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**The Exodus Motif in the Christian Bible**

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# The Exodus Motif in the Christian Bible

*Bryan Estelle*

The book of Exodus and the exodus event are reactualized and recontextualized in subsequent biblical books. Indeed, the Israelites developed a virtual 'exodus grammar' when talking about their liberation from the Egyptians. The New Testament literature appeals to the founding event as well; in fact, of the numerous references in the New Testament to Old, the exodus event is the third most frequently cited, trailing only behind the prophet Isaiah and the Psalms. This is no mere repetition, no base recapitulation. Rather, the exodus event is taken up, transformed, eschatologized, and ultimately repackaged.

**Keywords:** Bible, Israel, Exodus, Moses, Covenant, Eschatology, Intertextuality, Old Testament, New Testament, Allusion, Motif

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# **1 Introduction: the book of Exodus and the exodus motif**

This article will address two goals: first, a discussion of the book of Exodus, with special attention given to the 'Song of the Sea' (15:1–21), and then the use of the exodus motif in the Christian Bible. In recognition of the fact that there are no neutral perspectives, perhaps especially in an area such as this one, this article is written from a conservative Christian viewpoint. This perspective will tend to be more willing than others to affirm the historical accuracy of the biblical account, to be generous in its interpretation of dubious or contentious claims, and to see the biblical books as divinely authoritative. More liberal Christian approaches – as well as secular interpretations or interpretations from other religious perspectives – will be more likely to question the biblical account's accuracy, to seek alternative explanations for miraculous or contentious claims, and to analyse the biblical text as a purely human artefact. Where disagreements are common, it will be endeavoured to make this variety of opinion clear.

The name 'exodus' is a latinized form of the Septuagint's (LXX) *exodus*, and refers to the second book of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible). The book tells the story of the enslavement of the Hebrews in Egypt, of God's miraculous rescue of them and punishment of Egypt through successive plagues, and their escape through the Sea of Reeds from the army of Pharaoh. The end of the book, which recounts the construction of the tabernacle and the journey through the wilderness, prepares the reader for the main themes found in next two books of the Pentateuch, Leviticus, and Numbers. 'Exodus' also refers to a motif, found first in the book of Exodus but then also, as this article will show, throughout the rest of the Bible. The motif, variations notwithstanding, is the basic story of the book of Exodus – miserable enslavement, divine rescue and demonstration of power, a dramatic rescue, and the subsequent journey out of the place of slavery into a wilderness in expectation of arriving in the promised land. The 'exodus grammar' created by the Israelites to talk about their escape from Egypt is reused throughout the Bible to describe other situations.

## **1.1 The structure and content of the book of Exodus**

The main topics in Exodus are the events leading up to the Hebrews' time in Egypt and those following their flight from Egypt. Chapters 1:1–12:36 cover: their time in Egypt, including the birth of Moses and his early life and the conditions in Egypt; the call of Moses by God in the wilderness and his return to Egypt, including the revelation of the 'divine name' (3:14); the audience Moses and Aaron have with Pharaoh; the rejection of the request to let the Hebrews go; and the narratives of the plagues, ending with the climactic slaying of the firstborn. Chapters 12:37–15:21 narrate the events of God's liberation of the Hebrews from the power of the Egyptians. This includes: the institution of the Passover

ritual; the march from Raamses to Succoth; the beginning of the wanderings towards Canaan with a pillar of cloud and fire attending the pilgