sinai was thus the fulfillment of this sign (Exod. 19 onwards).

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[17] Kaiser, "Exodus," 438.

[18] Scholars debate exactly what the sign referenced in Exodus 3:10 refers to. Kaiser notes, "Some refer "this" back to the burning bush or to the preceding clause, while the majority of interpreters understand "this" to look forward to the following clause." Ibid. The view taken here is that the sign refers to God's future intentions to bring the Israelites to the mountain to serve/worship him; therefore, the sign would represent a future hope in the fulfillment of God's plans which would serve as an inspiration to Moses as he proceeds to follow God's call.

This promise alone explains the insistence of Moses to Pharaoh that Israel must keep a festival to YHWH in the desert (Exod. 5:1); only so can it be fulfilled."[19]

The notion among many liberation theologians that God delivered the Israelites from socio-political bondage in Egypt and brought them into the promised land so that they might create a society founded on modern-day notions of equality contradicts the biblical witness. Such anachronistic Marxist ideas import meaning into the text which is not supported by the biblical account. The law recognized that there would be different classes as seen in the laws regarding widows, orphans, and other poor persons. Exodus 22:25 protects the poor by preventing the charging of interest when the poor borrow money. In Exodus 22:26–27, provision is made to return the neighbor's garment before the sun goes down. Deuteronomy 24:14–15 details how hired *servants* who were *poor* are to be treated and paid daily before the sun goes down. Deuteronomy 26:12–13 records the payment of tithes to the stranger, fatherless, and the widow. The law is replete with examples of provisions protecting the foreigner, widows, orphans, and the poor, thus demonstrating that Israelite society was not the classless society portrayed by liberation theologians with Marxist ideas about the nature of society in the land of Canaan.

God not only liberated the Israelites so that he might fulfill his covenant promises to Abraham but also so the people would be free to serve and worship Yahweh in covenantal relationship. Liberation of the Hebrews entailed more than the creation of a new society in Canaan, which did not create the utopian society imagined by liberation theologians. The deliverance of the children of Israel encompassed the people being liberated so that they might worship and serve Yahweh.[20] This is demonstrated by God's repeatedly instructing Moses after

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[19] Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction*, 75.

[20] Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology,* 323. Goldingay further notes, "The way Exodus talks of freedom-or rather, fails to do so-confronts the Western preoccupation with freedom. Freedom in Scripture is the freedom to

the various plagues to tell Pharaoh to let the people go so that they may *serve* him (Exod 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13). Goldingay notes, "The exodus does not take Israel from serfdom to the freedom of independence but from service of one lord to service to another."[21] The children of Israel were not emancipated that they might go on their merry way and institute a new type of society amidst the other ANE nations. They were freed that they might be consecrated to serve and worship Yahweh and to provide a witness to the nations of the strength and majesty of the one true God. Moreover, God would have brought the Israelites out of Egypt even if they had not been oppressed as God had promised Abraham that he would bring them out of Egypt and further promised that he would bring them to the land of Canaan (Gen 15:13–21). Goldingay notes,

> God's act of deliverance is immediately provoked by the people's oppression, but even if there had been no oppression, they would have had to leave Egypt some time. The more fundamental reason for their leaving is that God promised them a different land and their occupying that land was built into the purpose for the world that Yhwh had announced.[22]

Hence, liberation in the Exodus was not merely a political or economic liberation but a spiritual liberation where the people would be free to worship God. Whereas they were once enslaved to the brutal regime of Egypt with Pharaoh as their master, the newly liberated children of Israel would be trading their allegiance to Yahweh, their new master whom they were to serve faithfully as vassals of the Mosaic covenant. These truths become evident when God tells Moses, "For unto me the children of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God" (Lev 25:55, KJV).[23] Levenson shares these

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serve Yhwh. This dynamic suggests another direction in which we might need to reframe the emphases of liberation theology. "Freedom from slavery under Pharoah took the form of becoming slaves of God….Therefore, when Israel wishes to testify to deliverance and freedom, it points first of all to the Torah." Ibid.

[21] Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 323.

[22] Ibid., 292.

[23] Jon D. Levenson, "Exodus and Liberation." *HBT* 13 (1991): 152.

sentiments when he notes, “The point of the exodus is not freedom in the sense of self-determination, but service, the service of the loving, redeeming, and delivering God of Israel, rather than the state and its proud king.”[24]

God Reveals Himself 3:13–15

When Moses questions God as to what he will say to the children of Israel when they ask the name of the God of their fathers (v. 13), the text states, “And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you” (Exod 3:14, KJV). That Moses would ask for a name to provide the children of Israel of the God who purported to act on their behalf before Pharoah should come as no surprise in the polytheistic world of the ANE, especially considering that while in Egypt the Israelites had engaged in the worship of other gods (Josh 24:14–15).[25] Whether Moses was seeking the actual name of God or seeking to ascertain what the name represented is a matter of debate.[26] Kaiser argues that the Hebrew *mâ,* translated *what,* speaks of the “significance, character, quality, and interpretation contained in the name; therefore, *mâ* seeks to discover what the name of Yahweh (=LORD) is in reputation and action.”[27] Regardless of Moses’ intentions in asking for a name, God’s response revealed not only his name (v. 14) but the meaning inherent in the name as well

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[24] Levenson, “Exodus and Liberation,” 152.

[25] Debates persist over whether Moses was asking God’s name because he was unfamiliar with the name or whether the Hebrews in Egypt did not know God’s name. According to Hamilton, “The majority of biblical commentators think that what the writer of Exodus implies is that Moses himself does not know the name.” See Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*, 106. According to some scholars, Moses likely thought the Hebrews would have known the name and would not have listened to Moses if he could not provide the name of the god that they were familiar with. Ibid. Other commentators argue Moses was not anticipating being asked the name but was more concerned with discovering the reputation behind the name of the god. Kaiser, “Exodus,” 441.

[26] In discussing the literary difficulty presented in vv. 13-15, Childs notes, “Few verses in the entire Old Testament have evoked such heated controversy and such widely divergent interpretations.” Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing, 1974), 61.

[27] Kaiser, “Exodus,” 441.

(v. 15).[28] In revealing himself as *'ehyeh' ăšer' ehyeh*, alternately translated as *I am who I am* or *I will be what I will be*, God assures Moses that He both *is* and *will be*. Kaiser notes,

> If little agreement exists on the inner relationship of vv. 13-15, still less exists on the meaning of "I AM." Perhaps the most natural explanation that does fullest justice to the fact that this name is connected with some form of the verb *hāyâ* ("to be") and to its own context given our present canonical shape of the text, is to see it as expressing the nature, character, and essence of the promise in v. 12: "I will be with you."[29]

Far from being evasive as some scholars assert, God's answer revealed not only his name to Moses but the significance of his name as well. God revealed himself as the ever-present God, eternal in being, and the one "who will be dynamically present then and there in the situation to which I am sending you."[30] God's revelation would have been reassuring to Moses and the Israelites that they could trust that Yahweh *was* and always *would be* what the Israelites need him to be. The children of Israel would not have to face Pharaoh alone but could depend on the full support of the God who could handle any situation they might face.

God goes on in verse 15 to reveal himself as the LORD, YHWH, and once again draws covenantal connections when he links himself with the patriarchs telling Moses to inform the children of Israel that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has visited them and seen what has been done to them in Egypt. Yahweh is not some lesser god in the ANE pantheon but the God of the patriarchs who had proven himself faithful to their forefathers. Kaiser notes, "For the first time God uses the standard third-person form of the verb 'to be" with the famous four consonants YHWH, instead of the first-person form of, *'ehyeh* as previously in vv. 12-14. This is to be God's "name" forever-a name denoting God's person, character, authority, power, and

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[28] Scholars debate whether God actually answered Moses in v. 14 with some claiming that God's response of *I am that I am* was an evasion on the part of God.

[29] Kaiser, "Exodus," 441.

[30] Ibid., 442.

reputation."[31] In revealing himself through the giving of his name God is also revealing his reputation, and God's reputation as the God of their forefathers was one of faithfulness to the Abrahamic covenant. Surely, the children of Israel could have confidence that what Yahweh promised would come to pass as Yahweh had repeatedly shown himself to be a faithful suzerain to the patriarchs. Just as Yahweh had been what the patriarchs needed in their time; the children of Israel could depend on Yahweh to be what they needed in their time as well. Yahweh's name was to be a memorial, *zēḵer,* for all generations (v. 15), not just a name to be remembered in a mental sense but a name to be praised in future generations for the greatness of Yahweh and all that he had accomplished on behalf of his people.[32]

Summary of Exodus 2:23–3:15

Throughout this exegetical analysis of Exodus 2:23–3:15, it has been argued that God himself repeatedly refers back to his covenant relationship with the patriarchs on multiple occasions throughout the text. From the moment the sounds of the cries of the children of Israel reached God's hearing, the covenantal connection was immediately established when God *remembered* his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 2:23–24). When the angel of the Lord initiated contact with Moses, he introduced himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 3:6). When God informed Moses of his intent to deliver the children of Israel and to bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey, God declared his intention to fulfill the covenantal promises he made to Abraham in Genesis 15 and 17 (Exod 3:7–8). God twice instructed Moses to inform the children of Israel that the God of their fathers was the one

[31] Kaiser, "Exodus," 442.

[32] Childs, *Memory and Tradition,* 70–73. Childs contends that the significance of *zēḵer* lies in the act of proclaiming all that God has rather than the mere act of recalling to mind God's name. Ibid., 72. See also Kaiser, "Exodus," 442.

responsible for sending Moses to them (v. 13, 15). Further on in Exodus 3:16 God instructs Moses to tell the people that it was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who had appeared to Moses and that he has seen what has been done to them. In verse 17 God again promises for the second time in chapter three to bring the people to the land promised to their fathers. In this one short section of Exodus, from 2:23–3:17, God references his relationship with the patriarchs five separate times. On two occasions God specifically references bringing the people to the land of Canaan, demonstrating his intention to fulfill his duties as the divine suzerain. Beyond these examples, the book of Exodus is a covenant book from start to finish, both in the fulfillment of promises given under the Abrahamic covenant but also in the establishment of the Mosaic covenant at Sinai. While the Exodus narrative contains socio-political elements, these elements were but a small part of a much grander theological storyline. Inherent in the covenantal connections throughout the book of Exodus are greater theological truths that extend far beyond the physical deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. Future development of the Exodus motif throughout this dissertation will demonstrate that liberation in the historical Exodus pointed towards the future greater spiritual and eschatological liberation that awaits the believer.

Exodus as Social Revolution

The tendency of liberation theologians to downplay the covenantal and spiritual elements in the Exodus narrative and to focus almost exclusively on the socio-political aspects of the story can be seen in the writings of Liberation theologian George (Jorge) V. Pixley. Pixley contends that the Exodus narrative is a foundational element of liberation criticism and supports a

liberationist reading of the Exodus.[33] In describing his commentary on the book of Exodus, Pixley notes that he was one of the first liberation theologians to interpret slavery in Egypt as "the social-political enslavement of a whole population to a system of economic tribute and the exodus as an attempt to establish a different type of society."[34] Pixley further states, "The application of liberation criticism to the story of the Exodus underscored that the story was about a revolution and not simply an emigration."[35]

For Pixley one of the central questions which must be answered through a liberation-critical reading of the text is what motivated the Hebrews to leave Egypt.[36] Were the Hebrews merely interested in escaping from Egypt or were they "rejecting kingship and the tributes it required, which they interpreted as slavery?"[37] This question is foundational to Pixley's argument that the Exodus is primarily a story of a revolution of the people intent on escaping a society founded on class. Pixley notes, "If they were just escaping from a land that had become hostile to them they would be refugees, but not revolutionaries. If, however, they were establishing a different system of government that did not include kings or tributes, and were seeking to replace it with a form of social equality, then the exodus is a revolution."[38] Owing to his hermeneutical approach, Pixley concludes that the entire Exodus narrative was a revolutionary movement instigated by the people as an act of rebellion against the class society of Egypt. In describing the overarching Exodus story Pixley notes,

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[33] Jorge Pixley, "Liberation Criticism," in *Methods for Exodus*, ed.Thomas B. Dozeman, Methods in Biblical Interpretation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 146.

[34] Ibid., 147.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., 146.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

> What had been overthrown in Egypt was the generalized slavery of the Asian mode of production. A new, classless society had been set up, established by Yahweh in the justice of the laws of Mount Sinai. If we fail to grasp the structural change implied by the exodus event, to speak of it as a revolution will only be demagogy. But if we analyze the overthrow of the structures of the Asian mode of production, and the establishment of a society on other bases-the bases of a primitive communism-then it will be precise and correct to designate this phenomenon as revolution.[39]

In Pixley's estimation, the liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage was a multi-step process with the victory over Pharoah being the first step of liberation from servitude in Egypt. The second step consisted of the wilderness journeys with the giving of the law at Sinai which Pixley equates to modern revolutions when he states:

> Mount Sinai is the place where Yahweh reveals the norms for a new society. The theophany of Mount Sinai corresponds to the constitutional assembly in the case of modern revolutions. Here are legislated the structures that will govern the new life of the community, and provide measures to be taken to counteract the inevitable temptation to return to the old familiar structures of class societies. After all, it was a class society from which this new people emerged, and it is class societies by which it is surrounded.[40]

Canaan as a Classless Society?

The third step was comprised of the construction of a new society in Canaan, which according to Pixley "meant the establishment of a classless society, a society of primitive communism."[41] While the law did provide governing structures for Israelite society, Yahweh's institution of the law at Mt. Sinai encompassed greater theological truths that Pixley ignores, including the connection between the giving of the law and the establishment of the Mosaic covenant. Moreover, Pixley's contention that the law legislated structures which would prevent a return to the class societies of Egypt is refuted by the ordinances contained in the Book of the

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[39] George V. Pixley, *On Exodus: A Liberation Perspective*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 4.

[40] Ibid., 82.

[41] Ibid., 81.

Covenant in Exodus 20:22–23:33. As the oldest law code contained in the Torah, the Book of the Covenant contains elements that would not be present in a classless society, such as the allowance of property rights, and the existence of slaves, servants, and freemen. Additionally, the law sharply delineated between males and females in Israelite society which further undermines Pixley's claims that the law would ensure a classless society. The Hebrew Bible does demonstrate concern for the vulnerable in society, such as the poor, widow, and orphan, and the law contained ordinances that served to protect such persons. However, such laws did not lead to the creation of a classless society reflecting communist ideals as Pixley asserts. The law recognized that there would be classes of widows, orphans, and other poor persons and provided for them in part by legislating behavior by the landowning classes that left grain and grapes that could be gleaned (Lev 19:9–10). Likewise, the laws surrounding slavery in Exodus 21:2–6 refutes Pixley's claims that ancient Israel was a classless and communist society.[42] Levenson, who asserts that Pixley's view that early Israel was a classless society is historical projectionism notes:

> This concern, which liberation theologians tend to call "the preferential option for the poor," is a central element of the Hebraic social ethic. But it does not in any way suggest classlessness or primitive communism as either a reality or an ideal. The condemnation of the oppression of the poor by the rich in the Hebrew Bible cannot be construed as a rejection of the very existence of the two classes. Such a construal projects Marxist ideas into the texts that had a very different view on the matter. [43]

Pixley fails to offer biblical support for his argument that the Israelites were seeking to establish a classless society in the land. Instead, Pixley bolsters his claim by asserting that the historians, including the Yahwist and Elohist strands, were merely seeking to record the history

[42] Levenson, "Exodus and Liberation," 140–41.

[43] Ibid., 140.

of the origins of the nation of Israel. In Pixley's estimation, the historians were not concerned with recording a revolutionary history although the source materials they used had arisen from a revolutionary experience.[44] Therefore Pixley concludes:

> Thus it was easier to present the account of the destruction of the old order in Egypt (which could be read as a struggle for national liberation) than to relate the experiences of an emerging people in Canaan that rejected the class societies existing in the land of Canaan. This is why, in the part of the account where we might have expected the history of the construction of a new society, we find instead the collection of laws that served as the constitution of this new society.[45]

According to Pixley the book of Exodus either "cannot or will not report the building of a classless society" leaving Pixley to assert that God guaranteed the revolution when he revealed to Moses the laws that would provide for a new society.[46] Pixley in turn uses his hypothetical history to encourage those engaged in a revolution to view the Exodus as a "manual of arms."[47] He denounces the "nationalistic interpretation of the Yahwist redactors" which he believes has caused believers to read the Exodus as an account of God rescuing the people "after the temporary aberration of a time of slavery."[48] Pixley states, "If we resituate the production of Exodus in the struggles of the Israelite peasants to win and defend their quality of life in the face of the assaults of the kings of Canaan, we give it back the revolutionary character of the struggle with the Pharoah."[49]

The issue with Pixley's assertation that the Exodus is a revolutionary struggle of the people is that his theory is based on nothing more than an *a priori* reading of Scripture that

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[44] Pixley, *Exodus: A Liberation Perspective*, 118.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid., 120.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

imposes anachronistic Marxist ideas where none can be found in the text. Pixley's theory is mere conjecture of the social setting of the Hebrews in Egypt. The biblical witness does not support his reconstruction of the Exodus that the Hebrews were engaged in radical revolution for the purpose of escaping a class society. Moreover, the Hebrews did not approach Moses asking him for help in confronting Pharaoh due to his ill-treatment of them. It was Moses who approached the Hebrews on Yahweh's behalf informing them of Yahweh's intentions to deliver them, thus demonstrating that it was Yahweh who instigated their deliverance, not the other way around. In their murmuring against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness the children of Israel state, "Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger" (Exod 16:3, KJV). Even after God had delivered them from bondage, the Hebrews' complaints demonstrate that there were some aspects of Egypt that they appreciated. Furthermore, Pixley's theory surrounding what the redactors were trying to accomplish in recording the Israelites' history is mere conjecture with no biblical support. Pixley would have been better served by engaging in a detailed analysis of the historical-cultural context of the Exodus rather than assuming a hypothetical social context that is not supported by the biblical text.

While Pixley does acknowledge Yahweh in the grand drama of the Exodus account, in Pixley's framework of the Exodus, it is not Yahweh as the divine actor who takes center stage, but the people themselves who figure prominently in their own deliverance. Pixley views the Exodus as the people instituting a rebellion due to their rejection of the class society which operated in Egypt at the time. Pixley notes that the philosophical question which must be answered is "In what sense is it correct to speak of God as the agent of a historical event such as

the liberation of the Hebrew slaves?"[50] One view, that Pixley describes as extreme, is the view that "In the account of the plagues, God is represented as the principal agent, assaulting the pharaoh and the Egyptians in order to force them to permit the departure of the Israelites."[51] Pixley takes issue with this view since it could be viewed as human involvement coming to an end when God steps in to act in the chain of human events. In this view God is seen as the divine actor with little human action taking place, thus God is the "exceptional cause, who takes the place of normal causes."[52] In Pixley's estimation, this view presents a practical disadvantage in that it encourages political passivity and detracts from the idea of human involvement.[53] Therefore, Pixley rewrites Scripture in an effort to formulate a version of the Exodus that can be contextualized to fit the needs of those presently fighting against oppressive structures. Since Pixley advocates for the oppressed in Central America to become involved in revolutionary acts in the modern-day fight against oppression, the element of human involvement is an important component of Pixley's interpretation of the Exodus.[54] Therefore, Pixley concludes that God can be said to have delivered the Israelites in that he was the universal instigator who inspired the Exodus in that he sent Moses to the people with the news of their liberation which would lead them to the promised land.[55]

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[50] Pixley, *Exodus: A Liberation Perspective*, 77.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Pixley contends that the midwives' failure to carry out the king's orders by killing all of the male infants at birth was the first step of revolution and that the same type of resistance against rulers is valid today. Pixley, *Methods for Exodus*, 152.

[55] Pixley, *Exodus: A Liberationist Perspective*, 80.

In discussing God's potential involvement in the Exodus, Pixley notes, "In sum, God does nothing-if by "do" we mean God is the exclusive agent of anything. On the other hand, God does everything-if by "do" we mean that God is present in every event, prompting it to the realization of its fullest and best potential."[56] As such, Pixley offers various explanations for events recorded in the biblical text, such as the plagues and massacre of the firstborn, which do not include God's direct intervention, thereby downplaying Yahweh's involvement and elevating the actions of the people in their deliverance from Egypt. For instance, Pixley concludes that God would not have undertaken actions of such magnitude, as seen in the plagues, in dealing with creatures such as frogs and flies. Such sentiments lead Pixley to conclude that the plagues may have been Moses interpreting natural events as God's judgments on the king.[57] Pixley further suggests that the massacre of the firstborn sons may have been a "terrorist action-inspired by God" and carried out by the Hebrews rather than supernatural acts of God.[58] Pixley's suggestions that God was merely the instigator while the Hebrews were the active agents of their deliverance contradicts the biblical narrative as seen in verses such as Deuteronomy 6:20–22 where Moses instructs the Israelites to tell their subsequent generations how when they were bondmen in Egypt God had brought them out with a mighty hand and how God showed great signs and wonders upon Pharaoh and Egypt (Deut 6:20–22, KJV). Moses further connects their

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[56] Pixley, *Exodus: A Liberationist Perspective*, 80.

[57] Ibid. According to Pixley, "It is difficult to say what this direct intervention of God could have been. God does not take action of major significance in irrational creatures-frogs, flies, and the like-because these creatures have too little margin for newness. If God effectuates the newness that consists in the actualization of the maximum potential of the real, then what God effectuates in a frog will be real, but severely limited." Ibid. Yahweh's providing quail for the Israelites in their wilderness journeys is explained away as a natural phenomenon which still occurs occasionally today where "immense flocks of birds arrive from Africa exhausted by their flight, and cover the earth." Ibid., 103. Pixley's explanation for Yahweh's provision of the manna is that an insect which lives on the tamarisk bush "secretes a sugary substance that, in the dry, cold morning air, coagulates into edible wafters." Ibid. Thus Pixley downplays Yahweh's miraculous intervention in events surrounding the Exodus and offers natural explanations for such events.

[58] Ibid, 80.

deliverance with the covenant in 6:23 when he notes that God brought them out to give them the land which God had sworn to the fathers. When Moses meets with God on Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19:3–4, God instructs Moses to remind the people what he had done in Egypt and how he bore them on eagles' wings and brought them unto himself. In Joshua 24:1–17 when reviewing Israel's history with the people Joshua details how Yahweh was the one who plagued Egypt, brought the fathers out, carried them through the sea, kept them in the wilderness, and brought them over the Jordan.

Pixley's revolutionary revision of the Exodus narrative downplays Yahweh's involvement in the Exodus and elevates the Hebrews to a place of prominence. Rather than being a story about God delivering the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage, the Exodus becomes nothing more than a story of social revolution where the people become the agents of their own liberation. This becomes apparent in Pixley's assertion that "the people is responsible for its flight from Egypt-under the inspiration of Yahweh and the captaincy of Moses."[59] This argument falls flat in that when Moses did speak to the children of Israel of their forthcoming deliverance as God instructed, they refused to listen to Moses due to their anguish (Exod 6:6–9). While God can use human instruments to carry out his divine purposes, the text of Exodus indicates that God was responsible for the supernatural events which occurred in the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage. Such a view not only severs the Exodus from its covenantal connections and the canon as a whole but fails to consider the fundamental interconnectedness of the Exodus in God's redemptive-historical purposes.

[59] Pixley, *Exodus: A Liberation Perspective*, 107.

Hermeneutical Blind Spots

Pixley's *a priori* approach to the biblical text leads to his viewing the Exodus as a story of an oppressed people group engaging in a revolution for the sake of creating a new classless society in Canaan. One of Pixley's hermeneutical mistakes is reading into the text to find meaning in the Exodus that will fit the needs of the interpretive community. Rather than approaching the text in an eisegetical manner, Pixley would be better served approaching the text in an exegetical manner to extract God's truth in relation to liberation and alleviating the suffering of the oppressed. Pixley's eisegetical approach essentially recreates the Exodus narrative by importing an anachronistic philosophy to support his *a priori* need for a narrative that supports his wish for revolution. This is evident in Pixley's defense of the emphasis that liberation criticism places on the motif of slavery in the reading of the Exodus when he notes, "we who struggle for liberation must read the text in terms of our needs today."[60] The problem with Pixley's approach is that his interpretation of the Exodus is influenced by the social circumstances of modern-day societies engaged in class struggles rather than being derived from the biblical text. This becomes evident in Pixley's arguments:

> Historical experiences such as the popular struggles in Central America are opening our eyes to the book of Exodus as the revolutionary manual of a deeply religious peasant people. But this reading of Exodus will not come to us without effort. In the present commentary on Exodus, I am attempting to follow this line of reading that the people of Latin America are opening up to us. I believe that I am being faithful to the original intention of the account. And the success of this reading will depend in part on the success of the revolutions that today are finding their inspiration in the Christian faith. Until these revolutions are reality, it will continue to be difficult to read a revolutionary text in which God is the principal agent, both in victory over the oppressor and in the building of a new order.[61]

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[60] Pixley, *Methods for Exodus*, 148.

[61] Ibid., 120–21.

Instead of analyzing events in Central America in light of the biblical witness in Exodus, Pixley interprets the Exodus through the lens of socio-political events in Central America. Furthermore, Pixley's notion that the validity of his reading can be judged by the success of modern-day revolutions fails in that proper interpretation of the biblical text cannot be gauged by the success or failure of revolutionary movements. The only objective way to measure the validity of an interpretation is to measure the interpretation against the meaning embedded in the biblical text. Rather than deriving meaning in the Exodus by importing meaning into the text from events occurring in Central America, a better hermeneutical approach would be to export meaning from the biblical text through an exegetical analysis of the text. While seeking contemporary application of the biblical text in an effort to solve societal issues is a worthy endeavor, a more sound hermeneutical approach would be to first determine the meaning embedded in the text and then apply these biblical truths to the needs of the community. In Pixley's hermeneutical approach, how the reader understands the text in relation to their social location takes precedence over the historical meaning embedded in the text. Pixley's liberationist approach to the biblical text was heavily influenced by Severino Croatto's hermeneutics. In discussing the hermeneutical presuppositions of Croatto, Pixley notes,

> Every act of reading is an act in the production of meaning. The written page has no meaning until somebody reads it, who is living in a situation in which he or she expects to find a message to address a current situation. And often the message will have scant relationship to the original intention of the author of the text read. The hermeneutical presupposition of Croatto illustrates well the central principles of liberation criticism and the influence of this methodology in creating a contemporary biblical liberation theology.[62]

Essentially, at the heart of Pixley's interpretation lies a postmodern reader-response based meaning. Pixley's acceptance of postmodern theories of interpretation which deny authorial

[62] Pixley, *Methods for Exodus,* 161.

intent and advocate for semantic autonomy leaves the biblical text open to any number of interpretations with no way to judge the validity of any interpretation. The Exodus can be reimagined ad nauseam and made to say whatever the interpreter or interpretive community needs it to say in their circumstances. Undoubtedly the social circumstances of the reader will impact how they read the text and ultimately the meaning as determined by the reader will take precedence over the historical meaning embedded in the text. The meaning found by the reader supplants the meaning embedded in the text thus devaluing the biblical text. A more sound approach would be to first determine the textual meaning embedded in the text and then move towards the contextual meaning to address societal concerns and bring to light theological truths that are relevant to the current generation.[63]

Summary and Conclusion

Not only does the book of Exodus begin with the fulfillment of God's covenantal promises but ends with the continued fulfillment of God's covenantal promises as the Israelites march forth toward the promised land of Canaan. While the Exodus contains many theological themes, one of the most significant is the revelation of God as the covenant-keeping divine suzerain who redeems his people and fulfills his promises. In keeping the promises he made to Abraham regarding his physical seed Israel, God demonstrated that he could be trusted to fulfill the spiritual and eschatological elements of the Abrahamic covenant as well, including that all the world would be blessed through Abraham's seed. In the grand narrative of Scripture, the Exodus plays a foundational role in God's historical-redemptive purposes.

[63] Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 32.

When God revealed himself to Moses at the burning bush, God introduced himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Throughout the book of Exodus in his continued discourse with Moses, God repeatedly refers to his relationship with the patriarchs and specifically states that he has *remembered* his covenant with the patriarchs (Exod 3:15–16; 4:5; 6:1–8). When God commissioned Moses, God instructed him to inform the children of Israel that he was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses was able to dissuade God from his plan to consume the Israelites in his wrath when Moses called on God to remember Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the promises God had made to multiply their seed and give them the land as an inheritance (Exod 32:12–13). Yahweh is not merely another capricious deity among the pantheon of ANE gods and goddesses, but the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yahweh is the divine suzerain who had sworn an oath by the cutting of the covenant with Abraham and no human obstacle, including a hard-hearted pharaoh, was capable of thwarting God's plans.

The tendency among liberation theologians to place more emphasis on the theme of oppression in the Exodus account influences liberation theologians to view the Exodus more often than not as a socio-political struggle against oppressive societal structures. This can be seen in Pixley's interpretation of the Exodus narrative as a social revolution. Thus, the link between covenant and liberation in the historical Exodus and the Exodus motif, as it develops throughout the canon, is underemphasized. Consequently, the role of the historical Exodus in God's redemptive-historical purposes is overshadowed and, in some instances, downplayed altogether. God's intention in delivering the Israelites from Egyptian bondage was not merely to deliver the Israelites from oppressive societal structures so that they might be free to establish a communistic society in Canaan. God delivered the Israelites and brought them to the land of

Canaan to fulfill the promises he made to Abraham 400 years prior. In refuting Pixley's view that the historical Exodus narrative was a class revolution, Levenson notes,

> …the ongoing significance of the exodus does not lie in its putative status as an instance of liberation in the quasi-Marxist sense in which that term is now used in many Christian seminaries and the elites of liberal churches. The early chapters of the Book of Exodus do not speak of a social revolution or a class struggle; close inspection shows that they do not even speak of the overthrow of Pharoah. The Exodus does not change the social structure of Egypt one whit. Instead, the subjects of these chapters is [sic] the miraculous escape to their native and promised land of foreigners who had been impressed into state slavery.[64]

The presupposition of liberation theologians that the overarching message of the Exodus is one of a political struggle against social inequality is not supported by the biblical text and fails in making connections between God's acting in *remembrance* of his covenantal obligations. Moreover, the ideas promoted among liberation theologians with Marxist leanings that the Israelites were intent on creating a utopian egalitarian society is not born out by the biblical text either. Furthermore, that social equality, in line with modern conceptions of equality, was achieved in the land of Canaan is refuted by several of the laws in Leviticus 25, including those concerning slavery.

While liberation theologians may have good intentions in seeking to contextualize the Exodus narrative in an attempt to address complex social issues, the interpretive process should be guided by sound hermeneutical principles, such as an exegetical approach to the biblical text, rather than allowing ideological presuppositions to guide their interpretation. In their desire to apply the biblical text to modern-day problems, liberation theologians have reimagined the Exodus to support the needs of the struggling communities they are engaged with. Subsequently,

[64] Levenson, "Exodus and Liberation," 145.

interpretations such as Pixley's have arisen that divorce the Exodus from its covenantal and canonical context and overemphasize the socio-political aspects of the Exodus.

Utilizing a hermeneutical process that engages the biblical text to determine the original meaning embedded in the text is a crucial component of the hermeneutical process and allows for better safeguards against subjective interpretations of the Exodus. Scholars such as Osborne note the importance of contextualization as an integral part of the interpretive process and contend that interpreters should be concerned with demonstrating the significance of the Word to the life of the modern believer.[65] The importance of such sentiments becomes apparent when one considers that one of the primary objections frequently lodged by liberation theologians against traditional orthodox theology and traditional hermeneutical approaches is that such systems and methodologies are more concerned with abstract theological concepts rather than applying biblical truths to address matters of societal concern. Application of biblical truth as an extension of the interpretive process should be a concern of the interpreter; however, orthopraxis cannot and should not take the place of orthodoxy.

Essentially, proper interpretation must precede proper application. If the Bible is believed to be the Word of God and capable of communicating God's truths to the world, then it is imperative that interpreters first set aside their ideological presuppositions and allow the biblical text to speak for itself. Liberation theologians fail in that their overemphasis on orthopraxis leads to the denigration of orthodoxy. A better practice would be the wedding of both orthodoxy and orthopraxy where correct interpretation is first sought to ensure that the truth as revealed in God's Word can then be applied appropriately to address contemporary concerns.

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[65] Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 343.

This chapter has linked liberation in the historical Exodus with God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and it is from this vantage point that God's acts of liberation will be traced through the book of Jeremiah in chapter five. The continual unfolding of God's liberative acts throughout this dissertation will demonstrate that liberation in the Exodus motif continues to progress towards the fulfillment of God's redemptive truths, which will ultimately culminate in the fulfillment of the greatest promise, the arrival of the promised seed, Christ the Messiah. God chose Israel to be the nation through which the seed of the woman, the promised Messiah would come. Exodus is not merely a part of Israel's history, but an integral part of God's grand narrative of salvation history for all the world.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE PROMISE OF A FUTURE EXODUS IN JEREMIAH

Introduction

At this point in the dissertation, the focus will switch from liberation in the historical Exodus to how the theological theme of liberation develops as it unfolds throughout the entirety of the canon. From the iron furnace of Egyptian bondage, through the long and often tumultuous trek through the wilderness, the newly formed nation of Israel found themselves poised on the banks of the Jordan River, prepared to cross over and see the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to Abraham. As the Israelites prepared for conquest, they could stand secure in the knowledge that they were a people in covenant relationship with the divine suzerain who had miraculously rescued them from Egyptian bondage and brought them through the sea to a land flowing with milk and honey. Having entered into a covenant relationship with Yahweh with the institution of the Mosaic covenant at Mt. Sinai, the Israelites were perfectly aligned to not only receive God's covenantal blessings but to represent Yahweh to the world as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exod 19:3–8). What God required in return was obedience and the keeping of the covenant which the newly formed nation swore to do. Had the Israelites upheld their covenantal obligations as outlined in the law, and remained faithful vassals, they would have inherited the blessings promised in the covenant (Lev 26:1–13; Deut 7:12–24; 28:1–68). Tragically, the history of the Israelites demonstrates their repeated failure to obey God and remain faithful covenant partners, leading to the nation suffering the curses outlined in the covenant (Lev 26:14–39; Deut 27–30). While God stood poised to pour out the blessings of the covenant, the Israelites instead incurred God's wrath and invoked the covenant curses due to their covenantal disobedience. From the days of the Judges to the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, the Israelites as a people became intimately acquainted with subjugation and captivity as they suffered under God's judgments due to their covenantal unfaithfulness. Chapter five will

explore the themes of exile and liberation in the book of Jeremiah and demonstrate that both exile and liberation are inseparably connected with the covenants.

In chapter four an exegetical analysis of Exodus 2:23–3:14 was undertaken to deduce the theological significance of liberation in the historical Exodus. The conclusion reached was that the foundational framework undergirding the Exodus was the covenant, thus demonstrating that liberation in the historical Exodus was dependent on the covenant relationship. The goal of this chapter is to explore the Exodus motif in the book of Jeremiah and show the development of a pattern of liberation that is founded on covenant relationships. This chapter will argue that the primary motivating factor contributing to Israel's exile throughout her history was the severing of the covenantal relationship with Yahweh due to Israel's spiritual adultery. Moreover, it will be argued that the primary motivating factor contributing to Israel's liberation after the Babylonian exile was the irrevocable promises God made in the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. In chapters three and four it was argued that liberation in the first Exodus was founded on the covenant relationship, particularly the Abrahamic covenant. Likewise, in chapter five it will be argued that liberation in the exodus from Babylon captivity was founded on the covenant relationship. The Israelites were not just guilty of breaking aspects of God's law regarding societal justice but were guilty of shattering the covenantal relationship due to their idolatrous actions, subsequently leading to their exile.

An exegetical analysis of Jeremiah 11:1–14 will demonstrate that Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem were guilty of following in the idolatrous footsteps of their forefathers in committing spiritual adultery against Yahweh, thus leading to their exile as a result of the broken covenant relationship. It will further be argued that the future liberation of the exiles was dependent on the mercy of God and was intimately connected with God's covenants in line with

his redemptive-historical purposes. Furthermore, it will be argued that covenant was the catalyst for Yahweh's liberation of the people from exile, thus demonstrating that liberation in the Exodus motif was founded on the covenant relationship.

The Old Testament Prophets

If the historical Exodus was founded on socio-political liberation, and God identified with Israel because of their status as an oppressed community, as liberation theologians often assert, it raises the question of why God would allow his people to be repeatedly enslaved. How could Yahweh, the sovereign suzerain of Israel, allow Judah to be carried off in chains to Babylon? Liberation theologians would assert that God allowed the Israelites to go into exile due to their unjust treatment and oppression of the marginalized in Israelite society.

Without question, the Exodus narrative is the prized Scripture utilized by liberation theologians in support of their theological belief systems and is the focal point of their writings. When liberation theologians do reference the prophets, liberation theologians generally assert that the main role of the prophets was to admonish the Israelites for their oppression of the marginalized in society. According to Cone, "The consistent theme in Israelite prophecy is Yahweh's concern for the lack of social, economic, and political injustice for those who are poor and unwanted in society."[1] Cone is correct that Yahweh's concern for societal justice is a consistent theme running throughout the prophetic corpus. The law was replete with verses detailing how the Israelites were to relate to one another, and specific mention was made that individuals were not to oppress others in society (Lev 19:14; 25:13–18, 25:43). The prophets continually reprimanded the people for their unjust treatment of others due to their failure to

[1] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 25.

follow these laws as evidenced when Amos rebukes Israel and Judah for oppressing the poor (Amos 2:6–8; 4:1; 8:1–6).

Cone further notes, "Later stages of Israelite history also show that God is particularly concerned about the oppressed within the community of Israel. The rise of Old Testament prophecy is due primarily to the lack of justice within that community. The prophets of Israel are prophets of social justice, reminding the people that Yahweh is the author of justice."[2] In pronouncing judgment on the people, God did take the people to task for their unjust treatment of the marginalized in society, as seen in God's judgment on those who oppress the worker, orphan, widow, and stranger (Mal 3:15).

The argument being presented here is not that social justice is not a consistent theme throughout the prophetic books as the scriptural witness indicates it is a persistent theme. However, it must be remembered that the laws regarding the just treatment of others were given as part of the Mosaic covenant. The oppressive actions of the Israelites caused them to suffer the judgment of God because of their covenantal disobedience in failing to keep the stipulations of the covenant, thus invoking the curses outlined in the covenant. Moreover, while social injustice was an important part of the prophetic message, it will be argued throughout chapter five that there were more significant factors that contributed to the repeated pattern of exile and liberation in the history of the nation of Israel. Although God did specifically reference the ways in which the people were oppressing the marginalized in society when he pronounced judgment; Yahweh's judgments on the Israelites for societal injustices must be contextualized with the covenant relationship in mind. The aim of this chapter is not to refute the notion among liberation theologians that the prophets were concerned with matters of social justice, as the

[2] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 25.

prophetic corpus demonstrates Yahweh's condemnation of Israelite society for their acts of injustice. This chapter will argue that although the prophets were concerned with social justice, the primary role of the prophets was that of covenant mediator calling people back to a covenant relationship with Yahweh.

The Role of the Prophets

Although the prophets issued strong rebukes against societal injustices, the primary role of the prophet was not that of social justice advocate. According to Fuhr and Yates, "The primary role of the prophets was to proclaim the word of God as "covenant reinforcement mediators."[3] The authors further note the prophets were responsible for "Preaching to the people a message of blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience, reinforced through fresh and sometimes shocking rhetoric."[4] Whether speaking a timely message to the current generation or a prophetic word for a future generation, the message of the prophets was firmly rooted in the context of covenant. Warnings of impending judgment were often issued in an attempt to convince the people to repent and turn back to Yahweh before they suffered the curses outlined in the Mosaic covenant due to covenantal unfaithfulness. The announcements of judgment and the oracles of salvation were both anchored in the promises contained in the covenants.[5] As Fuhr and Yates explain:

> The Mosaic covenant was not the only covenant to anchor prophetic messages. The oracles of salvation were anchored in the promises of the unilateral covenants; the unconditional blessings of the Abrahamic, Davidic, and new covenants are acknowledged by the prophets as the basis for eschatological hope. As much as the oracles of judgment were tied to violations of the bilateral Mosaic

[3] R. Alan Fuhr and Gary Yates, *The Message of the Twelve: Hearing the Voice of the Minor Prophets* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2016), 20.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid., 20–21.

> covenant, so the blessings promised by the oracles of salvation were based in the Abrahamic, Davidic, and new covenants.[6]

The message of the prophets was a covenantal message designed to draw the people back to covenantal relationship with God. Fuhr and Yates note that in their role of prosecuting attorneys, the prophets were responsible for bringing indictments against Israel "that revolved around five primary areas of violation: (1) idolatry, (2) social injustice, (3) violence, (4) hypocritical ritualism, and (5) spiritual apathy."[7]

It should be noted that while God is concerned with societal injustice, this does not extend to the notion among many liberation theologians that societal justice equals a classless society.[8] In discussing God's concern for social justice, Fuhr and Yates note that "God's concern was for the poor, not in reference to social equality, but in terms of social justice-the prophets made it abundantly clear that God hates corruption and ill-gotten gain made at the expense of the powerless."[9] In referencing the violation of the covenant through idolatry, Fuhr and Yates assert that the sin of idolatry "among Israel's many others, was the primary catalyst that brought the wrath of God's judgment to bear."[10] While the prophets repeatedly denounce injustice in the land, the prophetic lawsuits brought by God's prosecuting attorneys (the prophets) were for covenantal disloyalty. Societal injustices may have been listed in the indictment against the

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[6] Fuhr and Yates, *Message of the Twelve*, 21.

[7] Ibid., 22.

[8] See discussion in chapter four on Pixley's claims regarding the Exodus being a political revolution for the purpose of establishing a classless society in Canaan.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid. The authors contend that these truths are implied throughout the prophetic corpus and directly in 2 Kings 17:7–23.

Israelites, which detailed the crimes (covenantal violations) of the Israelites, but the main charge and subsequent conviction was covenantal unfaithfulness primarily due to spiritual adultery.[11]

Metaphor: The Language of the Prophets

In describing the prophets as being at war "in the trenches against idolatry," Sandy notes that the prophets' weapons were their words and that graphic metaphors were utilized to persuade the hearers and transform their thinking.[12] The use of rhetorical devices in Jeremiah paints a distinct portrait of the nature of Yahweh's covenantal relationship with the children of Israel. Perhaps the greatest rhetorical device that captures the unique and intimate nature of the relationship between Yahweh and his people is that of the marriage metaphor. The use of the marriage metaphor in the second chapter of Jeremiah provides significant insights that contribute to the understanding of the themes of exile and liberation in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah chapter two begins with God calling to mind the unique status and relationship he shared with Israel, with Yahweh reminiscing over shared affections and the beauty of their early years together in a devoted relationship (Jer 2:2). God's message spoken through Jeremiah in chapter two does not begin with condemnation but with a heart that fondly recalls the early days of their covenant relationship, much as an older married couple lovingly reminisces about their early days together. Yet, what started as marital bliss tragically evolved into marital discord due to the spiritual adultery and unfaithfulness of the Israelites.

In addressing the use of the marriage metaphor in Jeremiah chapter two, Wright notes that God is expressing divine nostalgia where "God remembers the first flush of marital love in

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[11] Fuhr and Yates, *Message of the Twelve*, 20-22. This will become evident in the exposition of Jer. 11:1–14 later in the chapter.

[12] D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 73.

the early days of his relationship with Israel as a nation (2–3), but only to contrast it bitterly with the ungrateful and unfaithful betrayal of their present behavior."[13] The use of the marriage metaphor should alert the reader early on that the overall theme being addressed here concerns more than simple disobedience to God but encompasses the theme of a covenant relationship with Yahweh. Yates asserts that "the placement of the metaphor of Israel as the unfaithful wife in Jeremiah 2–3 means that the entire book is stamped by this understanding of Israel's relationship with Yahweh." [14] In verse three Jeremiah uses another metaphor that expounds on the relationship Israel was to have with God by referring to them as his first fruits. Much as the land and its first fruits belonged to God, Israel also belonged to God as "a wife belongs to her husband, and as first fruit belongs to Yahweh."[15] According to Yates, the metaphors of marriage and the first fruits used here are "linked by the idea that Israel belongs exclusively to Yahweh."[16]

Yet, instead of remaining faithful to their marriage contract/covenantal relationship, Jeremiah accuses the people of playing the harlot with the pagan gods of the surrounding nations (Jer 2:20; 3:1, 6; 3:8). Jeremiah 2:8 demonstrates this truth when it states that "the pastors transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal" (Jer 2:8, KJV). Jeremiah further magnifies the extent of their treachery with the use of hyperbole to exaggerate their actions in verse 20 which states, "Indeed, on every high hill and under every leafy tree, you bend backward, you whore."[17] In verse five God asks the rhetorical question, "What iniquity have you

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[13] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Message of Jeremiah: Against Wind and Tide*, BST (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 61.

[14] Gary E. Yates, "Jeremiah's Message of Judgement and Hope for God's Unfaithful "Wife"," *BibSac* (2010): 154.

[15] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., and Tiberius Rata, *Walking the Ancient Paths: A Commentary on Jeremiah* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 46.

[16] Yates, "Jeremiah's Message of Judgement," 146.

[17] Jack R. Lundbom, *The Hebrew Prophets: An Introduction* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010), 198.

found in me, that they are gone far from me" (Jer 2:5, KJV). Regardless of all the ways in which God had shown himself faithful as seen in verses 6–7, Israel had turned their back on the One who had delivered them from the wilderness and had brought them into a land of abundance. Despite Josiah's attempts to bring religious reform to the nation of Judah, the condition in which the nation finds itself demonstrates that notwithstanding their religious rituals, their hearts were far from God.

The Prophetic Lawsuit

Due to the egregious actions of Judah, in Jeremiah 2 God brings a prophetic lawsuit against them for what amounts to the breaking of the covenant. Much like the Mosaic law made provisions for husbands to call unfaithful wives into court to face judgment, God's people could be "called into court" to face justice when they were unfaithful to Yahweh.[18] Throughout the book of Jeremiah, the nation is charged with a variety of offenses with the main indictment in chapter two being that of idolatry.[19] Hays notes that "although the lawsuit is formal, the injury is personal, and God uses the imagery of a husband and his unfaithful wife to convey the betrayal and pain that he feels because of Judah's idolatry."[20] God presents his case against Judah in verses 6–7 by noting how he had upheld his end of the covenant by all of the things he had done for them and how he had blessed them. He delivered them from Egypt and led them through the wilderness as he had promised. He further fulfilled his promises by bringing them into a land of plenty and subduing their enemies before them. God was faithful in upholding his end of the covenant which makes the failure of the Israelites to maintain their end of the covenant even

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[18] Gary V. Smith, *Interpreting the Prophetic Books: An Exegetical Handbook, Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Kregal, 2014), 30.

[19] J. Daniel Hays, *Jeremiah and Lamentations,* TTCS (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 14.

[20] Ibid.

more devastating. According to McKane, "the interrogations with which Yahweh opens his case against his people relates to the beginnings of apostasy, to the point when Israel first settled in Canaan" due to that being when "the first, fatal tendencies towards disloyalty began to manifest themselves."[21]

Jeremiah 2:13 states, "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jer 2:13, KJV). The metaphor of God as living waters is repeated in Jeremiah 17:33 where it is once again noted that Israel has forsaken the Lord who is the "fountain of living waters" (Jer 17:33, KJV). As the living waters, Yahweh was capable of meeting all the needs of the Israelites, yet they instead turned from God and "substituted defective replacements" which were unable to meet their needs as Yahweh was capable of doing.[22] Yates notes a further connection when he states:

> The portrayal of Israel's appeals to Egypt and Assyria for military assistance as "drinking" the waters of those lands (Jer. 2:18) also reflects the idea that Israel's alliances with other nations constituted adultery just as much as idolatry (cf. Hos. 7:8-11; 8:8-10). Turning to other nations for security involved trusting in their gods and renouncing Yahweh's sovereign prerogative to protect and defend His people.[23]

As the case against Judah progresses, further accusations are brought forth and a plethora of metaphors are used in verses 20–25 to describe just how far the nation has fallen. The nation which was formerly metaphorically referred to as a noble vine is now referred to as a degenerate plant of a strange vine, a dromedary, and a wild ass (Jer 2:22–23, KJV). Wright notes that the most striking example is Israel being compared to animals in heat in verses 23–24 which

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[21] William McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* (London: T & T Clark, 1986), 30.

[22] Kaiser and Rata, *Walking the Ancient Paths*, 47.

[23] Yates, "Jeremiah's Message of Judgement," 148.

demonstrates that "Israel's unfaithfulness to their covenant God was as blatant and shameless as that: the most holy relationship reduced to animal instincts."[24] That such stark imagery is used to represent the children of God who were once referred to as God's beautiful bride demonstrates the utter depravity of the Israelites' actions.

The marriage metaphor in chapter two is interwoven throughout the remainder of the book of Jeremiah and the entirety of the OT canon, thus highlighting the uniqueness of God's relationship with the Israelites and the utter devastation which occurred when the Israelites broke the sacred relationship. Having analyzed Jeremiah's use of the marriage metaphor it becomes readily apparent that God's relationship with the children of Israel encompasses much more than an obligation to obey the commands of the law. Having laid the foundation for understanding the intimate nature of the covenantal relationship, this chapter will proceed with an exegetical analysis of Jeremiah 11:1–14.

Exegetical Analysis of Jeremiah 11:1–14

Chapter 11 introduces the second section of prose material in Jeremiah following Jeremiah 7:1–8:3 and introduces the next section of the book of Jeremiah in chapters 11–20 which focuses on the certainty of God's impending judgement.[25] In this section, the focus is on not only *hearing* the words of the covenant but on *doing* what Yahweh has commanded through the covenant. The focal point is the words of the covenant, and the call is to active obedience. Simply listening to the words of the covenant with natural ears would not suffice as demonstrated by Yahweh's command to Jeremiah in verse 2 which states, "And say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this

[24] Wright, *The Message of Jeremiah*, 73.

[25] Kaiser and Rata, *Walking the Ancient Paths,* 129.

covenant" (Jer 11:3, KJV). Failure to obey the stipulations of the covenant would lead to an invocation of the covenantal curses as outlined in Leviticus 26:14–39 and Deuteronomy 27–30.

God Sends Forth His Word (11:1–3)

The introductory formula in verse one introduces a new word coming from Yahweh and is a frequent formula used in the book of Jeremiah as seen in Jeremiah 7:1, 18:1, and 30:1.[26] As God's mouthpiece, Jeremiah will not speak forth his own words but the very words of Yahweh. Amid the people's apostasy and failure to heed the words of warning that God had previously issued through Jeremiah, God still sends a word for the people through his servant the prophet. God's sending forth his word, even as he stands at the precipice of pronouncing judgment on the people, "testifies to the faithfulness of Yahweh in providing his word even when it appears that his covenant with Israel is hopelessly fractured."[27]

In verse two, the command goes forth to *hear* the words of the covenant, and God instructs Jeremiah to proclaim these words of God to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Throughout this section in Jeremiah, the command to *hear* is repeatedly given and implies more than just hearing with the physical ears. As previously discussed in chapter four, the Hebrew word *šāmaʿ*, translated *hear,* means "to hear" or "show oneself obedient" and carries with it the connotation of not only *hearing* but *doing*.[28] Although the literal use of the term may mean "to hear, figuratively the term means "to respond to" or "obey."[29] Throughout the entire book of Jeremiah the prophet repeatedly calls for the people to *hear* the word of the Lord. The

[26] Kaiser and Rata, *Walking the Ancient Paths,* 129.

[27] Gary E. Yates, "The Prophet Jeremiah as Theological Symbol in the Book of Jeremiah," *LBTS Faculty Publications and Presentations* (2010): 2.

[28] שָׁמַע, *BDB*, 1033–34.

[29] Hays, *Jeremiah and Lamentations,* 70.

same Hebrew word *šāmaʿ* is translated as *obey* throughout chapter 11 with *šāmaʿ* being translated as either *hear* or *obey* in verses 11:2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, and 14.[30] As the people of Judah and Jerusalem stand on the brink of exile in chapter 11, it becomes clear that while the people may have listened with their natural ears they have failed to internalize the words spoken and have remained in disobedience to God's words. Therefore, the command given here implies more than just *hearing* the words but *obeying* the words being spoken. A stark contrast exists between God's response to *hearing* versus that of the children of Israel. In Exodus 2:24 God acted in response to hearing the cries of his children in Egyptian bondage, thus provoking God to action. The failure of the children of Israel was that they failed to act regarding what they heard.

A connection with the book of Deuteronomy is evident in verses 2–3 in that the *words* of the covenant mentioned in verse two and the curse associated with the man who does not obey the words of the covenant in verse 3 harken back to the Mosaic covenant in the book of Deuteronomy. The prose sections in Jeremiah are entwined with the "rhetoric and theological assumptions of the tradition of Deuteronomy."[31] According to Brueggemann, "This is evident in particular rhetorical cadences, but it is also unmistakable in the larger claims of covenantal theology as is made clear, for example, in Jeremiah 11:1–17 with its advocacy of "covenant" (v. 2) and a preoccupation with the burden of listening and obeying (vv. 4,8)."[32] Deuteronomy 28:1 states, "And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth" (Deut 28:1, KJV).

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[30] J. Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian, 2010), 159.

[31] Walter Brueggemann, *The Theology of the Book of Jeremiah, Old Testament Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 139.

[32] Ibid., 140.

God's commands to *hear* and *obey* hearken back to the Mosaic covenant, thus linking the upcoming exile of the people with their failure to obey the stipulations of the covenant. The key to receiving the blessings of the covenant was obedience while the penalty for disobeying the stipulations of the covenant was judgment (Lev 26:14–46). The same Hebrew word *šāmaʿ*, translated as *hear* in verse two, is translated as *obeyeth* in verse three.[33] The repeated linking of *hearing* and *obeying* highlights the notion that *hearing* the words of the covenant are not sufficient if one fails to *obey* the words of the covenant. In verse three the reminder of the curse awaiting those who disobey the covenant demonstrates that "outside that sphere of responsive obedience and blessing lay only one thing-the curse."[34] The conditional nature of the Mosaic covenant meant that Israel as the vassal of Yahweh would suffer the curses if they failed to remain faithful to Yahweh as suzerain.

A Call to Covenantal Remembrance (11:4–7)

Allusions to the historical Exodus are seen in verses 4–7 when Yahweh reminds the people how he had brought their forefathers out from the land of Egypt. Verse four calls to remembrance the instructions God issued to the Israelites when he delivered them from the land of Egypt and the promise that if they would *obey* his commands, he would be their God. Jeremiah uses a striking metaphor when he refers to Egypt as the iron furnace from which God rescued the Israelites. A furnace used for smelting iron would have required an extremely high temperature as iron required a temperature of 1535 degrees to melt.[35] Portraying Egypt as the iron furnace denotes a place of extreme hardships for the Israelites and paints a portrait of a place

[33] שָׁמַע, GHCLOT, 836A.

[34] Wright, *The Message of Jeremiah*, 143.

[35] William L. Holloday, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophet Jeremiah*, ed. Paul D. Hanson (Philadelphia: 1517 Media, 1986), 353.

of suffering and pain. God describes Egypt as the "house of slavery" in Jeremiah 34:13 when referring back to the covenant he made with them when he delivered them from the land of Egypt.[36] God reminds the people of Judah and Jerusalem that it was by his mighty hand that their forefathers were delivered from a land that was so brutal it was referred to as an iron furnace. Furthermore, the smelting process in the lives of the Israelites can be viewed as constructive and not destructive in that the smelting process with iron "transforms the malleable ore to the durable iron product," much in the same way that the experiences the Israelites suffered in Egypt transformed them into a people ready to enter into covenant relationship with Yahweh.[37]

The requirement for entering into covenant relationship is seen when God instructs the forefathers that if they will only obey his voice and commands then he will be their God (v. 4). Lalleman-de Winkel notes that "the classical covenant formula, 'you will be my people and I will be your God' (v. 4, Exod. 6:7), stresses that the main focus of God's deeds towards Israel is to establish a strong, intimate relationship."[38] Yahweh's offer to be their God and accept them as his people was founded on a desire for a relationship. God did not choose Israel because of any redeeming qualities on their part but because of his love for them and the promises he made to their forefathers as seen in Deuteronomy 7:8.[39] However, to maintain that relationship, the Israelites were bound to obey God's commands as outlined in the covenant.

In verse 5, Yahweh links his intentions to bring the forefathers into the promised land with his promise to Abraham when he states, "That I may perform the oath which I have sworn

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[36] John Goldingay, *The Theology of Jeremiah: The Book, the Man, the Message* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 35.

[37] Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *IVP Bible Background Commentary OT*, 1627.

[38] H. Lalleman-de Winkel, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, TOTC 21 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 160.

[39] Kenneth Seeskin, *Thinking About the Prophets: A Philosopher Reads the Bible*, JPS Essential Judaism (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2020), 71.

unto your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey" (Jer 11:5, KJV). His offer to be their God and accept them as his people was contingent upon their obedience to his commands. The oath referred to in verse five which God made with their fathers refers to the oath he made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Exodus 6:8 states, "And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD" (Exod 6:8, KJV). The metaphor of a land flowing with milk and honey in verse five sharply contrasts with the metaphor of the iron furnace used to represent the land of Egypt in verse four. One metaphor represents a land of hardship and oppression while the second metaphor represents a land of blessing and abundance. God's actions in delivering the Israelites from the iron furnace signify the people going from "a lower area in the geographical sense of the word, but also to a "higher" land."[40] Thus, the people went from the iron furnace of Egypt to a land that represented not only physical blessings but spiritual ones as well. Jeremiah's use of metaphors in these verses paints two vastly different pictures of what their life was like in Egypt versus what their life would be if they chose to obey God. Jeremiah's response in the affirmative to God's words was the "proper liturgical response" and was the same response given by the Israelites in Deuteronomy 27:15–26.[41]

In verse 6, God commands Jeremiah to go forth and proclaim the words of the covenant to the people of Judah and Jerusalem in the same manner that God himself had previously commanded the obedience of their forefathers. Verse six echoes the sentiments in verses 2–3 and stresses again the importance of not only *hearing* the words of the covenant but *obeying* them as well. Verse seven mentions God's repeated protests to the forefathers beginning from the time he

[40] Lalleman-de Winkel, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 159.

[41] Kaiser, *Walking the Ancient Paths*, 130.

called them forth from Egypt until the present day. In mentioning Yahweh's repeated protests to their fathers in verse 7, God is highlighting his earnest efforts at maintaining a covenant relationship with their forefathers through covenantal obedience. The earnestness of his protests is displayed by the figure of speech, "rising early in the morning." This same truth is relayed in Jeremiah 7:25 which states, "Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them" (Jer 7:25, KJV). The frequent use of this idiom in Jeremiah has led to Lundbom noting that this phrase may be viewed as a "signature phrase of the prophet."[42] God's call for obedience was not a one-time call but a recurrent persistent attempt to call his people to a place of obedience as can be seen in Jeremiah 7:13, 23; 25:4, and 35:15. Jeremiah's allusion to the historical Exodus is a hallmark of the prophetic corpus in that the prophets frequently called upon the people to remember God's actions in bringing his children out of Egypt. Allusions to historical tradition in the prophets can be seen in Amos 2:10; 3:1; 9:7, Micah 6:4, Hosea 10:4–9; 11:1–4, and Ezekiel 20:1–32.

Accusations of Covenantal Disobedience (11:8–10)

The concept of hearing and obeying is once again brought to the forefront as verse 8 demonstrates not only a failure to *hear* but to *obey* also. The hearts of the forefathers had become evil and their rebellion against God shown forth in their continual refusal to walk in his ways. Instead of seeking to please God and walk in his ways, the people sought to please themselves by choosing to walk their own paths. Verse 8 parallels Jeremiah 7:22–26 and gives the reasons why God brought forth the curses upon the people that were outlined in the covenant. Deuteronomy

[42] Lalleman-de Winkel, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 160.

chapters 11, 27, and 28 spell out the importance of obedience and associated blessings and the consequences associated with failing to abide by the terms of the covenant. While verse seven demonstrated a repeated exhortation to obedience beginning at Sinai, verse eight portrays the failure of the forefathers to heed the exhortation to obey. The result of the people's "chronic, hardhearted disobedience" and rebellion is the implementation of the curses of the covenant.[43] From their entrance into the land the Israelites had repeatedly rebelled against God despite God's continual calls for repentance and the result is an activation of the covenant curses.

In many ways, OT prophets functioned as "lawyers of the covenant" (Mic 1:2; 6:1–8) and in verse 9 Yahweh uses Jeremiah as his prosecuting attorney to bring accusations of covenantal disobedience against the current generation.[44] Tragically, the men of Judah and Jerusalem are found guilty of engaging in a conspiracy and have sinned just as their forefathers did in breaking their covenantal relationship with Yahweh. The Hebrew word *qešer*, translated as *conspiracy*, carries the meaning of "to bind, bind together," hence "to make an alliance, conspire," and out of the sixteen times the noun *qešer* is used in the OT in each instance it refers to a conspiracy or rebellion.[45] The word is most often used in a political context to refer to rebellion against the government as seen in I Kings 16:20; 2 Kings 11:14; 12:21; 14:19; and 15:15, 30.[46] However, in this instance, the rebellion is not against an earthly ruler or government but against the God who governs the entire world.

Verse 10 clearly illustrates what conspiracy the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem are guilty of. Following in the footsteps of their forefathers they have abandoned

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[43] Michael L. Brown and Paul W. Ferris Jr., *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 244.

[44]Tremper Longman, III, *Jeremiah, Lamentations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 155.

[45] Brown and Ferris, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 244.

[46] McKane, *Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, 239.

Yahweh and allied with the false gods of the land. Instead of obeying Yahweh and maintaining their covenant relationship, they rebelled against Yahweh and conspired to worship false gods. Instead of binding themselves to Yahweh and remaining in alliance with their divine suzerain, they have bound themselves to the same false gods their fathers worshipped. The present generation is guilty of conspiring against Yahweh, his word, and the covenant which God had made with their forefathers. Just as their forefathers walked in their own ways and rebelled against Yahweh, the present generation has been declared guilty of the same offenses. Likewise, just as their forefathers shut their ears and refused to hear Yahweh's words, the present generation refused to listen as well.

Being found guilty of the charge of conspiracy, the people of Judah and Jerusalem have shattered their covenantal relationship with Yahweh (v. 10). The Hebrew word *pārar*, translated *broken*, signifies a nullification of the covenant as seen in Numbers 30:8–15, 1 Kings 15:19, and Ezekiel 17:15.[47] The Israelites continued disobedience and failure to live up to their covenantal obligations not only fractured the covenant but shattered the covenant altogether. The covenant was the vehicle that allowed the Israelites to maintain a relationship with Yahweh and the nullification of the covenant also meant the dissolution of their relationship with Yahweh.

The Shattered Covenant & Covenantal Curses (11:11–14)

The oracle here closely parallels the introductory chapters of the book of Jeremiah in that they share the common themes of an "emphasis on idolatry", references to Israel and Judah, and the calamity set to come upon the people.[48] The people of Judah and Jerusalem have been found guilty of conspiracy which has effectively shattered their covenant relationship with Yahweh.

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[47] Hays, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 71.

[48] Brown and Ferris, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 245.

Therefore, the people will face the same covenantal curses that their forefathers faced. Their false gods will be unable to save them from the judgment to come. The people will fare no better by crying out to Yahweh as he has closed his ears to their cries.

The word *therefore* in verse eleven "introduces the verdict" with the defendants having been found guilty on all counts.[49] Due to the people having been found guilty of conspiracy and nullifying God's covenant, Yahweh is ready to sentence the people to their punishment. As Yahweh pronounces judgment, he makes it clear that there is no means of escape for the guilty party. The people's cries to Yahweh will prove to be fruitless and he will not relent this time. With the shattering of the covenant relationship, God is no longer obligated to deliver his people.

A major focus of Jeremiah 11 has been a call to *hear* the words of the covenant and *do* them. However, the people have consistently refused to *hear* and *obey* with the result being that "deity, prophet, ancestors, current people of Judah and Jerusalem" have essentially become "united in contagious hearing loss."[50] It remains ironic that God's continual calls for the people to *hear* went *unheard* and now when they cry out to God, he will refuse to *hear* them. Further irony exists in that it was Yahweh's *hearing* the cries of the people in Egyptian bondage that caused God to *remember* his covenant in Exodus 2:22–23. While God's ears had been open to the children of Israel in the past, God now chooses to shut his ears so that he *no longer hears* their cries. God's closing his ears to the people in their time of calamity may appear callous, but Wright notes that "it is nothing more than God returning upon their own heads the Israelites' own persistent refusal to listen to God"[51]. The same Hebrew word *šāmaʿ*, used in verse 14 in

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[49] Lalleman-De Winkel, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 161.

[50] Barbara Green, *Jeremiah and God's Plans of Well-being, Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament* (Columbia, SC: The University of South Carolina Press, 2013), 50.

[51] Wright, *The Message of Jeremiah*, 144.

referring to God's refusal to *hear,* has previously been used seven times in chapter 11.[52] Yet, despite God's repeated attempts to capture the "ears" of the people they have failed to listen and to obey. Parallel verses can be seen in Jeremiah chapter seven where Yahweh repeatedly calls for the people to *hear* and *obey.*

Verse 12 demonstrates that when the people of Judah and Jerusalem run to their false gods whom they have burned incense to in the past, they will find that their false idols will offer them no help either. If God refusing to hear their cries was a test of the people's genuineness in turning to him, as Goldingay asserts it may have been, then surely the people failed their test by running back to their old gods.[53] The people committed spiritual adultery against the one true God who had done so much for them and their forefathers. Yet, the lifeless gods who had led to their downfall do not even have ears to hear their cries much less any power to save them from the judgement of Yahweh. Their cries for help from their false gods will prove to be as futile as their worship of these false idols. Closely related is Jeremiah 2:28 which states, "But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble: for according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah" (Jer 2:28, KJV).

A Multitude of Spiritual Harlotries (11:13)

The comparison of the number of cities to the number of their gods in v. 13 demonstrates that the people of Judah had immersed themselves in the worship of a plethora of foreign gods. The mention of there being as many altars set up to Baal as there are streets emphasizes that a large number of idols and alters had been erected to worship Baal.[54] Such sentiments parallel

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[52] Wright, *The Message of Jeremiah,* 144.

[53] Goldingay, *The Theology of Jeremiah*, 40.

[54] Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, np (Jeremiah 11:13 e-book section).

Jeremiah 23:10 which notes that the "land is full of adulterers" (Jer 23:10, KJV). When Jeremiah and Hosea refer to the "cultic practices of Baal religion" both prophets "use the term "adulterers."[55] The worship of idols was not relegated to a few among the people but had infiltrated society to the point that it was systemic and widespread. The people had gone so far as to set up abominations in God's house and built alters to Baal and caused their children to pass through the fire unto Molech (32:34–35). The people of Judah and Jerusalem were not only guilty of playing the harlot, but they were guilty of committing adulterous acts with a multitude of "lovers."

Cease from Praying (11:14)

Not only does God refuse to listen to the cries of the people but he commands Jeremiah to cease interceding on behalf of the people. With the shattering of the Mosaic covenant by their disobedience, God commanded Jeremiah in verse 14 to cease interceding on their behalf because "intercessory prayer is not effective without a valid covenant relationship."[56] Close parallels can be seen in Jeremiah 7:16 and 14:11 where God tells Jeremiah to cease from making intercession for the people. Throughout Jeremiah chapter 11, God brings to the people's remembrance the myriad of ways in which he has called for them to *hear* and *obey*. The entirety of the nation's history is one of God calling for his people to *hear, repent,* and *turn* from their wicked ways. Jeremiah himself has repeatedly shared God's words of warning and not only have the people failed to listen but they persecute God's prophet as well. Having had his attempts to gain the people's attention rebuffed a multitude of times, God is no longer willing to hear the pleas of the

[55] W. Wessels, "Prophets at Loggerheads. Accusations of Adultery in Jeremiah 23:9–15," *Acta Theologica* 31 (2011): 350.

[56] Hays, *Jeremiah and Lamentations,* 69.

people or Jeremiah's words on their behalf. God is prepared to use the Babylonians as his "surgeon's scalpel," and nothing will thwart God from the "operation" he has planned.[57]

The emphasis on covenantal disloyalty in Jeremiah chapter 11 links together the breaking of the covenant and the upcoming exile of God's people. Continued liberation for the people of God rested on maintaining the covenant relationship and the people would pay a steep price for their disloyalty to Yahweh. Loyalty was a crucial component of ANE covenants and as the divine suzerain, Yahweh was well within his rights to bring judgment against his disloyal vassals. Parallels in judgment for covenantal disloyalty can be seen in the 14th century BC Hittite treaty between Suppiluliuma I of Hatti and Tette of Nuhashshi. After listing a multitude of gods as divine witnesses to the treaty and oath in §13-§17, the treaty details what will befall the disloyal vassal when it states,

> All the words of the treaty and oath which are written on this tablet-if Tette does not observe these words of the treaty and oath, but transgresses the oath, then these oath gods shall destroy Tette, [together with his person], his wives, his sons, his grandsons, his household, his city, his land, and together with his possessions. But if Tette observes [these] words [of the treaty] and oath which [are written] on [this tablet, these oath gods shall protect] Tette, together with his person, his wives, [his sons, his grandsons], his family, [his household], his city, his land, [and together with his possessions].[58]

Exile as a Result of Societal Injustices?

The lens through which liberation theologians view the historical Exodus will undoubtedly influence how they view exile and prophetic pronouncements of judgment in the prophetic corpus. If liberation theologians primarily view the Exodus as liberation from social injustices, and Yahweh as the god who favors the oppressed, then it stands to reason that

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[57] Phil Moore, *Straight to the Heart of Jeremiah and Ezekiel: 60 Bite-Sized Insights* (Chicago: Lion Hudson, 2021), 32.

[58] Gary M. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, ed. Harry A. Hoffner Jr. (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1996),53-54.

subsequent subjugation of the children of Israel would be viewed as punishment for acts of oppression on the part of the Israelites.

In the view of some liberation theologians, such as Latin American liberation theologian José Miranda, the exile of the Israelites was due solely to their acts of injustice rather than the breaking of the covenant. Miranda notes that with regard to the prophets, it must be asked "how do we explain why the prophets considered the lack of social justice as the only cause for the disaster and rejection of Israel?"[59] Miranda agrees with the sentiments of Kraus that all of the prophets "know but one decisive theme: justice and right."[60] In Miranda's estimation, "Israel's injustices to the poor and needy are the direct and exclusive reason for Israel's rejection by Yahweh."[61] Miranda asserts that the prophets were not concerned with the keeping of the law as he contends the prophets seldom mentioned the law.[62] Yahweh does not reject Israel for nonobservance of the law but for injustices committed by Israel. Miranda further asserts that the law was important to the prophets because of its justice content.[63] According to Miranda, in

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[59] José Porfirio Miranda, *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression*, translated by John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1974), 160. Miranda accuses "customary exegesis and theology" of avoiding this question because if the question were taken seriously it "would lead to horrifying conclusions for the West and for Christianity." Ibid.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid., 166.

[62] Miranda contends that "the original legislation was rooted in the Exodus tradition, not the Sinaitic." Ibid., 145. According to Miranda, Exodus 18 demonstrates that Israel already had a system of laws prior to God's giving of the law at Sinai. Ibid., 144. Miranda asserts, "If we keep in mind that the Sinaitic account (Exod 19–Num. 10 is a much later narrative insertion, then the conclusion is unequivocal: Israel's adoption of laws was originally connected with the libertarian (Exodic) tradition and the laws were adopted "in order to do justice between a man and his neighbor." Ibid., 144-145. Therefore, Miranda concludes that the redactors gave preference to the Sinai tradition over the Exodic tradition. Ibid., 145. Miranda, who supports two traditions in the Pentateuch (libertarian/Exodic and Sinaitic), agrees with von Rad and Noth that "the linking of the laws with the Sinaitic tradition was a redactional and editorial operation of an even later date than the insertion of the Sinaitic excursion into the Pentateuchal account." Ibid., 138.

[63] According to Miranda, "to count the laws among the "marvels" (Ps. 119:18, 27) which liberated the people from the oppression of Egypt indicates that the only meaning of the law is to do justice in the strictest and most social sense of the word." Ibid., 151.

Genesis 18 the Yahwist demonstrates that the only reason for Israel's election was that "justice and right" may be done for all mankind.[64] As such, Miranda concludes that the answer to the question of why the prophets considered a lack of social justice as the only reason Yahweh rejected Israel is as follows:

> The injustice, the mercilessness, the oppression, and the exploitation to which all cultures have learned to resign themselves are precisely what Yahweh wants to abolish in the world. The great purpose of God's intervention in human history is definitely to eliminate all this injustice and enmity which many Christians it would appear find so normal.[65]

Since Miranda contends that the sole reason Israel was chosen was to teach the world justice in accordance with Genesis 18, Miranda concludes that Israel has essentially betrayed all human beings. Thus, the people's betrayal of humankind is what has led to their devastation in the prophetic corpus.[66] Miranda denies the covenantal connection between exile and the covenant due to his belief that "the covenant was *not* the form in which the law originally was connected with Yahweh" [emphasis original].[67] Miranda asserts that "covenant theology came into existence in the seventh century and the original theologization of the law came into existence at least five centuries earlier."[68]

Miranda declares his agreement with Smend that the expression, "'they will be my people and I will be their God' originally had nothing to do with covenant….Moreover, when the eight-century prophets announced Yahweh's rejection of Israel (an announcement central to all of them), they never based their message on Israel's nonfulfillment of the covenant; this striking

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[64] Miranda, *Marx and the Bible,* 164–69.

[65] Ibid., 168.

[66] Ibid., 169.

[67] Ibid., 140.

[68] Ibid.

fact is convincing proof that covenant theology was introduced at a later date."[69] Miranda's contention that the exile of the Israelites was in no way connected to the covenant is refuted by the above exegetical analysis of Jeremiah chapter 11.

God's opening words to Jeremiah in 11:2 instructs the prophet to hear the words of the *covenant* and to speak them to the people. In verse three Jeremiah notes that those who fail to obey the words of the covenant will be cursed. In verses 4–5 God connects the covenant with the law when he references the day that he brought the fathers out of Egypt to fulfill the oath he had made to the patriarchs. Repeated references are made throughout Jeremiah chapter 11 to *hear* and *obey* the words of the *covenant* and to the failure of the fathers to *hear* and *obey* (vv. 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10). The Exodus imagery in Jeremiah 11 definitively links both the Exodus generation and the current generation with covenant. Moreover, the impending judgment is due to the current generation displaying the same covenantal disloyalty displayed by the Exodus generation. Furthermore, the marriage metaphor early on in chapter two denotes a relationship sealed by covenant, thus enveloping the entire book of Jeremiah with the theme of covenant. Miranda's *a priori* approach to the prophetic corpus, influenced by his presuppositions regarding redactional theories, leads to his divorcing the prophetic corpus from its covenantal context.

Future Liberation in Jeremiah

Having established the intimate connection between exile and the covenant relationship in Jeremiah, the following section will explore the theme of restoration and future liberation in Jeremiah to establish a link between liberation and the covenant relationship. Such a connection will demonstrate that both the Egyptian exodus and the Babylonian exodus were founded on the

[69] Miranda, *Marx and the Bible*, 141.

covenant relationship, thus supporting the argument throughout this dissertation that liberation in the Exodus motif is founded on covenant. While the people of God will be unable to escape the judgment to come, God has not forgotten the covenantal promises he made to Abraham and David. Regardless of the judgment he must dole out on his people, the purposes of God in redemption would not be thwarted.

Hope Remains for the People of God

While God certainly desired a relationship with his people, the covenantal relationship was intended to do more than just cement the people's relationship with Yahweh. Yahweh's original intention for the nation of Israel was for them to be a witness reflecting his glory to the nations of the world. Had the people abided by the covenant and lived according to God's holy standards, as outlined in the covenant, they would have been a nation set apart as God's special witness to the world. Yet, even when their failure to abide by the covenant and represent God to the nations led them into captivity, God still calls them to be his witness among the heathen nations. The irony should not be missed that Israel's story begins with God calling Abraham out of the land of Babylon; yet, in Jeremiah 29 God seems to reverse course when he sends Israel into exile in Babylon. However, even amid captivity, Wright notes that "the descendants of the one called out of Babylon in order to be the fount of blessing to the nations now return to Babylon in captivity and are instructed to fulfill that promise right there."[70]

A key principle underlying the covenant relationship with Israel was God's desire for the people to be his witness to the world. In Jeremiah 11, the people cannot possibly be a witness to Yahweh as the text demonstrates they were engaged in the same syncretistic cultic practices of

[70] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 100.

the pagan nations surrounding them. Their worship of a pantheon of gods just like their neighbors ruined their witness to the world. Yet, for all the ways in which the Israelites betrayed God, Yahweh still refused to give up on his people, determined to see the promises he made to Abraham fulfilled. Of particular note in Jeremiah 29 is God's instructions to the exiles to settle down in the land of their captivity and to build houses, plant gardens, take wives, and produce offspring (vv. 5–6). Perhaps more striking is God telling the people to pray for peace in the city in which they are in exile (v. 7). God does not encourage the captives to revolt against their overlords or engage in revolutionary efforts to secure freedom from their oppressors.

Future Restoration

Even amid exile in Jeremiah 29, Yahweh offers hope for a future restoration of those in exile. In Jeremiah 29:10–14, God promises that after seventy years he will visit the people and bring them back from Babylonian exile (v. 10). The people can rest assured that despite their betrayal of Yahweh, the divine suzerain still has plans for his people (v. 11). There will come a day when Yahweh, who had previously refused to hear the pleas of the people, will now hearken unto the people when they pray (v. 12). In discussing these verses Hays notes,

> What is described is a renewed communication with God. Recall the results of the broken covenant expressed with the same words back in 11:14: "Do not *pray* for this people…because I will not *listen* when they *call* to me." When the covenant was shattered, God ceased to "listen" to the people of Judah. But now, as part of God's good plan for the restoration, they will once again be able to come to him and pray to him, confident that he will listen and act [emphasis original].[71]

Verse 13 provides the key to reuniting with Yahweh, stating, "And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jer 29:13, KJV). God was not looking for empty cultic practices in a half-hearted attempt to regain God's favor so that they might be

[71] Hays, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 213.

delivered. These sentiments are supported by God's rebuke of such half-hearted attempts in Jeremiah 3:10 which states, "And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD" (Jer 3:10, KJV). What God desires is for his bride to repent, turn back to him, and acknowledge their iniquity (Jer 3:12–14). God promised to heal his backslidden children if they would only return to him (Jer 3:22).

The Book of Consolation

The Book of Consolation, rich with Exodus imagery, begins with promises that would have been a balm to the wounded souls of the captives when word comes of Yahweh's plans of restoration. The covenantal connection is established early on in Jeremiah 30:3 which states, "For, lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to *return to the land* that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it" (Jer 30:3, KJV). God's promise of a second exodus and a return to the land of the fathers not only fulfills elements of the Abrahamic covenant but the Mosaic covenant as seen in Deuteronomy 30:1–6 where God promises to turn their captivity, have compassion on the exiles, and bring them back to the land of their fathers. The words of Jeremiah in these chapters would have served "as a means to reassure the people of God's faithfulness to his covenant promises, especially after proclamations of overwhelming judgment, salvation oracles often function as concluding, capstone endings to prophetic anthologies."[72]

A second exodus for the people of God was forthcoming as demonstrated in Jeremiah 30:3 when God promised that the day was coming when the people of Israel and Judah would be brought back from captivity. Although the people had suffered an incurable wound (v. 12), God

[72] Fuhr, and Yates, *Message of the Twelve*, 32.

would restore them. God's covenantal promises to Abraham were going to be fulfilled once again when God proclaimed that he would be their God and they would be his people (30:22). Hays notes,

> The formula, "I will be your God; and you will be my people" is the most basic covenant formula in the Bible, used in both the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenant. This is the climactic verse of Jeremiah 30. The very essence of the restoration will come out of a new covenant relationship that nonetheless centers on the continuation of the most central feature of the earlier covenants (God's relationship with his people).[73]

Regardless of the situation the people of God find themselves in, they can rest assured that the God of their forefathers is a faithful suzerain who will bring to pass all that he has promised. The basis of God's future restoration is covenant as noted by Yates when he states,

> …Yahweh remains faithful to His covenantal commitments and will act in the future on Israel's behalf on the basis of these commitments. In the promissory passages in 3:14-18 and 4:1-4 emphasis is placed on the Abrahamic Covenant. In 3:14-18 Yahweh promised to increase Israel's numbers greatly when they return to the land that was promised to their fathers. Also the nations will join the people of Israel in worshipping Yahweh at Jerusalem. Thus Israel's hope for the future is the realization of the trifold blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant-descendants, land, and blessing to all peoples. The call to "circumcise the heart" in 4:4 recalls the physical sign of the covenant between Yahweh and Abraham (Gen. 17-10-14).[74]

From beginning to end the book of Jeremiah is a book immersed in covenantal truths. Whereas the unfaithful bride was guilty of breaking the Mosaic covenant, Yahweh as the divine suzerain would not allow his redemptive purposes in the Abrahamic covenant to be circumvented. Furthermore, God's plan of liberation and restoration involved not only the

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[73] Hays, *Jeremiah and Lamentations,* 220. The second exodus motif runs throughout the book of Ezekiel with the same references to restoration and statements such as "I will be your God and you will be my people" seen in Ezek. 11:14-25. In referencing the new exodus in Ezek. 11:17-20 Estelle draws a connection between the restoration prophesied in Jeremiah and Ezekiel when he notes, "In the latter verses (vv. 19-20), there seems to be a clear influence from Jeremiah with innerbiblical exegesis of Jeremiah 32:39." Bryan D. Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity, 2018), 195.

[74] Yates, "Jeremiah's Message of Judgment," 160.

current exiles but encompassed future generations in line with the promises contained in both the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. Jeremiah provides a theological bridge in connecting both the Abrahamic and the Davidic covenants, with the "future messianic age and the restoration."[75] These connections support the notion that liberation, as developed in the Exodus motif, is an integral part of God's salvation historical plan which will culminate in eschatological liberation in Christ.[76]

Eschatological Hope for Future Restoration

While certain elements of the promises in these chapters were fulfilled in the post-exilic restoration of the people to the land, there were undoubtedly elements of Jeremiah's prophecy that pointed towards future eschatological fulfillment in Christ the Messiah. The promise of future restoration in Jeremiah 31:31–34 goes beyond their present circumstances and portends eschatological fulfillment in the distant future. The continuation of God's redemptive-historical promises, which began in Genesis 3:15 and progressed with God's seed promises to Abraham, progress forward with the introduction of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31–34. Unlike the Mosaic covenant, which was written on tablets of stone, the new covenant will be written in the hearts of man and will offer an internal witness of who God is. With the institution of the new

[75] Hays, *Jeremiah and Lamentations,* 220. Hays highlights the difficulties associated with prophecies concerning future restoration in Jeremiah. While some restoration elements were fulfilled historically in the return of the exiles in Ezra and Nehemiah's day, other elements were fulfilled in Christ with other elements still awaiting future fulfillment. Ibid. Hays notes, "The problem is that these images are blurred together in the prophet's vision without any clear indication of the time distance between them. We only see the time difference clearly as we are able to look backward." Ibid., 220-221. Brown asserts that although there was repentance leading to covenantal renewal in Ezra and Nehemiah, this renewal "hardly resembles what is prophesied here, nor does there seem to be any consciousness of a "new covenant" being ratified in Ezra or Nehemiah." Brown and Ferris, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 450. I would concur with Brown's conclusion that "nothing resembling Jeremiah's new covenant was instituted at that time in terms of a changed relationship, the internalizing of the law, or lasting forgiveness." Ibid., 452. The view taken here is that while there were historical elements that were fulfilled in the return of the exiles, the new covenant was instituted with the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross (Luke 22:20; Heb 8-9).

[76] The argument that the true significance of liberation is to be found in Christ's eschatological fulfillment of liberation from sin and death will be developed in chapter six.

covenant, the people of God will no longer be compelled to follow a set of ordinances dictated on stone but will obey God as a result of God's truths inscribed in their hearts. Williamson notes, "Thus a major difference between the old covenant and the new is that the obligations of the covenant will be internalized in the new covenant community (cf. Jeremiah 24:7; 32:39). Consequently, the primary objective of the earlier covenant (a permanent divine human relationship) would now be attainable."[77]

While Jeremiah 33:1–13 provides promises that God will end the captivity of Judah and Israel and bring them back to the land, the promises of restoration in the second half of the chapter stretch far beyond the exiles currently in captivity. "Beyond those days" in verse 14 symbolizes a future fulfillment of restoration beyond the upcoming physical restoration of the exiles back to the land. In verse 15, God promises to send forth a Branch who will be a righteous ruler from the lineage of David in fulfillment of his promise to David (2 Sam 7:8–17). The fulfillment of the eternal nature of kingship (v. 17) and priesthood (v. 18) were to be fulfilled in Christ the promised Messianic seed (Heb 1:8; 2:17; 3:1; Rev 11:15).[78] The future new covenant would be a fulfillment of both the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. These truths support the

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[77] Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*: *Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 154.

[78] There is much debate over the nature of the fulfillment of the priestly promise in Jer. 33:18. Does the promise in v. 18 refer to a future restored Levitical priesthood at some time in the future or to the eternal priesthood of Christ? Biblical scholars differ over the fulfillment of this part of the promise as well as verses from Ezekiel which speak of the restored priesthood. Much of how one interprets this verse will depend on their eschatological leanings. According to Kaiser, "God does not promise a perpetual priesthood (cf. Deut 18:1-18), yet a "perpetual covenant" is promised to the priests of the house of Aaron within that Levitical family (Numbers 25:10; cf. Exod 29:9; 40:15)." Kaiser, *Walking the Ancient Paths*, 287. The debate over a future restoration of the Levitical priesthood is unlikely to be resolved with biblical scholars and commentators noting the confusing nature of such verses. Kaiser himself states that "there is more here than currently we mortals can figure out, for it seems at points to run counter to the idea in the book of Hebrews that Christ has offered himself as the final sacrifice once for all so that future sacrifices will no longer be needed." Ibid. The view taken in this dissertation, regardless of the difficulties presented in this verse, aligns with Wright's assessment that "the New Testament affirms that the eternal nature of both the throne of David and the Levitical priesthood was taken up and fulfilled by Jesus Christ." Wright, *The Message of Jeremiah*, 353. The OT offices of king and priest were declared to be eternal, and it is through the work and ministry of Jesus Christ that these OT realities find their fulfillment.

argument throughout this dissertation that liberation, as developed throughout the canon, is founded on covenant, and the overarching message of liberation in the biblical text is spiritual and eschatological liberation.

God draws further covenantal connections when he solidifies his promises by noting that his covenant with David (v.17) can only be broken if his covenant with day and night can be broken (v. 20) referencing his promises to Noah in Genesis 8:22. God's promises of restoration to the people allude back to multiple covenants; "the Noahic covenant (my covenant with day and night and the fixed laws of heaven and earth), the Abrahamic covenant (descendants of Jacob; descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob)," and the promises of a royal ruler made through the Davidic covenant.[79]

Theological Reflections on Jeremiah

In many ways, the history of the nation's idolatry can be seen from its inception with the golden calf incident in Exodus 32. While Judges 2:7 records that the people remained faithful during the days of Joshua, the tide quickly changed after his death which is noted in their worship of Baal, Ashtaroth, and the gods of the surrounding nations in Judges 2:10–14. Upon the division of the nation into two kingdoms, Israel straight away falls into idolatry when King Jeroboam orders the worship of two golden calves in Bethel and Dan in I Kings 12:26–29. The nation of Judah follows in the same idolatrous footsteps as the nation of Israel engaging in a mixture of Yahweh worship while simultaneously participating in the cultic rituals and festivals of a pantheon of pagan gods.[80] Further examples of the prophetic proclamation against the

[79] Longman, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 333.

[80] Hays, *Message of the Prophets*, 67.

idolatrous practices of the Israelites can be seen in "Isa. 2:8-9, 18; Jer. 2:20-28; 10:1-16; Ezek. 8:1-18; Hos. 4:10-19; 8:5; Amos 5:26; 7:9; Mic. 1:5-7; Hab. 2:19-20; Zeph. 1:4-6."[81]

A central theme in the book of Jeremiah is that of covenant relationship. While Israel failed to maintain covenantal faithfulness due to spiritual harlotry, Yahweh proved himself to be a faithful divine suzerain who maintained covenantal fidelity. In referencing the peoples' worship of Baal (2:8, 23) and the failure of the people to worship Yahweh alone, in accordance with the requirements outlined in the Mosaic covenant, McConville notes,

> This topic, set at the beginning of the prophecy in ch. 2, is the key to the whole accusation of Jeremiah. Instead of 'loving' Yahweh, they have made 'lovers' of other gods (v. 33). In the covenant, Israel would be faithful and Yahweh would bless them (2:7. Cf. Deut. 7:12-13). Now they have trusted gods that have no power, and therefore they will find no help (2:5, 28).[82]

The accusations of covenant infidelity and the taking of other "lovers" is a common theme throughout the prophetic corpus as seen in Ezekiel 19 and Hosea 11. In Jeremiah, the failure of the people to show genuine lasting repentance and turn from their idolatrous ways led to exile due to the covenant relationship being severed. The nation is no longer secure in the land as their disloyalty to Yahweh annuls the blessings of the covenant and invokes the curses instead. From the land to the temple, "all the marks of Judah as Yahweh's people are taken away" due to their failure "to display his justice and righteousness before the eyes of the nations, which was their calling (Deut 4:6-8), and therefore their position is untenable."[83] Yet, even while judgment is being pronounced due to the spiritual adultery of the people, the theme of hope arises on the horizon in the form of future restoration. Even though the people followed in the footsteps of

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[81] Hays, *Message of the Prophets*, 66–67.

[82] Gordon J. McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Prophets* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 189.

[83] Ibid., 191.

their fathers, who suffered throughout their history due to their covenantal disloyalty, Yahweh in his great mercy and compassion promised restoration and return from exile. Far surpassing the temporary return of the exiles to the land, God's new covenant prophecy contains future eschatological promises which will be fulfilled in Christ, thus demonstrating Yahweh's continual covenantal faithfulness to the covenants he had made with both Abraham and David. Fuhr and Yates notes that "Every eschatological promise within the Prophets links back in some aspect of God's promises in the unilateral covenants (see Gen 12:1-3; 15:18-20; 2 Sam 7:12-16; Deut 30:4-6)."[84]

Summary and Conclusion

Through an exegetical analysis of the historical Exodus in chapter four, it was argued that the historical Exodus was founded on God's covenants and not societal injustices as liberation theologians assert. This chapter has analyzed the nature of exile and liberation in the book of Jeremiah in order to deduce the theological significance of liberation as it relates to the children of Israel once again finding themselves in need of liberation. The conclusion reached here is that liberation from exile in the book of Jeremiah demonstrates that just as liberation in the first Exodus was founded on God's covenantal promises, liberation from Babylonian exile was founded on God's covenant promises to Abraham and David in line with God's redemptive purposes.

From beginning to end, the book of Jeremiah is thoroughly saturated with the concept of covenant relationships. From the prophets to the priests (5:31; 6:13), to the kings of Judah to the everyday people, the spiritually corrupt inhabitants of Judah committed abominations against

[84] Fuhr and Yates, *Message of the Twelve*, 21.

God due to a rebellious heart (5:23). When God's repeated warnings through the prophet Jeremiah failed to provoke the people to repentance, they suffered the ultimate judgment in exile from the land. The failure of Israel to abide by the terms of the covenant was not a new phenomenon as can be seen throughout Jeremiah with Yahweh's recitation of the history of Israel's failure to abide by the covenant from her earliest days out of Egypt.

The setting of the pre-exilic and exilic prophets illustrates the tumultuous history of the nation of Israel and their repeated failure to live up to their covenant obligations as defined by the Mosaic covenant in Deuteronomy. While the prophets strongly admonished the people for their failures in matters of societal justice, throughout the text greater emphasis is placed on the peoples' abandonment of Yahweh to worship the idols of the pagan nations surrounding them. Preexilic prophets such as Micah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Joel, Amos, Hosea, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah repeatedly stress the theme of the people's broken covenant relationship with Yahweh.[85] At the heart of the prophetic indictment against the people of Israel lay the charge of idolatry, which Jeremiah notes in 11:10 has shattered their covenant with God.

Throughout the prophetic corpus, Yahweh delivered his word through prophetic messengers acting as covenant mediators whose primary goal was to call the people of Israel to covenantal obedience to maintain their relationship with Yahweh. A snapshot of the prophetic ministry in the OT reveals that much of their message centered around the sin and rebellion of the people and a need to repent and return to God to avert God's judgment.[86] While the OT prophets confronted the nation for a multitude of transgressions against Yahweh, including their failure to ensure societal justice, the OT prophetic books demonstrate that idolatry, leading to

[85] Hays, *The Message of the Prophets,* 66.

[86] Smith, *Interpreting the Prophetic Books,* 23.

spiritual adultery, was the habitual sin that caused the people to incur the wrath of Yahweh. The nation's history is replete with examples of rampant idolatry and the prophetic call to cast aside their idols and return to worship of the one true God is a recurrent theme running throughout the OT prophetic books. The ongoing nature of their covenantal disloyalty can be seen in the repeated allusions to the Exodus generation throughout not only the book of Jeremiah but the entirety of the prophetic corpus. The Exodus generation and the current generation may have been linked through covenantal *infidelity* on their part, in breaking the covenant bond, but they were also linked through covenantal *fidelity* on Yahweh's part. Yahweh has proven his faithfulness as a divine suzerain in liberating both generations from bondage due to his covenantal promises.

While the nature of Israel's idolatry had legal implications regarding the covenant stipulations, the relational implications were even greater as the shattering of the covenant led to a shattering of Yahweh's relationship with his people. Yates notes, "Israel's worship of other gods was more than the violation of a legal commandment; it was the betrayal of an exclusive covenantal relationship."[87] The message of the prophets centered on calling God's people back to covenantal relationship with him through repentance and a singular devotion to Yahweh. The unique nature of Yahweh's relationship with Israel is highlighted by the use of the marriage metaphor to describe the relationship between Yahweh and the people in Jeremiah chapter 2. The sacred romance between Yahweh and his people is underscored by the frequent use of marital infidelity as a root metaphor which can be seen in a number of places throughout the OT including "Exod 34:14–15; Lev 20:5; Judg 2:17; I Chr 5:25; Isa 1:21; 23:17; Jer 3:8-9; Ezek

[87] Gary E. Yates, "True Knowledge of God and the Transformation of the Heart: Worship in Jeremiah and Ezekiel" (lecture, Liberty University, Lynchburg, May 9, 2021), https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/66820/files/76101782?module_item_id=7452167.

16:17; Hos 4:12-13; Mic 1:7."[88] Israel's forsaking Yahweh to chase after foreign gods was such a serious breach of their relationship that their actions were described as "whoring" in Judg 8:27, 8:33; 2 Chron 21:13; Ezek 16:25; 16:36, 23:20; Hos 4:12; 9:1. The prophet Jeremiah highlights the disgraceful nature of their adulterous actions by likening God's people to a donkey in heat (Jer 2:24). The nation's failure to remain faithful in their devotion to Yahweh was not merely a breaking of commandments but a breaking of the very heart of Yahweh in that their intimate union had been severed.

Yahweh castigated the Israelites for a multitude of sinful practices, from societal injustices to empty cultic practices to spiritual whoredoms. While liberation theologians are correct that the prophets denounced elements of societal injustice, these injustices occurred within a covenantal context. The prophetic lawsuit brought against the nation in Jeremiah 2 was for the crime of transgression against Yahweh due to covenantal disloyalty. The guilty verdict pronounced on the nation is that they were guilty of shattering the covenant relationship through the commission of spiritual adultery. Thus, while the prophets were advocates of social justice, their main role was that of covenant mediator responsible for calling the people back to covenant faithfulness with Yahweh.

Although the people had failed to remain faithful vassals, Yahweh would remain a faithful suzerain. Even amid their suffering in exile, God had not forgotten the promises he made to Abraham or David. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God offered hope for future restoration, both for the current generation and eschatological hope for the future with the establishment of a new covenant. Fuhr and Yates note,

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[88] This list is drawn from Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, NSBT 36 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 98.

> In prophetic literature it is common for judgment and salvation to be proclaimed as opposing realities, with judgment the result of covenant disobedience and deliverance the result of covenant faithfulness. However, the ultimate restoration of God's blessings on his covenant people is proclaimed as eschatological realities, with the expectation of fulfillment based in his faithfulness to the unilateral covenants he made with Israel. Therefore, the prophets typically proclaim God's salvation as eschatological blessings with oracles that foretell a blessed future to come after the ashes of judgment have cleared.[89]

While the announcements of judgment in Jeremiah warned of impending disaster, the oracles of salvation served the function of offering hope for those in exile. Amid exile in a foreign land, God's people could be encouraged that the divine suzerain had not forgotten his covenantal relationship with Israel, just as God had not forgotten his promises to Abraham when he delivered the Exodus generation from Egypt. Although the great city of Jerusalem lay in waste and the temple was in ruins, the people of God could still cling to a measure of hope while in exile. While prophecies of restoration in Jeremiah were partially fulfilled in the return of the exiles from Babylonian captivity, the prophesied new covenant contained even greater eschatological promises which would ultimately be fulfilled in Christ.

In this chapter, it has been argued that exile and liberation in the book of Jeremiah are inseparably linked with the covenant relationship. Chapter five has linked exile and liberation in the history of the nation of Israel with the divine covenants, including the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and the new covenant. Israel's exile throughout her history was due to covenant disloyalty while Yahweh's repeated liberation of Israel throughout her history was due to Yahweh's covenant faithfulness in line with his redemptive-historical purposes. Venturing forward from here, chapter six will explore the theme of liberation in regard to covenant fulfillment as it develops throughout the NT canon. Particular attention will be given to parallels

[89] Fuhr and Yates, *Message of the Twelve*, 31.

between the life of Jesus and the historical Exodus to demonstrate that Jesus not only fulfilled OT prophecies but that Jesus opened the door to a greater eschatological exodus.

CHAPTER SIX: THE GREATER SPIRITUAL AND ESCHATOLOGICAL LIBERATION IN CHRIST

Introduction

Throughout this dissertation, it has been argued that covenant is the interpretive key for elucidating the theological significance of liberation throughout the canon. In chapter four an exegetical analysis of Exodus 2:23–3:15 argued that the nature of the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage was due to God's covenantal obligations and not socio-political concerns as asserted by liberation theologians. Chapter five traced the Exodus motif throughout the book of Jeremiah and argued that the liberation of the Babylonian exiles was likewise founded on the covenant relationship. Having laid the groundwork for the argument that liberation in the historical Exodus and subsequent exodus from Babylon was built on the framework of covenant relationship, the focus in chapter six will shift to how Jesus fulfilled elements of the historical Exodus to demonstrate that the central message of liberation as developed in the Exodus motif is spiritual and eschatological liberation in Christ the Messiah. The goal of this chapter will be to show that the overarching significance of the theological theme of liberation throughout the entire biblical canon is spiritual and eschatological liberation, rather than earthly liberation from physical oppression. God's actions in liberating his people Israel throughout her history were not isolated acts aimed at delivering societal justice but were an underlying part of God's salvific plan for mankind in line with God's redemptive-historical purposes for all the world.

This chapter will begin by analyzing the allusions to the historical Exodus in the book of Matthew to demonstrate that Jesus repeats the pattern of OT Israel in his life and ministry. An analysis of the close parallels between the life of Jesus and the pattern of events in Israel's history will demonstrate the superiority of Christ to OT elements of the Exodus. Subsequently, it

will be argued that the liberation that Jesus came to deliver was eschatological in nature, not earthly and political liberation from societal oppression. Whereas the Israelites failed to obtain lasting physical and spiritual liberation due to their repeated spiritual adultery and covenant-breaking, Jesus paved the way for an eschatological liberation for all of mankind through his life, death, and resurrection.

If the biblical books of the OT canon were linked by hope in a Messianic vision, the theological threads tying together the hope for liberation in the NT rest in the eschatological vision of Christ. Whereas the OT Messianic hope finds fulfillment in Christ, the eschatological hope finds its ultimate fulfillment in the return of Christ in the book of Revelation. The eschatological vision begins with Christ's historic actions and teachings and continues through his death, resurrection, and ascension, culminating in Christ's triumphant return to earth at the end of the age. Chapter six aims to show that the NT teaching on liberation demonstrates that the liberation envisioned by God's restoration promises in the prophetic corpus was for a future time and would be eschatological, finding ultimate fulfillment in Christ. The argument outlined in chapter six is that the historical Exodus pointed to Jesus and that the liberation being offered in the final exodus is an eschatological liberation where the believer is freed from the penalties of sin and finds eternal rest in Christ.

The Theological Theme of Fulfillment in the NT

Although the Israelites had returned from Babylonian exile, the Second Temple period demonstrates that the nation was far from having realized the full measure of restoration promised in Jeremiah's salvation oracles. While the temple had been rebuilt, the glory of the first temple far surpassed the temple constructed by Herod which lacked the divine glory and the ark

of the covenant.[1] Moreover, the post-exilic period in the nation of Israel's history demonstrates a turbulent time for the Jews with a succession of conquering foreign powers, violent uprisings, and the fragmentation of competing Jewish groups leading up to the time of Christ.[2]

Disputes arose for a plethora of reasons, including varying interpretations of the law, rejection of temple leadership and regulations, and apocalyptic belief systems.[3] The Judaism that existed in the first century was not a unified group but a fractured community of varying Jewish sects that sought to establish their brand of Judaism over and against competing groups. Furthermore, the sectarian nature of these groups led to a contentious and often hostile view of other Jewish groups denouncing opposing groups as wicked, ungodly, and lawless, while promoting their sects as being the truly righteous ones.[4] Matthew's community emerged during

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[1] Block, *Covenant*, 394.

[2] For a survey, see Stanley E. Porter, *The Apostle Paul: His Life, Thought, and Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 112–13. In recent years Pauline studies have centered on the relation of the law to salvation and the characterization of the nature of ancient Judaism. A turning point in Pauline studies occurred with the introduction of Sanders' work *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* in 1977, with Dunn and N.T. Wright advancing the scholarly debate forward. Debate continues to rage between those who accept aspects of the NPP and those who hold to a more traditional view which maintains that Paul viewed Christianity as a faith-based religion while viewing Judaism as a works-based religion. An in-depth discussion of the NPP is beyond the scope of this dissertation and will only be briefly mentioned here as it relates to the nature of Judaism in the first century. Laato notes that the NPP essentially "arises from the new perspective of Judaism" and if the "old perspective of Judaism as a religion of gaining merits and earning salvation is no longer valid, it is no more possible to stand up for the old perspective on Paul as preaching against the legalistic understanding of God's grace." Timo Laato, "The New Quest for Paul: A Critique of the New Perspective on Paul," in *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls: Justification in Biblical, Theological, Historical, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 383. This author rejects the major tenets of the NPP, such as Sanders' covenantal nomism and Dunn's view of the law as a boundary marker or badge and argues that the foundational assumption of the NPP that Judaism was a monolithic system that viewed law and order through the same lens is a flawed assumption. While it is feasible that some Jews understood that law-keeping did not earn salvation, there is no evidence that all Jewish sects viewed law-keeping in the same manner. Both the biblical witness and contemporary NT texts, such as the Psalms of Solomon 10:4, Macc 2:51-52, and Qumran texts such as 4QMMT, demonstrate that at least some Jewish sects maintained a works-based view of salvation. Porter, *The Apostle Paul,* 118. Furthermore, the NPP's primary focus on Palestinian Judaism fails to consider the many sects of Diaspora Judaism which likely differed in many elements. Ibid. The view maintained in this chapter is that beliefs surrounding salvation and justification varied among the widely fragmented Jewish groups of the time and while some sects may have understood the relationship between law and grace, there also existed groups that upheld a belief in a works-based salvation.

[3] Francois Viljoen, "The Matthean Community Within a Jewish Religious Society," *HTS* 72. 4 (2016): 1–8.

[4] David C. Sim, *The Gospel of Matthew and Christian Judaism: The History and Social Setting of the Matthean Community* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 110.

this tumultuous period in the first century and undoubtedly faced opposition and persecution from the various Jewish sects of the day. According to Block, "The postexilic community was indeed Torah based, but with the elevation of the Torah to virtual idol status, Second Temple Judaism had become a meritocracy in which the Oral Torah regulated every detail of life and for which the Pharisees considered themselves not only definers but also models of Torah piety."[5]

As previously argued in chapter five, from the earliest days of her history, Israel as a nation failed in securing lasting liberation due in part to covenantal disloyalty. A new covenant was needed that would inscribe God's laws on the hearts of man which would ultimately lead to a lasting spiritual liberation. From within this social setting, God would send forth his appointed heir, the seed promised under the Abrahamic covenant who would bless the nations and open the way for lasting spiritual and eschatological liberation.

Fulfillment in the Book of Matthew

The theological theme of Jesus as the fulfillment of OT promises and passages runs throughout the entirety of the book of Matthew presenting Jesus as the long-awaited Jewish Messiah bringing salvation history to its ultimate climax. Köstenberger notes that while reading Matthew one would "do well to keep one finger in the Old Testament-Israel's Scriptures" as "Matthew styles his Gospel as a continuation of God's dealings with Israel and cites numerous Old Testament passages to highlight the identity of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah."[6] Scholars generally agree that the book of Matthew contains approximately fifty-five direct quotations while the remaining Gospels only contain sixty-five quotations between the three of them.[7]

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[5] Block, *Covenant: The Framework*, 397.

[6] Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Jesus of the Gospels* (Chicago: Kregel, 2020), 35.

[7] Craig Blomberg, "Matthew," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds. G K. Beale and D A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1.

While the theme of fulfillment is certainly present throughout the four Gospels, the sheer preponderance of references to OT passages in the book of Matthew demonstrates that Matthew's Gospel holds the place of pre-eminence in highlighting Jesus as the promised Messiah to the nation of Israel. Blomberg notes that "Virtually every major theological emphasis of Matthew is reinforced with Old Testament support," and he further attributes the "pervasiveness of the Jewish Bible in Matthew" to the position held by the early church that Matthew, a Jewish follower of Jesus, authored the text.[8] Matthew's extensive use of OT Scriptures is understandable in light of the political, social, and religious turmoil and instability facing first-century Jews. Matthew's ability to demonstrate that Jesus was the Messiah which the OT Scriptures prophesied would present a strong witness to non-believing Jews and would go a long way in both legitimizing and establishing the new faith.

Usage of Fulfillment Formulas in Matthew

One of the unique structural features of Matthew's Gospel is the author's frequent use of fulfillment formulas.[9] On ten separate occasions, the phrase "*This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying…*" precedes an OT quotation demonstrating how Jesus fulfilled the OT Scriptures.[10] Although fulfillment formulas are prominent throughout Matthew's Gospel, Jesus

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[8] Blomberg, "Matthew," 2.

[9] Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: An Introduction to Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 216. Examples of fulfillment formulas with OT quotations can be seen in "Matt. 1:22-23; 2:15, 17-18, 23; 4:14-16; 8:17; 12:17-21; 13:35; 21:4-5; 27:9-10." Ibid.

[10] Ibid., 216. According to Moo, Matthew's fulfillment formulas "offers more textual and hermeneutical difficulty than any others in the New Testament." Douglas J. Moo, "The Problem of *Sensus Plenior*," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon,* ed. D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1986), 191. There remains no fixed standard for analyzing the NT use of the OT as scholars continue to expand their understanding of ancient Jewish exegetical methods and interpretive conventions. A variety of interpretive methods and traditions were utilized with Jewish and rabbinical exegetical methods being far from monolithic. Richard B. Hays and Joel B. Green, "The Use of the Old Testament by New Testament Writers," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation,* ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 1598h-1598i. The NT authors would likely have engaged in similar interpretive practices as other contemporary interpretive communities

can also be seen fulfilling the OT Scriptures and elements of Israel's history in passages that do not contain fulfillment formulas. Throughout the narrative sections in Matthew, Jesus can be seen fulfilling OT Scriptures through his life and ministry, indicating that Jesus was the Messiah the Jewish nation had so longed for. The following section will begin by examining how Matthew interpreted and applied Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15 and progress to an exploration of how Jesus fulfilled the OT Scriptures, including non-prophetic Scriptures and elements of the Exodus in his life and ministry.

Indirect Typological Fulfillment

An example of Matthew's use of a fulfillment formula can be seen in Matthew's application of Hosea 11:1 to Jesus being called out of Egypt in Matthew 2:15. Beale designates Matthew's use of Hosea 11:1 under the category of "indirect typological fulfillment."[11] Beale notes the difference between direct fulfillment of verbal prophecy and indirect fulfillment.

> The main difference between direct fulfillment of prophecy and indirect typological fulfillment is that the direct fulfills what was explicitly predicted by the words of a prophet, while the indirect fulfills what was implicitly foreshadowed by historical events, which have been narrated. Both ultimately prophesy about the future but do so in a different manner: one by words and the other by events. In this sense, one could identify indirect typological prophecy as "event prophecy." The NT sees that OT episodes point forward to events to come in the new covenant era.[12]

Beale points to Matthew 2:15 as an example of a literal fulfillment of OT Scripture which contains a typological element. Matthew 2:15 states, "And was there until the death of Herod:

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as can be seen in the way some NT authors utilized an eschatological hermeneutic similar to that of the Dead Sea Scroll community which applied the biblical text to contemporary events. Hermeneutical methods differed among NT writers as the various authors used different interpretive strategies and applied OT Scriptures in varying ways. Ibid., 1598h-1598i.

[11] Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament*, 54.

[12] Ibid.

that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Matt 2:15, KJV). Whereas Matthew relates the infancy story of Jesus to Hosea's reference to Israel being called out of Egypt in Hosea 11:1, Hosea's pronouncement should not be viewed as a prophecy of a future event but as an actual historical event that has already taken place in the history of the nation of Israel.[13]

Blomberg asserts that Matthew's use of Hosea is "a classic example of pure typology: "The recognition of a correspondence between New and Old Testament events, based on a conviction of the unchanging character of the principles of God's working."[14] Essentially, Matthew was drawing a comparison between OT Israel being delivered from Egyptian exile with Jesus, the hoped for Messiah returning from Egypt, which Blomberg notes would have been "too striking a set of parallels for Matthew to attribute them to chance."[15] Whether Hosea intended his words to be prophetic in any sense has no bearing on the appropriateness of Matthew's interpretation as noted by Blomberg when he states, "The original event need not have been intentionally viewed as forward-looking by the OT author; for believing Jews, merely to discern striking parallels between God's actions in history, especially in decisive moments of revelation

[13]H. Wayne House, "Philosophy of Meaning, Interpretation and Application" (unpublished paper, 2018), 11.

[14] Blomberg, "Matthew," 8. In describing typology G. Ernest Wright notes, "typology when rightly understood and used takes historical data seriously; persons, acts and events possess a typological meaning when they are understood to have been fixed or directed by God so that they point toward the future. They possess their own original historical significance, but the eye of faith can discern that God has also set them as previews or types which point to greater and more complete facts." G. Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital*, SBT (London: SCM Press LTD, 1954), 61. The typological connections made throughout this chapter are concerned with drawing connections between historical events in accordance with God's redemptive purposes and as such are concerned with facts and not allegorical methods that seek to find hidden meaning not intended by the biblical text. This author would agree with Wright's assessment of typology when he asserts that typology, used in the correct manner, "does not falsify history, but it deals with that peculiar characteristic of Biblical history in which significant events point beyond themselves to their fulfillment." Ibid.

[15] Blomberg, "Matthew," 8.

and redemption, could convince them of divinely intended "coincidence."[16] Expressing similar sentiments, France notes that the essence of typology does not depend on direct predictions but on "transferable "models" from the OT story."[17]

Yahweh's deliverance of his children from Egyptian bondage and subsequent love and care for them was a historical occurrence. In the context of Hosea chapter 11, the prophet is calling to remembrance the tender love God showed towards his son (v. 1) Israel even amid their constant forsaking of God and committing of spiritual adultery by walking after other gods. The references to Israel's backsliding and being encompassed with lies that would lead to their ultimate subjugation under the Assyrians were historical realities that came to pass due to their forsaking God despite the love Yahweh had shown them in delivering them from Egyptian bondage. Hosea was not issuing a predictive decree in these passages but was referring to what God had historically done for his people and the shameful actions of the people after God had shown such love.

Difficulties arise when exegetes view fulfillment in Jesus's first advent as referring specifically to Jesus' fulfillment of OT predictive prophecies.[18] In arguing against such a narrow view of the Greek word *plēroō,* translated as *fulfilled* in Matthew 2:15, Moo asserts that "The word is used in the New Testament to indicate the broad redemptive-historical relationship of the new, climactic revelation of God in Christ to the preparatory, incomplete revelation to and

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[16] Blomberg, "Matthew," 8.

[17] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 80. According to Beale, "The notion that OT history could be a foreshadowing of events in the NT has a long-standing interpretive history among interpreters, stretching back to the apostolic fathers. The hermeneutical legitimacy of what is considered to be a biblical philosophy of history in which God is seen to be designing patterns of earlier history to foreshadow later patterns of history." G. K. Beale, "The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15: One More Time," *JETS* 55 (2012): 698.

[18] Moo, *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, 191.

through Israel."[19] Jesus not only fulfilled direct OT prophecies but was the culmination of God's redemptive plans. In discussing the use of *plēroō* in Matthew 2:15, Moo concludes:

> What needs to be emphasized, then, is that the use of *plēroō* in an introductory formula need not mean that the author regards the Old Testament text he quotes as a direct prophecy; and accusations that a New Testament author misuses the Old Testament by using *plēroō* to introduce nonprophetic texts are unfounded. In the case of Matthew 2:15, then, the Evangelist may be suggesting that Jesus, God's "greater son," brings to a climax-"fills up"-the "Exodus motif," that had become, even in the Old Testament, an eschatologically oriented theme.[20]

Jesus, as the Son in Matthew 2:15, would accomplish what the rebellious son of Hosea 11:1 failed to accomplish. While the marriage metaphor reigns supreme in Hosea, beginning in chapter eleven, the metaphor of a father and son highlights another unique aspect of the nature of Israel's betrayal of Yahweh. Yahweh is introduced as a loving father who called his young son out of Egypt. Hosea reaches back through the annals of time and pulls from the historical record to remind Yahweh's children of his past actions on their behalf, as previously seen in Hosea 10:9. Hosea's harkening back to Yahweh calling his children out of Egypt is a hallmark of the prophetic corpus in that the prophets frequently called upon the people to remember God's love in bringing his children out of Egypt as seen in Jeremiah 2:1–3.

In this opening verse, Yahweh further reminds Israel that he called the nation as his son because of his *love* for them, hearkening back to Deuteronomy 7:7–8 where Yahweh notes he chose them not because they were mighty in number but because of his love for them. Hays notes,

> In context in Hosea, the "son" is clearly the people Israel as a whole; the sentence is not a prediction of a future messiah but a reference to past events of the exodus. Thus, Hosea's metaphor, referring to Israel corporately as God's "son," evokes a

[19] Moo, *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, 191.

[20] Ibid.

> tradition that goes all the way back to God's instructing Moses to tell Pharoah that "Israel is my firstborn son" (Exod 4:22-23).[21]

The fatherly love Yahweh held for his children brings a greater indictment against Israel in that their betrayal is made all the more hurtful as a child betraying their parent. Yet, despite all Yahweh had done for Israel, verse two demonstrates their inability to remain a loyal son with their turning to pagan elements, which parallels the indictments brought in 2:13. Just like their forefathers had before them, Israel wounded the heart of God by engaging in idolatrous practices including sacrificing unto Baal. Just as Gomer did not remain faithful to Hosea (2:2), the Israelites were not a faithful son to Yahweh. The present-day generation of Israel in Hosea's time had proven to be no different from the generation of their forefathers.

The striking parallels between God delivering the Israelites from Egypt and God causing the child Jesus to go into Egypt and Jesus's subsequent "calling out" were not merely by chance but a display of God working behind the scenes orchestrating events to bring to pass his ultimate purposes.[22] When understood in this light, Matthew's use of Hosea 11:1 in reference to Jesus shows a typological fulfillment of an actual historical event in the nation of Israel's history, which would have presented a strong witness to both non-believing Jews and Jewish believers. Hays notes that Matthew "sees the fate of God's "son" Israel recapitulated in the story of God's Son Jesus: in both cases, the son is brought out of exile in Egypt back to the land."[23]

Yet, differences exist in that Jesus remained faithful to God in fulfilling his redemptive purposes while the Israelites failed to maintain covenant loyalty. Despite physical liberation from

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[21] Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 40.

[22] Blomberg, "Matthew," 9.

[23] Hays, *Reading Backwards*, 40.

Egyptian bondage, Israel as a nation failed to remain free from oppression as seen in their subjugation to foreign rulers throughout her history. Moreover, Yahweh even permitted the return of the children of Israel to bondage as seen in the Assyrian and Babylon captivities as a consequence of their failure to remain faithful to the covenant. Although Israel as a nation had repeatedly failed to maintain covenant fidelity, the divine suzerain had long ago set a redemptive plan in motion that would allow for a greater exodus, not only for the children of Israel but for all those who chose to put their trust in the one true God. Morales notes that "Israel's original problem was that although they had been 'delivered physically out of Egyptian bondage, the hearts of God's people had remained in spiritual bondage to the world, no different from the spiritual darkness of the nations."[24] These sentiments highlight that God was more concerned with the spiritual liberation of the Israelites than he was with their physical liberation. What good was physical liberation from oppression if the Israelites were just as bound spiritually as the pagan nations were? Similar sentiments are expressed in Matthew 16:24–26 where Jesus asks how it profits a man to gain the world but lose their own soul.

In essence, Matthew was connecting the calling out of the Son of God with the calling out of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage. Matthew was reading Hosea 11:1 eschatologically where the prophetic value of the Exodus points to the coming One who would liberate mankind from sin and death. Not only did Jesus typologically fulfill the pattern of OT Israel being called out of Egypt, but Christ remained faithful to God despite what he suffered, unlike the often unfaithful Israelites. In reading the text eschatologically, Matthew demonstrates that the historical Exodus pointed to something greater than socio-political liberation from

[24] Michael L. Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity, 2020), 119.

slavery in Egypt. The historical Exodus pointed towards a future liberation in Christ that was eschatological in nature.

Such a reading negates the reading of liberation theology which views the Exodus as being primarily a story of liberation from oppression and socio-political bondage. The idea of political liberation was never part of Matthew's reading of the Exodus in Hosea. Matthew's reading demonstrates that liberation in the historical Exodus encompassed greater theological truths, namely God's working out his salvific purposes for all mankind. Whereas the first son called out of Egypt failed Yahweh by being unfaithful to the covenant, the second Son, Jesus the true Israel, would prove himself faithful in fulfilling all of God's covenant promises, subsequently bringing a greater deliverance to the world which encompassed liberation from sin and eschatological death. Beale expresses similar sentiments when he notes,

> Therefore, Matthew contrasts Jesus as the "Son" (2:15) with the "son" in Hosea (11:1). The latter, who came out of Egypt, was not obedient and was judged but would be restored (11:2-11), while the former did what Israel should have done: Jesus came out of Egypt, was perfectly obedient, and did not deserve judgment but suffered it anyway for guilty Israel and the world in order to restore them to God. Hence, Jesus did what Israel should have done and did not do. This use of Hos. 11:1 also is an example of how important Exodus patterns were to Matthew and the other NT writers in understanding the mission of Jesus and the church…[25]

Parallels Between Jesus' Life and the Exodus

Further parallelism between the life and ministry of Jesus and the historical Exodus demonstrates the existence of theological truths inherent in the Exodus motif that point to a greater liberation in Christ, beyond that of a physical liberation from oppression. Throughout the entirety of the NT canon, Jesus can be seen fulfilling offices, ordinances, and events related to Israel's covenant community in a typological fashion, thus opening the way for a greater future

[25] Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 412.

liberation in Christ with the introduction of the new covenant. Just as liberation in the historical Exodus was founded on the covenant relationship, the liberation found in Christ was founded on covenant relationship as well.

Jesus as the Greater Moses

Many parallels exist between the life of Jesus and Moses with Blomberg noting that "Out of Egypt" is the first of several parallels in Matthew's infancy narrative to events from the life of Moses, leading to the view of a Christological portrait of Jesus as a "new Moses."[26] Köstenberger notes that "Matthew presents Jesus as the greater Moses, exceeding the salvation-historical contribution of the great lawgiver and deliverer of Israel at the exodus.[27] In the birth narrative of Matthew, Jesus escaped death at the hands of Herod by fleeing to Egypt, just as Moses escaped death at the hands of Pharoah in Egypt.[28] Both Moses and Jesus returned from Egyptian exile and became instruments in God's eternal salvific plan. Whereas Moses was the mediator of the old covenant, Jesus was the mediator of a newer and better covenant (Heb 8:6–9). Jesus was the prophet like Moses whom God would raise up (Deut 18:15–18; Acts 3:22–23).[29]

In Numbers 21:7–9, Moses lifted the bronze serpent in the wilderness that those who looked upon it may live. John 3:13–14 states that Jesus must be lifted up the same way Moses lifted the serpent in the wilderness and that those who believe in Jesus would have everlasting life. Whereas Moses was viewed by the Jews as a liberator, Jesus proved to be the greater Moses

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[26] Blomberg, "Matthew," 8.

[27] Köstenberger, *Jesus of the Gospels*, 53.

[28] Dale C. Allison Jr., *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 142–44.

[29] G. Wright, *God Who Acts*, 62.

in that he was the redeemer who offered liberation from sin and eschatological death, something Moses could not provide.[30]

In Matthew 4:1–11, the wilderness testing of Jesus mirrors the wilderness experiences of Moses. Similar to Moses' forty days of fasting on Mt. Sinai (Exod 24:18, 34:28), Jesus fasted for forty days in the wilderness. Beale notes that "Each response by Jesus to Satan is taken from a response by Moses to Israel's failure in the wilderness (Deut. 8:3 in Matt. 4:4; Deut. 6:16 in Matt. 4:7; Deut. 6:13 in Matt. 4:10)."[31] While Moses was a great leader used by God in the process of liberating the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, Jesus was the greater Moses in that only Jesus was capable of providing lasting eschatological liberation for mankind. Allison notes that Matthew's Moses "becomes a symbol of someone greater, a promise awaiting fulfillment, a book in which the exodus becomes history anticipating eschatology."[32]

Parallels Between Israel and Jesus in the Wilderness Wanderings

Beyond the parallel with Moses, Jesus' experience in the wilderness also parallels that of the nation of Israel as a whole, demonstrating that as the true Israel, Jesus, was able to resist temptations in a way that Israel failed to in her wilderness wanderings. Furthermore, whereas the Israelites betrayed God by their worshipping of the golden calf in the wilderness, Jesus remained loyal to God in that he rebuked Satan when offered all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for worshipping Satan. Just as Jesus proved himself to be the true Israel in Mathew 2:15 by being the obedient Son, Jesus as the expression of the true Israel is further developed in his wilderness

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[30] Köstenberger, *Jesus of the Gospels*, 54–55.

[31] Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 418.

[32] Allison, *The New Moses*, 273.

testing.[33] In comparing Jesus's wilderness experience with that of the nation of Israel, Köstenberger notes, "At the very inception of his public ministry, therefore, Jesus is revealed as the true Israel. Here we see both his identification with Israel, and with humanity in general, and a marked contrast with Israel's wilderness experience. Where Israel was disobedient, Jesus was obedient."[34]

In his wilderness testing Jesus typologically fulfilled the wilderness experiences of the nation of Israel and succeeded whereas the Israelites continuously stumbled along their path. The Father tested Jesus before Jesus walked into his divine ministry in the same way God tested the children of Israel before they walked into their divine calling in the promised land. God took Israel through a process to prepare them for that calling (Exod 4:22; Deut 8:5; Jer 31:9; Hos 11:4), which should have taught them obedience and trust in God. In contrast with the Israelites, Jesus learned through his wilderness testing total dependence on God and obedience, lessons which Israel failed to learn throughout her history (Heb 3:8–11, 15–19). Whereas Israel repeatedly engaged in rebellion against God, Christ learned obedience, becoming obedient even unto death on the cross (Phil 2:8; Heb 5:8–9).[35] France sums these sentiments up when he notes,

> Now another "Son of God" is in the wilderness, this time for forty days rather than forty years, as a preparation for entering into the divine calling. There in the wilderness he, too, faces those same tests, and he has learned the lessons which Israel had so imperfectly grasped. His Father is testing him in the school of privation, and his triumphant rebuttal of the devil's suggestions will ensure that the filial bond can survive in spite of the conflict that lies ahead.[36]

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[33] R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 23j.

[34] Köstenberger, *Jesus of the Gospels*, 49.

[35] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 128.

[36] Ibid.

The Pattern of the Exodus in Jesus' Life

G. Wright notes that "The person and office of Jesus are seen in pure typological relation to the various offices of the Israelite covenant."[37] John's Gospel is replete with allusions to the Exodus demonstrating that Jesus fulfilled the historical elements of the Exodus. The seven "I am" sayings of Jesus, along with Jesus' "I am" declarations in John 18:5–8, correspond with Yahweh's revelation of himself in the burning bush accounts of Exodus 3:14 and 6:2.[38] Perhaps one of the greatest allusions to the Exodus is John the Baptist's introduction of Jesus as the Lamb of God which takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29, 36), thus demonstrating that the original Passover sacrificial lamb pointed to Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb of God, who would bring deliverance from sin and death rather than political deliverance.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand

The argument that liberation in the Exodus motif has spiritual value beyond that of liberation from oppression in a physical sense, is demonstrated in John chapter six. In John 6:1–14, Jesus feeding the gathered multitude with the multiplication of the bread parallels Yahweh's actions in providing manna for the children of Israel in Exodus 16:4–15, 35. When the people questioned Jesus, Jesus alluded to the manna that the Israelites ate in the desert (John 6:31). Jesus compared the bread given by Moses with the true bread from heaven by declaring that he was the bread of life and informed the hearers that those who come to him will never hunger again (John 6:26-35). Whereas the Israelites in the wilderness partook of the bread to nourish their physical bodies, the bread that Christ offered was spiritual in nature and those who partook of such would experience eschatological liberation as noted in John 6:32–40.

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[37] Wright, *God Who Acts*, 62.

[38] Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 161.

The Last Supper

The nature of the liberation Jesus offered is further confirmed with the institution of the Last Supper in Matthew which further parallels the first Passover in Egypt. When Jesus inaugurates the Last Supper at the time of the Passover in Jerusalem, Jesus utilizes OT covenantal language when referencing the shedding of blood for the remission of sins.

> All of this is said in the context of the Passover meal when the father would normally have expounded the story of the redemption from Egypt which marked the original formation of Israel as the people of God. The implication is startling, and is underlined by the phrase "my blood of the covenant," echoing the original covenant ceremony at Sinai (Exod 24:8): Jesus' death is the redemptive sacrifice which is now to inaugurate a new covenant community.[39]

The Passover lamb in Exodus pointed to Jesus as the Passover lamb whose shed blood would lead to the inauguration of the new covenant (Heb 9:15). At the crucifixion of Jesus, not a bone was broken in accordance with the instructions given regarding the Passover lamb in Exodus 12:46 and Numbers 9:12. In his death, Christ became the Passover lamb without spot or blemish (Exod 12:5; 1 Pet 1:19) that was sacrificed for the sins of mankind (I Cor 5:7; 15:3–4). In ministering to the Ethiopian eunuch, Philip explains that Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophetic declarations issued by the prophet in Isaiah 53:7–10 regarding the suffering servant who would be sacrificed as a sin offering (Acts 8:26–35).

Just as the first Passover in Egypt required the shedding of blood to prevent judgment on each household inhabited by God's chosen; the second Passover required the shedding of innocent blood which would prevent those who receive Christ from experiencing eschatological judgment. Morales draws a connection between Jesus's crucifixion and the original Passover in Egypt when he notes,

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[39] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 932.

> Just as the blood of the Passover lamb, substituted for Israel as God's firstborn son, had stayed the death-threat of God's judgment, redeeming Israel from bondage and ransoming them from the grave, so the crucifixion of Jesus, the perfect paschal sacrifice, delivers God's people from the death and bondage of sin—fully and finally.[40]

In his death and resurrection, Jesus brought about the ultimate liberation in that he paved the way for man to be free from the bondage of sin and eschatological death. That liberation was spiritual in nature, rather than socio-political, is evidenced by Jesus' statements when witnessing to the Jews in John 8:31–32. Jesus informed his followers that the Jews who believed in him and continued in his word would know the truth and be set free by the truth. In response, the listeners note that they are Abraham's seed and have never been in bondage to any man (John 8:34, KJV). Jesus' response is telling in that he states, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John 8:34, KJV). While the Jews were referring to physical bondage, Jesus makes it clear that the freedom which he was offering was freedom from slavery to sin, thus confirming John the Baptist's proclamation in John 1:29 that Jesus as the Lamb of God was the One who would take away the sins of the world.

Fulfillment in Hebrews

The theological themes of covenant and fulfillment are interwoven throughout the text of Hebrews. While Christ's life and ministry closely parallel the pattern of events in the history of the nation of Israel, the Book of Hebrews demonstrates that Christ was superior to OT elements contained in the old covenant. In the role of High Priest, Christ's death satisfies the demands of God's justice and ushers in a new and better everlasting covenant through his blood (Heb 2:17; 7:22–28; 8:1, 6–13; 9:15; 13:20). The new covenant written in the hearts and minds of man

[40] Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 164.

provides an anchor of hope allowing believers to complete their earthly wilderness wanderings successfully. As a result of the new covenant in Christ's blood, believers have an eschatological hope for liberation in Christ through reconciliation, remission of sins, and deliverance from death, culminating in an eternal unshakeable kingdom (Heb 12:27–28).

As noted previously in this chapter, the life and ministry of Christ parallels that of Moses in a plethora of ways, with Christ being the greater Moses. Hebrews chapter three provides further support that Christ was greater than Moses in that Christ accomplished what Moses could not accomplish for the Exodus generation that left Egypt (Heb 3:3). Jesus was counted worthy of more glory than Moses in that Moses was a servant while Christ is called a son over his own house (Heb 3:5–6). While Hebrews 3:4 notes that Moses was faithful in *all his house*, Moses was unable to lead the Exodus generation into the promised land. Due to the Exodus generation hardening their hearts during the wilderness period, God became grieved with the Exodus generation and prevented them from entering into rest in the land of promise (Heb 3:7–11). The notion that Moses was faithful in God's house implies that Moses was faithful to all the responsibilities with which God had commissioned him concerning the "theocratic community."[41] Yet, even though Moses remained faithful, the Exodus generation failed to enter the land due to God's judgment. Guthrie notes that Moses' "faithfulness gains its greatest renown when it serves as a pattern for, although exceeded by, the faithfulness of Christ."[42]

Whereas the Exodus generation fell in the wilderness due to unbelief, thus failing to enter into the rest God had prepared for them (Heb 3:15–19), Jesus, as the greater Moses secured the way for believers to enter into the rest of God (Heb 4:1–11). The warning to believers against

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[41] Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews*, TNTC 15 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1983), 103.

[42] Ibid.

hardening of the heart in the same manner as the Exodus generation in Hebrews 3:13–17 is especially poignant considering the history of Israel is replete with examples of the children of Israel provoking God, beginning with the Exodus generation as seen in "Exodus 15:22-25; 17:1-7; and 32:1."[43] In Hebrews, the biblical author uses the example of the Exodus generation to warn the believers against hardening of the heart in unbelief to prevent them from provoking God and subsequently failing to enter into the rest of God in the same manner as the Exodus generation.

The great faith chapter in Hebrews 11 provides eschatological hope for the believer by detailing the history of their ancestors who remained faithful to God, unlike the wilderness generation, despite not having fully seen God's promises come to pass in their lifetime. Believers are encouraged to remain faithful just as their ancestors remained faithful by embracing their status as pilgrims on the earth and recognizing that their true heavenly home awaited them in the future (Heb 11:13–16). In contrast to the wilderness sojourners who failed to enter into God's rest due to sin and unbelief (Heb 3:18–19; 4:6), believers are to push forward in faith knowing that God is faithful in fulfilling his promises. Schreiner notes,

> The warnings given to the readers fit with their status as sojourners and exiles. In that sense the readers are like the Israelites who were in the wilderness before finding rest in the land of Canaan (3:12-4:13). The readers are on a journey to enter their heavenly rest, but they face perils along the way, just as Israel did on the way to the land of promise. The readers are warned not to harden their hearts and rebel against God. Israel gave way to unbelief and disobedience, and the readers must not follow their example. Unbelief and disobedience threaten because the wilderness period is exasperating, exhausting, and trying. Believers long to be in the heavenly city and enjoy their heavenly rest, but instead they encounter the pressures and opposition of life in the world.[44]

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[43] Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 108.

[44] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, BTCP (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2015), 491-492.

The journey through the faithful in Hebrews 11 would have provided great encouragement to believers that regardless of what trials and afflictions they suffered in their present life, they could rest assured that they would receive the promises of God. God never promised that believers would not suffer oppression or extreme persecution, as seen in Hebrews 11:36–40. God promised that there remained a rest for the people of God which would be realized in the future. What awaits the believer is not Mount Sinai but Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:18–22). Believers who remain faithful receive a heavenly kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28). While they may never obtain an earthly form of liberation from societal injustices, as seen in the examples of those who were mocked, beaten, afflicted, tormented, and martyred in Hebrews 11:36–38, those who remained faithful would experience eschatological rest and liberation in eternity.

That the wilderness generation failed to enter the land due to unbelief highlights the notion that liberation in the historical Exodus pointed beyond liberation for the purpose of socio-political freedom and the creation of a new society. The theological significance of liberation was to be found in the liberation obtained in Christ, which was liberation from slavery to sin and eschatological death. Through his one-time sacrifice, Christ opened the way for those who believe in him to experience spiritual and eschatological liberation. Moreover, the liberation offered by Christ was founded on covenant in the same manner that liberation in the historical Exodus was founded on covenant. In shedding his blood Christ inaugurated the new covenant, thus fulfilling the redemptive promises of Jeremiah 31:31–34 (Heb 9:15; 10:15–17). Christ came to bear the sins of many and tasted death for all of mankind that he might destroy the devil which had power over death (Heb 2:9; 2:14; 9:28). Hebrews 2:15 notes that Christ delivers those who were subject to a lifetime of bondage due to the fear of death. Hebrews 9:26 notes that Jesus

sacrificed himself to put away sin. Sin was what separated mankind from God and when Christ returns the second time he will appear without sin unto salvation (Heb 9:26–28). With the inauguration of the new covenant through Christ's blood the way was made for mankind to approach God with full assurance that their sins and iniquities would be remembered no more (Heb 10:15–17).

The Theological Significance of Liberation in the NT

While Jesus' death on the cross brought liberation from the bondage of sin and the fear of death, his blood paved the way for future eschatological liberation as well.[45] Williamson notes that although "the climactic covenant anticipated by Jeremiah and the other Old Testament prophets" is ratified through the death and resurrection of Christ, there awaits a future and final realization of God's covenantal promises which are eschatological in nature.[46] While the door to reconciliation with God has been opened through the sacrificial blood of Christ, and believers can rest assured in their eternal security, a greater realization of the fullness of God's promises awaits the return of Christ in all his glory in the second advent. Just as the liberation experienced by the Babylonian exiles did not bring full restoration per Jeremiah's prophecy of future restoration, full liberation for the believer awaits a future time as well.[47] Dearman shares these

[45] The eschatological nature of Christ's ministry can be seen in the teaching and preaching ministry of Jesus throughout the Gospels. Jesus sets forth the eschatological vision in his judgment discourse in Matthew chapter 24. While Christ begins his judgment discourse with the perilous signs preceding the second coming, Jesus offers hope to those who remain faithful in Matt. 24:30-31 by noting the glorious appearance of the Son of Man with his angels who will gather together the elect. Jesus introduces the "thief in the night" motif in Matt. 24:42-44 (Luke 12:29) which is carried forth by Paul in I Thess. 5:2-6 and Peter in 2 Pet. 3:10-11. Matthew 25 continues along the same vein with the parable of the ten virgins (25:1-13) and talents (25:14-15), demonstrating the importance of being prepared for the coming Day of the Lord. Matthew 25:31-33 vividly illustrates the judgment to come when the Son of Man comes in his glory to judge the nations. Jesus is shown sitting on the throne of his glory (v. 31), separating the nations (v. 33), dispensing judgment on the goat nations on his left hand (v. 41, 46), and granting eternal life to those on his right (v. 34). Christ maintains the authority to grant eternal life on the basis of the new covenant instituted in his blood (Matt. 26:28).

[46] Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 212.

[47] Ibid., 212-13.

sentiments when he notes that "the coming of Christ and the gift of the Spirit do not exhaust the promises made in the new covenant; the complete transformation of God's people is still in the future."[48] Dearman discusses NT references to the nature of the new covenant promises by Jeremiah (Heb 8–9).

> What all the New Testament references have in common is a belief that the future redemption promised by God through Jeremiah (or any of the prophets) has dawned in the ministry of Jesus Christ and will be brought to an ultimate fulfillment in his second coming at the end of the age.[49]

Warnings and the Hope for Future Liberation

References to the Exodus generation are common throughout the NT with the biblical authors warning believers against making the same mistakes the wilderness generation made. In I Corinthians chapter 10, Paul alludes to the historical Exodus when warning fellow believers against following in the footsteps of the Exodus generation in their wilderness wanderings. Just as believers in Hebrews were warned against following in the footsteps of the wilderness generation, Paul utilized their example to encourage believers to not follow the pattern set by the wilderness generation.

Paul began by telling his listeners how the wilderness generation had secured God's blessings. God had brought them through the sea (Exod 14:21–31), they were baptized unto Moses in the sea and cloud (Exod 13:21–22), and they were provided meat and drank from the spiritual Rock that was Christ (Exod 16:35; 17:6; I Cor 10:1–4). Parallels between the wilderness generation and the church can be seen in Paul noting the wilderness generation had been baptized into Moses in a similar way to believers being baptized into Christ (Rom 6:3).[50]

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[48] J. Andrew Dearman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 246.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity, 2018), 200.

> We recognize that Paul argues analogously. In Christian baptism, believers are 'clothed…with Christ' (Gal. 3:27) and are incorporated into the church (I Cor. 12:13). There is a sense in which Israel, through the great redemptive event of the exodus, was incorporated into Moses and established as the people of God.[51]

In drawing connections between the wilderness generation and the church, Paul's admonition should present a strong warning to the believers that if they pursue their lusts in the same manner as the wilderness generation, they will face God's judgment just as the wilderness generation did. Although God had proved himself faithful in delivering and miraculously caring for the Exodus generation, I Corinthians 10:5–11 demonstrates that God was not pleased with them and subsequently, they failed to enter the promised land.

In verse 6, Paul declares that these things were an example to believers that they should refrain from lusting after evil. Paul warns the believers to abstain from idolatry (v. 7) and fornication (v. 8), not to tempt Christ (v. 9), and to refrain from murmuring (v. 10). The wilderness generation had engaged in all the evils listed in these verses which caused God to be displeased (v. 5). Despite God's going before his people and leading the way (Exod 13:21–22), the people still rebelled against God and provoked his anger (Ps 78:27–31; 106:14.) If believers follow in the footsteps of the wilderness generation, then they will fall just as the previous generation fell (I Cor 10:12).

In I Corinthians 10:9, Paul warns believers against testing God in the same manner as the wilderness generation who were destroyed by serpents (Num 21:6). While Numbers 21:6 reports that the children of Israel *died* when the Lord sent serpents among them, the Greek word *apollymi,* translated *destroyed,* is used by Paul in I Corinthians 10:9 in describing what happened to the wilderness generation.[52] Schreiner notes,

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[51] Schreiner, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction,* 200.

[52] Ibid., 204.

> The term 'destroyed' can refer to physical death, which was certainly the judgment inflicted on Israel, but the word is also often used by Paul to denote eschatological destruction (Rom. 2:12; 14:15; I Cor. 1:18, 19; 8:11; 15:18; 2 Cor. 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thess. 2:10). If Israel was punished physically, Paul warns the Corinthians about the final eschatological judgment here. The judgment of Israel in redemptive history points to and anticipates a greater and more serious judgment, one that is eternal and not merely temporal.[53]

In Hebrews and 1 Corinthians 10, both biblical authors refer back to the wilderness generation and warn believers against following the pattern set by the wilderness generation. Both authors note that the wilderness generation failed to enter the promised land due to their unfaithfulness to God. That liberation in the historical Exodus pointed to a greater liberation than deliverance from socio-political bondage is demonstrated by the warning to believers that they risk not entering into God's final eschatological rest if they fail to remain faithful until the end. Such warnings support the contention that the theological significance of liberation throughout the biblical text is that of liberation from sin and death. The following section will explore the nature of liberation in the book of Revelation and demonstrate that redemptive history comes to a climax culminating in a final eschatological liberation at the end of the age.

Eschatological Liberation in Revelation

Although the early church recognized that, in a sense, the Day of the Lord was already upon them with the death and resurrection of Jesus, they recognized the second coming of Christ, with all the promises that entailed, as a future event still to come. While Jesus' death and resurrection inaugurated the new covenant and offered liberation from sin for the believer, the full measure of liberation is seen in the second coming of Christ where all of God's covenantal promises are fully realized.

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[53] Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, 204.

A great multitude of every tongue, tribe, and nation will stand clothed in white robes before the Lamb (Rev 7:9). The significance of Jesus' sacrificial shedding of blood as the Lamb of God is highlighted by John's repeated reference (27 times) to the lamb in Revelation.[54] Jesus has fulfilled the role of the good shepherd who gave his life for the sheep in fulfillment of John 10:11. Jesus as the Lamb shall wipe away all the tears from their eyes and they shall no more hunger nor thirst as Jesus has purchased the redeemed with his blood (Acts 20:28) and will now dwell among his people (Rev 7:15–17; 21:4). Having been purchased with the precious blood of Christ, rather than corruptible things such as silver and gold, the believers have been purified and born again to eternal life in Christ (I Pet 1:18–23).

The Exodus motif comes full circle in the book of Revelation with parallels between the Song of Moses in Revelation 15 and the song of the original Exodus in Exodus chapter 15. Just as the original exiles sang God's praises after being miraculously brought through the Red Sea after their exodus from Egypt, the song of Revelation 15 is sung by those standing on the sea of glass who have overcome the beast and his image, his mark, and the number of his name (Rev 15:2). Allison notes that "the deliverance from the Red Sea is here the typological equivalent of the eschatological deliverance."[55] Whereas in the first exodus, God's people praised him for defeating Pharoah, in Revelation the people praise God for defeating the beast. God has proven himself faithful in delivering his people in fulfillment of his covenantal promises in the same

[54] Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God*, 376. Kaiser notes John's use of the lamb concept throughout Revelation in "Revelation 5:6, 8, 12-13; 6:1, 16; 7:9-10, 14, 17; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1, 4, 10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22-23, 27; 22:1, 3." Ibid.

[55] Allison Jr., *The New Moses*, 198.

way he proved himself faithful in delivering the Exodus generation from Egypt due to the promises under the Abrahamic covenant.[56] Beale notes,

> Like God's people of old, so God's new covenant people praise him by singing "the song of Moses." Their song is a hymn of deliverance and praise of God's attributes like the song in Exod. 15:1-8. Though Moses is called a 'servant of God" often throughout the OT, the title here comes from Exod. 14:31, since there the title immediately precedes the song in Exodus 15. The song here is about the much greater deliverance accomplished through the Lamb's work, so that it is called the Lamb's song as well as Moses'.[57]

The final fulfillment of all things in Christ is accomplished with the implementation of the new heaven and earth (Rev 21:1), the coming of the new Jerusalem (21:2), and God dwelling with his people. The bridegroom has come for his bride.[58] The sons of God have been revealed in fulfillment of Romans 8:19, the faithful have inherited the promises (Heb 6:12), having been sealed, the purchase possession has been redeemed (Eph 1:14), and the inheritance of the believer has been received (Col 3:24; Heb 9:15). With the passing away of the old cosmos, the promised redemption has come in the eschatological liberation of believers, which encompasses an exodus from the old world with the redeemed emerging into a newly created order.

The Covenantal Connection

A masterful continuity can be seen throughout the canon with Israel's history being intimately connected with God's redemptive-historical plans for all mankind. The historical Exodus was an integral part of God's salvific plan, not only for OT Israel but for all the world,

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[56] G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 739.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Owing to a plethora of eschatological systems, scholars and believers alike vary significantly in their view of end-time events, such as the Millennial kingdom and final judgments. Delving into such matters is beyond the scope of this dissertation. What is being highlighted here is that the hope of eschatological liberation for the believer is fulfilled with the return of Christ.

and as such the Exodus cannot be divorced from the larger biblical narrative. Like links in a chain, God's redemptive plan which began in the OT can be seen progressing down through the ages into the NT in Christ and will ultimately culminate in a future eschatological liberation.

Beginning with God's Messianic seed promise in Genesis 3:15 and proceeding through to God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's seed, God's redemptive-historical plan unfolds throughout the pages of Scripture. Covenant is the link in the chain that connects all of God's promises forming a bridge between the Old and New Testaments that links all of God's salvific plans. Just as the covenant was the foundation of the historical Exodus, the final exodus from this earth hinges on the covenant relationship as well. While believers enter into a covenant relationship with Christ through the new covenant instituted in his blood, thus securing eschatological liberation, the new covenant is linked with the Abrahamic covenant and promises made long ago. Whereas liberation in the historical Exodus may have entailed deliverance for the nation of Israel, final and eschatological liberation through the new covenant in Christ's blood opens the door for all of mankind to be liberated from the bondage of sin and eschatological death.

Summary and Conclusion

Perhaps more so than any other NT book, Matthew's Gospel was concerned with using the Hebrew Scriptures to prove that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. Far from being an abstract concept, whether Jesus fulfilled the OT prophecies that the nation of Israel had historically clung to through tumultuous times, was a matter of utmost importance to first-century Jews who had chosen to place their trust in Jesus as their Messiah. In the often-turbulent world of the first century with Judaism in an increasingly fragmented state, the realization that Jesus was the fulfillment of Israel's long-awaited Messianic hopes would provide comfort,

strength, and hope to Jewish followers of Messiah who were being persecuted by rival Jewish sects. Hagner notes that Matthew was exceptionally fruitful in this regard as one of Matthew's main purposes for writing was to "demonstrate the continuity of the new with the old, as the famous fulfillment quotations alone indicate."[59]

From beginning to end, Matthew's Gospel is saturated with OT Scriptures demonstrating the ways in which Jesus fulfilled the OT Scriptures, both directly, indirectly, and thematically. Matthew's Gospel portrays Jesus as the Jewish Messiah culminating OT prophetic history and bringing salvific hope to the nation of Israel. That the historical Exodus has a greater spiritual value beyond that of liberation from oppression can be seen in the NT witness which points to Jesus as the covenantal fulfillment of the Exodus motif. While all four of the Gospels relate to Jesus as the fulfillment of the OT Scriptures, Matthew's overwhelming use of direct OT quotations in comparison with the other three Gospels (55 direct quotations in Matthew alone compared to 65 shared between the other three Gospels) indicates that developing the theme of fulfillment of OT Scriptures through Jesus the Jewish Messiah is a primary concern for Matthew.[60] The saturation of Matthew's Gospel with OT Scriptures and Matthew's primary emphasis on Jesus's fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures would have presented a powerful witness to the Jews and would have ultimately been the key that would unlock the hearts and minds of non-believing Jews that they might come to receive Jesus as their prophesied Messiah.

Repeated allusions to the historical Exodus throughout the NT, demonstrate that Jesus repeated the pattern of OT Israel and the Exodus in his life and ministry. In discussing Matthew's use of Hosea 11:1, France notes the following:

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[59] Donald Alfred Hagner, "Balancing the Old and the New: The Law of Moses in Matthew and Paul," *Interpretation* 51.1 (1997): 21.

[60] Blomberg, *Commentary on the New Testament*, 1.

> The exodus, leading as it did to the formation of a new people of God, was a potent symbol even within the OT of the even greater work of deliverance which God was yet to accomplish (e.g., Isa 43:16-21; 51:9-11; Jer 16:14-15; 31:31-34; Hos 2:14-15), and Matthew has taken up that prophetic typology and applied it to the "new exodus" which has now come about through Jesus.[61]

Whereas Israel repeatedly failed to maintain covenantal fidelity, Jesus proved to be the faithful Son capable of accomplishing what Israel failed to accomplish throughout her history. As the greater Moses, Jesus brought liberation to the world in a way that Moses could never fully accomplish for God's people Israel. While the Exodus generation repeatedly demonstrated weakness and unfaithfulness during their wilderness trials, Jesus resisted temptation in the wilderness and remained loyal to God. As such, Jesus became a witness to the nations of God's glory and might in a way that OT Israel never achieved. Jesus became the light to the nations revealing God's truths to a lost and dying world. Moreover, Jesus became the Passover Lamb capable of cleansing mankind from their sins leading to liberation from sin and death for those who come to salvation through Christ. What all of OT Israel's ceremonies, sacrifices, and ordinances failed to accomplish; Jesus accomplished once and for all on the cross at Calvary.

The argument presented throughout this chapter is that the overarching message of liberation in the Scriptures is not an earthly deliverance from societal injustices and oppression, but a spiritual liberation from the bondage of sin and eschatological death through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. The NT demonstrates that Jesus fulfilled elements of the historical Exodus in his life, ministry, death, and resurrection, thus demonstrating that the Exodus event pointed forward to what Christ would accomplish on behalf of mankind bringing to a climax God's salvific purposes for the world. While the historical Exodus liberated the children of Israel in accordance with God's covenantal purposes, Christ inaugurated a new covenant in his blood

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[61] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 80.

that paved the way for those who believe to be fully liberated from sin and the fear of death (Heb 10:15–18). While the believer in Christ has been liberated from the penalties of sin and can walk in the fullness of Christ, there awaits a future eschatological liberation where the believer will come to fully realize the fulfillment of all of God's covenantal promises. In describing how the fullness of God's covenantal blessings will be realized at a future date, Williamson notes,

> Through Jesus, the royal seed of Abraham, divine blessing has now been extended to all the families of the earth. Nevertheless, while these blessings are already experienced by Christians now, the full realization of the hopes held out to us in the new covenant will take place only in the eschaton, when that great petition of the Lord's Prayer will finally be answered-and God's kingdom will come on earth just as it is in heaven. Ultimately, the prospect held out by Jeremiah and the other Old Testament prophets is eschatological in nature. True, we see it already fulfilled now in part, but only in part.[62]

With Christ's first coming the way was made for all mankind to be reconciled to God by entering into a covenant relationship with God through the cross of Christ. Acceptance of the blood of Christ for the remission of sins thus guarantees spiritual and eschatological liberation from sin and eternal death. While God's covenantal promises secured the deliverance of the Exodus generation from Egyptian bondage, the redemptive storyline of the Bible demonstrates that God's covenantal promises entailed a greater future exodus, that of eschatological liberation with the second coming of Christ. As the promised seed, Christ has truly fulfilled the promises made to Abraham that all nations of the earth would be blessed through him. The salvific plan God set in motion in Genesis 3:15 will be fully realized with the return of Christ in the clouds, proving once and for all that God was, is, and always will be the one true and faithful divine suzerain.

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[62] Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 212-13.

CHAPTER SEVEN: RESEARCH SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The aim of this dissertation has been to produce a biblical theology of liberation to ascertain the theological significance of liberation throughout the canon. As such, this dissertation has traced God's pattern of liberation throughout the biblical canon, utilizing the framework of the Exodus motif. In support of this goal, this study began with an analysis of the historical Exodus, proceeded to explore God's actions in liberating his people from Babylonian exile in the book of Jeremiah, and culminated in an analysis of the liberation effected by Christ in the NT. It has been argued throughout this dissertation that God's acts of liberation in the biblical text have always been intimately linked with God's covenants, thus demonstrating that God's acts of liberation are founded on the framework of the covenantal relationship. Moreover, through an examination of the Exodus motif, encompassing God's acts of liberation throughout history, it has been argued that the theological significance of liberation in the Scriptures is a spiritual liberation from the bondage of sin and eschatological death through the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus. As such, the conclusion reached here is that the contention among liberation theologians that the overarching message of liberation throughout the biblical text is one of liberation from socio-political oppression must be rejected. Due to their faulty hermeneutics and *a priori* approach to the Scriptures, in particular the historical Exodus, liberation theologians have downplayed the covenantal connection and overemphasized the political aspects of the historical Exodus. Through a comprehensive biblical-theological and exegetical analysis of liberation throughout the canon, the conclusion reached in this dissertation is that the historical Exodus was founded on God's covenant promises to Abraham and as such, the historical Exodus was an integral part of God's redemptive-historical purposes. Subsequently, when viewed from the perspective of liberation in the entire biblical storyline of

salvation, the Exodus should be viewed as a salvation event that foreshadowed the greater future spiritual and eschatological liberation that Christ would bring about with the inauguration of the new covenant in his blood.

Summary Conclusions

Chapter one introduced a brief history of liberation theology and highlighted the frequent use of the historical Exodus account by liberation theologians in support of their contention that the historical Exodus was socio-political in nature, thus leading to their frequent adoption of the Exodus narrative as a catalyst for social and political reform. The origins of liberation theology in Latin America, black liberation theology in the United States, and the evolving nature of liberation theology into present times were addressed. With rapid changes in political and social structures in the West over the last decade, and with the rise of social justice movements, liberation theology has experienced a resurgence with political and social issues advancing into the Christian sphere. Due to the complex social issues facing society and the Church, this biblical-theological study of liberation in the biblical text was undertaken in order to gain a proper understanding of the significance of the theological theme of biblical liberation.

An analysis of the hermeneutical methods and principles running throughout the various streams of liberation theology was undertaken in chapter two to demonstrate the fundamental errors in their hermeneutical approaches and how these errors affect their interpretation of the Exodus event, subsequently impacting how they view the theme of liberation throughout the biblical text. While liberation theologians utilize a variety of hermeneutical methods, a common theme throughout their writings is a concern for orthopraxy over and above orthodoxy. Whereas the starting point for traditional hermeneutical methods is the biblical text, the starting point for liberation theologians is the experience of the oppressed in society. As such, exegetical

approaches to the biblical text are downplayed in favor of post-modern reader-response approaches where the member of the oppressed community is responsible for determining meaning. Determining the original meaning of the biblical text takes a backseat to the goal of determining what the biblical text means to the life of modern oppressed persons and interpretive communities, thus leading to subjective interpretation rather than an objective search for biblical truth. The *a priori* approach utilized by liberation theologians has led to a vast array of interpretations of the historical Exodus and liberation throughout the various streams of liberation theology, as seen through an analysis of the interpretations of various liberation theologians throughout multiple chapters in this dissertation.

To demonstrate that liberation in the Exodus motif was founded on the covenant relationship, and not socio-political in nature as asserted by liberation theologians, chapter three explored the nature of covenant relationships in the ANE to demonstrate that God's actions in delivering the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage were covenantal in nature. With the introduction of God's Messianic seed promise in Genesis 3:15, God's salvation historical promises progress forward with the institution of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:3) which becomes the foundation of God's deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt. Far from being a single incident of God's acting on behalf of an oppressed people group, God's actions on behalf of Israel were a crucial component of God's redemptive-historical plan that would ultimately see the arrival of the promised seed which would bring lasting spiritual liberation to the world.

An exegetical analysis of Exodus 2:23–3:15 was conducted in chapter four to deduce the theological significance of God's liberating act in the historical Exodus event. God's act of *zāḵar*, translated *remembrance*, of the covenant with Abraham in Exodus 2:24 directly links the

historical Exodus event with God's covenantal promises, thus supporting the argument that the primary motivating factor in God's deliverance of the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage was his covenantal promises in line with his redemptive purposes for mankind. In his role as the divine suzerain God's remembrance of the promises he had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob stirred him to act on behalf of his people. In introducing himself to Moses from the burning bush, God introduces himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 3:8) and announces his intention to deliver the Israelites and bring them into the promised land (Exod 3:8), thus further demonstrating his intention to fulfill his covenantal promises to Abraham (Gen 15:12–14; 18–21; 17:7–8). Israel was called out not merely for her benefit, but to display God's glory and power to the pagan nations of the world and was the nation through which God would bring forth the promised Messianic seed that would bless the nations of the world (Gen 3:15; 22:18), further fulfilling God's covenantal promises. Moreover, Israel's liberation from Egyptian bondage foreshadowed the greater future liberation that only Christ could offer.

In chapter five, the focus shifted from the historical Exodus to how the theological theme of liberation developed in Israel's history in the prophetic corpus. As the mouthpiece of God, the prophet Jeremiah repeatedly warned the Israelites of the consequences of their failure to remain faithful covenant partners to Yahweh and warned of God's impending judgment unless the people returned to God in true repentance. Due to Israel's failure to heed Jeremiah's warnings and the severing of the covenantal relationship, the actions of the people invoked the curses of the covenant, and God's people were sent into Babylonian exile. That the people were sent into exile due to covenantal disloyalty demonstrates that their continued liberation depended on maintaining the covenant relationship. Yet, even amid their exile, God as the divine suzerain,

provided hope in the promise of future restoration (Jer 29:10–14), once again connecting the theme of liberation with that of covenant relationship.

In chapter six, it was argued that Jesus, through his life and ministry, fulfilled elements of the historical Exodus and that the liberation Jesus effected through his death and resurrection was liberation from sin and eschatological death. The pattern of Jesus' life mirrored that of the nation of Israel as seen in Jesus being called out of Egypt, Jesus's time in the wilderness being tested, Jesus becoming the Passover Lamb that was sacrificed, and Jesus becoming the bread of life. While Moses was a great leader, Jesus superseded Moses in that Jesus was able to accomplish a lasting spiritual liberation from sin and death, which Moses could not provide for God's people. Although Jesus' life and the exodus experiences of the nation of Israel were similar in many respects, Jesus succeeded in his mission whereas the history of the nation of Israel was replete with failures leading to the provoking of God's wrath. Whereas the Israelites as God's son were disloyal to Yahweh through spiritual adultery, Jesus proved himself to be the greater Son in that he remained faithful to God, even to the death of the cross. With the inauguration of the new covenant in Christ's blood, the way was opened for mankind to be free from the bondage of sin and fear of death. Believers are warned against following in the footsteps of the wilderness generation who failed to enter into the promised land (Heb 3:8–9; 1 Cor 10). Hope remains for a future eschatological liberation for the believers who remain faithful to Christ (Heb 11) with the faithful inheriting God's promises of eternal life through Christ. Those who overcome will experience lasting eschatological liberation when Christ comes for his bride in fulfillment of God's redemptive promises (Rev 7:15–17; 15:2; 21:1–7).

Proposed Areas of Future Research

As the intent of this dissertation was to analyze the hermeneutical methods and principles of liberation theologians, little attention was given to the theological belief systems running throughout the various streams of liberation theology. With liberation theology making a comeback in recent years, liberation theology and its associated theological belief systems remain an area ripe for future research in biblical and theological studies. As evidenced by an analysis of the views held by a wide swath of liberation theologians throughout this dissertation, liberation theologians place great emphasis on social justice and the oppressed with the historical Exodus undergirding much of their teachings. While past scholarly research has been conducted in these areas, as newer liberation theologians emerge and as the Gospel message becomes more politicized in Western society, more current scholarly research in these three areas would prove increasingly beneficial. Although the three areas discussed below warrant a study in themselves, the interconnected nature of these themes would make for an immensely valuable study if all three themes were combined into one study.

Future Research in the Field of Social Justice

Defining the term *social justice* proves difficult with so many groups and organizations in Western society increasingly appropriating the moniker. Whereas in the past, individuals may have thought of social justice in terms of equal rights in economic, legal, and political arenas, these days it appears that "social justice" can refer to almost any movement that claims to be fighting for justice on behalf of a myriad of groups regardless of their agenda. Goldingay notes, "The notion of social justice is a hazy one. It resembles words such as community, intimacy, and relational, warm words whose meaning may seem self-evident and which we assume are

obviously biblical categories, when actually they are rather undefined and culture relative."[1] Attempting to define justice from a secular standpoint may be a futile effort in that what one society deems to be justice may differ greatly from another society's or culture's view of justice. Goldingay rightly notes that the "meaning of the phrase social justice has become opaque over the years as it has become a "buzz expression."[2]

A vast number of groups claim to be fighting for social justice and engage in advocacy efforts in areas encompassing politics, environmentalism, law, race, sex and gender, religion, reproductive rights, social work, education, healthcare, human trafficking, poverty, community relations, criminal justice reform, and a host of other areas. Bonnycastle notes that because the term social justice is used in so many contexts, such as "sociopolitical, economic, legal, philosophical, practice, and academic contexts, a universally applicable definition is difficult to obtain."[3] While it may be difficult to obtain an adequate definition of social justice that is universally agreed upon, with the ever-increasing demands being placed upon Christians to become involved in the fight for social justice causes, it is imperative that believers have a proper understanding of the biblical concept of societal justice that is grounded in the Scriptures. In the words of Williams, "A Christian worldview calls us in its Greatest Commandment to love God with our whole minds. …Our Messiah does not seek justice at the level of headlines and hearsay. He calls us to true justice, not knee-jerk activism."[4] As such, a biblical theology of

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[1] John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 500.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Collin R. Bonnycastle, "Social Justice Along a Continuum: A Relational Illustrative Model," *Social Services Review* 85 (2012): 267.

[4] Thaddeus J. Williams, "Putting First Things First: The Gospel and Social Justice (In That Order)," *Journal of Christian Legal Thought* 8.2 (2018): 1–9.

justice throughout the biblical text and how biblical justice relates to modern calls for social justice would be a worthwhile scholarly undertaking.

A Biblical-Theological Analysis of Oppression

As discussed in Chapter One, a common critique against liberation theologians has been the Marxist underpinnings of various liberation theologies and their use of Marxist analysis tools in evaluating societal issues, such as the theme of oppression. Rather than looking to secular philosophies and social theories, such as Marxist, economic, and critical theories to define oppression, the church should be looking to the biblical text to define oppression. As such, a biblical analysis of oppression throughout the canon would prove beneficial within any future research on the theme of biblical justice as it relates to modern-day social justice movements. Moreover, as liberation theologies continue to evolve, the need for a clear understanding of a biblical definition of oppression becomes even more crucial as the overriding focus of liberation theologians is the oppressed community. In Chapter Two it was noted that a common hermeneutical principle promulgated by liberation theologians was the notion that the biblical text must be approached through the lens of the oppressed. While Latin American Liberation Theology may have originated in the context of oppression between class structures in society, the term oppression has come to have different meanings in various social contexts.

In *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, Antonio contends that modes of oppression can be divided into two categories which consist of "struggles for recognition" centered on issues of race, identity, gender, sexuality and other forms of cultural injustice, and "economic oppression" centered on so-called "material inequality."[5]. According to Antonio,

[5] Edward P. Antonio, "Black Theology and Liberation Theologies," in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, ed. Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 33.

> Dividing up oppression in this way is not new. It has been around for a long time in social theory. Today it expresses itself in the debate between those who argue that oppression must be understood in terms of economic or class relations and those who demand and struggle for different forms of social recognition (racial, sexual, gender, and so on). The debate has famously entered theology through the insistence of Latin American liberation theology and other forms of black theology that oppression must be understood primarily in socio-economic terms.[6]

While Antonio asserts that dividing oppression up into different categories based on factors, such as sexuality and gender, has been a long-held practice in social theory, the question that is foundational to the church is how the Bible defines oppression. The label of *oppressed* has been appropriated by a plethora of groups in the United States that claim to be fighting for social justice on behalf of those whom they deem to be marginalized in society. However, some of the groups labeling themselves as oppressed consider themselves oppressed because their lifestyle choices have historically been rejected by the church and society, such as the LGBT community. Does the church and societal structures historically recognizing the marriage union as being between a male and female, thus disallowing gay marriage, align with the biblical teaching on what constitutes oppression?

With more groups in modern Western society claiming they are being oppressed and with the advent of LGBT theologies pushing for changes to church structures and theological systems, questions relating to the biblical definition of oppression are enormously important. Advocates such as Kraus assert that "Queer Christians must first claim the oppression they have endured at the hands of heterosexist Christianity."[7] Kraus contends that "gay and lesbian Christians have been victim to heterosexist Christian theology," and notes that "the only way to come out of this persecution is to create a new theology; a theology that accepts and values the contributions gays

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[6] Antonio, "Black Theology and Liberation Theologies," 33.

[7] Kelly Kraus, "Queer Theology: Reclaiming Christianity for the LGBT Community," *e-Research: A Journal of Undergraduate Work* 2.3 (2011): 105.

and lesbians can make to Christianity."[8] Kraus advocates for the LGBT community to claim the status of oppressed persons and contends that the LGBT community is oppressed because sexual acts are only acceptable to Christians in the context of heterosexual marriage. Therefore, the denial of marriage rights to LGBT persons means that they are not afforded the right to engage in sexual relations.[9] Thus, the sexuality of LGBT persons is disparaged, leading to the queer community struggling to gain acceptance in the church.[10] Not only does Kraus assert that LGBT persons must name themselves as an oppressed community, but she also further contends that queer theology should appropriate the story of the Exodus to empower queer theology.

> Queer theology can utilize the story of the exodus from Egypt just as liberation theology uses the Exodus as an empowering narrative that can liberate the oppressed. Through Moses God led the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt and so too God can lead LGBT people out of the discrimination from heterosexist theology. Rather than continue to be the victims of heterosexist theology, the queer community can empower themselves and become the chosen people of God much like the Hebrews.[11]

With LGBT persons being pushed to appropriate the Exodus narrative and the label of oppressed persons and encouraged to create "new theologies," the biblical teaching on oppression becomes more relevant than ever.[12] Historic views on biblical sexuality and gender are being challenged and long-held orthodox views on these subjects are now being viewed as

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[8] Kraus, "Queer Theology," 105.

[9] Krauss was writing in 2011, prior to the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015 in the United States.

[10] Ibid., 105-106.

[11] Ibid., 107.

[12] See Bill Johnson, "The Good News of Gay Liberation," in *Loving Men/Loving Women: Gay Liberation and the Church,* ed. Sally Gearhart and William R. Johnson (San Francisco, CA: Glide, 1974), 114–16. The push for a radical overhaul in the church and theological systems has long been a goal of gay liberation theology. Writing in 1974, Johnson accuses the church of homophobia and notes the church needs to be liberated and "held accountable for the violence it has done to our dignity and to our experience of love." Ibid., 114. They issue a list of demands which the church must agree to such as: affirming gayness as part of the naturally created order and ordained by God, encouraging gay relationships, electing gay people to offices in the church, re-educating ministers and pastors about gayness, supporting and funding gay advocacy and legal efforts, re-examining current teachings on marriage and other sexual issues, and to "develop a totally new theology of sexuality which would reflect the validity of same-sex relationships as well as other relationships and life styles." Ibid., 116.

oppressive in some sectors of society and the church. As debates over gender and sexuality continue to persist in Western society, the church must stand prepared to respond to such objectives based on the truths of the Word of God.

The Nature and Mission of the Church

Another area of study relating to the topic of oppression that warrants further research is what role the church and believers should play in attempting to alleviate oppression within society and the world. This area of study is particularly relevant in relation to liberation theology which advocates for direct action to be taken on behalf of those who are oppressed. In discussing liberation theologians' emphasis on praxis, Nunez notes, "Following the Marxist dictum, liberation theologians believe that the objective is not just to explain society, but to change it. Consequently, the first step in doing theology has to be a personal commitment to the liberation of those who are oppressed and exploited by an unjust society."[13] Sentiments such as these give rise to questions of what the mission of the church is in society. Does the Gospel commission entail the church transforming society and if so, what type of change is the church supposed to effect in society?[14] If the church's role is to transform society, what exactly does such a task entail?

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[13] Emilio A. Nunez, "The Church in the Liberation Theology of Gutierrez," in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church*, ed. D. A. Carson (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984), 173.

[14] The debate over the nature of the NT church and its mission is a long-standing debate with questions arising regarding whether Jesus and the early church were revolutionaries intent on overthrowing societal structures or whether they were attempting to influence society through counter-cultural elements of their faith. The argument that the early church leaders were not radical revolutionaries intent on overthrowing Greco-Roman societal structures does not diminish the notion that the early church was counter-cultural in their teachings and that such teachings wrought changes in society. That the teachings of the early church were counter-cultural can be seen in the harsh treatment and persecution suffered by the early church. Examples of the counter-cultural nature of their teachings can be seen in the NT instructions relating to slaves, women, and children. In discussing the revolutionary nature of the instructions regarding slaves, Gnuse notes, "We read the imperative for slaves to be obedient to their masters, and this offends our modern sensitivities. But we must not overlook the second half of the imperative, beginning in v. 9, which addresses the masters. It is most revolutionary for that age. To call upon masters to be kind

It was noted in Chapter One that one of the early critiques of the Catholic Church was that Latin American liberation theologians were so intent on meeting the physical needs of the poor that matters of eternal consequence, such as salvation were being downplayed. Such critiques call into question the nature of the church's mission on earth. Should the primary focus of the church be on evangelizing and spreading the Gospel, which would ultimately lead to societal changes?[15] Is the mission of the church to transform societal structures, and if so, how should the church go about this task? Does transforming society encompass bringing societal change through the transformation of the hearts of men and women who have come to know Christ? If the church should be more focused on transforming society than the individual hearts and minds of men, should the church attempt to effect change through legal avenues such as advocacy, or can the church engage in more radical revolutionary efforts which may entail law-breaking and potentially violent efforts to transform society if legal avenues fail to bring about

to their slaves would have been completely offensive to many Roman authorities and slave masters, who maintained absolute control over slaves lest a slave uprising destroy all of them. The rebellion of Spartacus in Italy, as well as other uprisings, were not forgotten by the Romans. From our perspective we fail to appreciate how radical such biblical statements to masters would have sounded in that era, and how dangerous it was for the author of Ephesians…" Robert Karl Gnuse, *Trajectories of Justice: What the Bible Says About Slaves, Women, and Homosexuality* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2015), 65.

[15] Rowe takes issue with the prevailing idea in NT interpretation that the book of Acts should be read "as a document for the political possibility of harmonious existence between Rome and the early Christian movement." C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3. While arguing against the notion that the Christian mission was a "direct call to liberation," Rowe argues for a radical rereading of Acts which Rowe views as a "theologically sophisticated political document that aims at nothing less than the construction of an alternate total way of life-a comprehensive pattern of being-one that runs counter to the life-patterns of the Graeco-Roman world." Ibid., 4. Rowe highlights the tensions that arose between the pagan Graeco-Roman society and the early Christians as the Christian mission spread out into the Gentile world. Rowe argues that as the Christian movement spread forth the two worlds collided due to differences between the Christian and pagan worldviews. The differences between the two worldviews placed the Christian mission at odds with a society that rejected the values being espoused by Christians. In Rowe's estimation, the Christian mission was of a "culturally destabilizing character," which led to the "potential for outsiders to construe Christianity as sedition or treason." Ibid., 5. Christianity and the pagan culture were competing realities with the adoption of Christianity leading to the adoption of a different way of life, thus threatening to dissolve the Graeco-Roman way of life. Christianity was innocent of the charges of sedition and treason and was not attempting to institute a coup but attempting to produce a new culture through the introduction of Christian values. Ibid.

the desired change?[16] Were Jesus and the apostles' violent militants set on transforming society and overthrowing the Roman government through radical revolution? Or did they attempt to change unjust social structures through a change of heart brought about by the inner man being transformed by Christ? Nunez notes, “That in different epochs Christians have participated in violent revolutions is a historical fact; but the question is whether such examples should be taken as the basis on which to argue that involvement in a violent revolution is the mission of the church as such. The discussion in this issue is not yet closed, and it may be open for long years ahead.”[17]

Continued Use of the Exodus as A Model for Social Reformation

As noted in Chapter One, the Exodus has been viewed as a paradigm model of socio-political liberation by liberation theologians and has been used by a variety of groups in the past as a catalyst for social action. The overwhelming use of the Exodus account by liberation theologians pushing for social reform, or in some instances social revolution, gives rise to the question of whether the historical Exodus should be the primary biblical model used by liberation theologians in support of their aims to eliminate oppression by transforming society. In an interview given in 2016, D.A. Carson questions whether the Exodus event should be the paradigm event used by liberation theologians in support of their attempt at escaping oppression. Carson points to the focus on praxis by liberation theologians and contends that liberation theologians choose the Exodus event because it aligns with their hope for a pattern of escape as

[16] Questions such as these cannot be relegated to the realm of theoretical possibilities with no practical application. Atrocities such as the holocaust, genocides, modern-day slavery, and sex trafficking call for biblical answers as to how the church and believers are to respond to oppression and injustices in the modern world.

[17] Nunez, “The Church in the Liberation Theology of Gutierrez,” 189.

seen in the Exodus.[18] Carson concludes, "And so, the ultimate control of what story prevails to warrant liberation theology is itself not shaped by reading Scripture as a whole, but shaped by the experience of the people, by praxis."[19] Carson raises thought-provoking questions when he asks what warrants the use of the Exodus story as opposed to God's instructions to the Babylonian exiles to whom God tells them not to rebel lest they be found to be in rebellion against God.[20]

As discussed in Chapter Two, there is serious risk involved with the postmodern notion that meaning is not found in the biblical text but is determined by the reading community as the biblical text can be made to mean whatever a particular community or group wants it to mean. The Exodus event has been politicized throughout history and used as a catalyst for reform and revolution by a wide assortment of groups all fighting on behalf of their various causes. Throughout the history of the United States, the Exodus has been utilized in a variety of ways. Colonial settlers invoked the Exodus tradition in the fight for independence against Great Britain.[21] As noted in Chapter One, both American slaveholders and slaves read the story of the Exodus and interpreted it in light of their individual circumstances and applied the story in vastly different ways. Abolitionists used the Exodus to support their fight against slavery while

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[18] D. A. Carson, "Exodus: Understanding One of the Bible's Major Themes," *Desiring God*, episode 913 interview transcript August 5, 2016, https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/exodus-understanding-one-of-the-bibles-major-themes.

[19] Carson, "Exodus."

[20] In questioning the use of the exodus account by liberation theologians, Carson states, "The question can be raised: What warrants that story as opposed to, let's say, the story that is taking place at the time of Jeremiah where what God is telling the people through the prophet Jeremiah is, "Stay where you are. Don't rebel. The Babylonians that are oppressing you and taking over, they are God's messengers to chastise you. Don't rebel against them, because then the destruction of Jerusalem will be all the worse"? And so, the question then becomes, biblically, "What warrants choosing the exodus account where you end up with liberation versus the Jeremiah account where you end up being told to stay where you are, and if you head for liberation, you are rebelling against God almighty?" Ibid.

[21] Scott Langston, *Exodus Through the Centuries,* WBBC (Newark, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 4–8.

slaveholders used the Exodus to support their belief in the practice of slavery.[22] These few examples in American history demonstrate that the Exodus has the potential to be interpreted in vastly different ways and subsequently applied to a wide variety of causes which are often diametrically opposed to one another. If the reader or interpretive community is responsible for determining meaning in the biblical text according to their individual circumstances, then the Exodus can be used to justify any number of actions, as can be seen throughout history.

Furthermore, there is risk involved depending on how far one takes the example of the Israelites' experience. If one utilizes the Exodus event to support radical revolution to gain freedom from oppression, does that extend to subsequent conquest as it did in Israel's conquest of the land of Canaan? How far does the Exodus model extend in struggles against oppression? In discussing the contradictory and oppressive uses of the Exodus throughout history, Langston notes,

> A subversion of the Exodus paradigm is evident in those who at one time experienced oppression and then went on to become perpetrators of oppression – unless one argues that an exodus inevitably leads to a conquest. From colonial Europeans who came to the Americas fleeing oppression to the Boer Voortrekkers of South Africa to Robert Mugabe's regime in Zimbabwe, the legacy of the exodus has often meant freedom for one group at the expense of another. These transformations illustrate the problems involved in using a biblical paradigm. Simply invoking biblical ideas and stories is not sufficient to demonstrate that a contemporary concept or event is equivalent to a biblical one. While similarities may exist, the differences in subsequent ideas and situations are often overlooked.[23]

Historically, the Exodus has been used not only as a model for revolution but also as a means to oppress other people groups. The multitude of ways in which the Exodus has been interpreted and applied, with sometimes disastrous consequences, highlights the need for both

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[22] Langston, *Exodus, Through the Centuries*, 7.

[23] Ibid., 5–6.

proper interpretation and application of the biblical text. While the Exodus story has the potential to inspire oppressed persons, it also has the potential to be interpreted and applied in a manner that inflicts serious harm on others. Langston shares such sentiments when he notes,

> The appeal of Exodus to oppressed and oppressor alike reflects the book's view of the tenuous and precarious nature of power. Power is not one-sided or one-dimensional; nor is Exodus simply a book pitting good against evil. The thin line between good and evil becomes evident in the use of Exodus, and the power of its ideas makes it a potentially dangerous book. It can bring about great good, but it can also create great evil.[24]

The historical misuses of the Exodus call into question the use of the Exodus as a model for social action and revolution. Moreover, should the Exodus be used as a model for political reform if the Exodus was not primarily a socio-political event as argued throughout this dissertation? As discussed in chapter four, the Israelites were not the agents of their own liberation from Egyptian bondage. The Israelites did not engage in a violent revolt against their taskmasters and Pharoah. It was the actions of Yahweh as the divine suzerain who was responsible for the Israelites' deliverance from bondage and oppression in Egypt. If the historical Exodus was not primarily socio-political in nature, as argued throughout this dissertation, then it may be time to re-think the use of the Exodus as a model for socio-political reform and revolt. As the Exodus narrative continues to be appropriated by modern-day groups, further research into the question of the appropriateness of the Exodus as a model for political and social reform is warranted.

In discussing evangelical reflections on the issues raised by the use of the Exodus event by liberation theology, Carson notes, "But what was seen eventually by a lot of evangelicals who were wrestling with these things was that the exodus account needs to be put within the

[24] Langston, *Exodus Through the Centuries*, 6–7.

framework of the entire biblical storyline, a whole biblical theology. And the ultimate liberation is achieved by that to which the exodus points; namely, Christ himself."[25] The conclusion of this dissertation is that when placed within the overarching biblical storyline, the Exodus shines forth not because of the socio-political elements of the story but because of the part it played in God's redemptive plan. God's actions in liberating the children of Israel foreshadowed the greater liberation that Christ, the promised Messianic seed, would bring to the world, thus demonstrating that the historical Exodus was part of the underlying foundation of God's salvific plan for mankind.

[25] In discussing the importance of viewing the Exodus in relation to the rest of the biblical text, Carson notes, "Otherwise, one can go through the Scripture and pick up a story that seems to fit best by circumstances and merely apply it without further thought without seeing what other stories might apply that seems to run in a different direction. In other words, the stories of Scripture have to be fit within the context of the Bible's storyline itself. Otherwise, we are constantly controlling Scripture by focusing on our situation and then randomly taking passages and applying them to ourselves. So, in this connection, the proper use of exodus is shaped not only by how exodus functions in the Old Testament, but how it is picked up and is completed by what is disclosed in the New Testament." Carson, "Exodus." For a more in-depth analysis of the risks associated with interpreting the biblical text through the lens of personal experience, thereby importing meaning into the biblical text, see "Lived Experience as the Criterion for Biblical Truth," "The Dangers of Lived Experience as a Hermeneutical Approach," and "The Dangers Inherent in Reader-Response Methods of Interpretation" sections in chapter two.

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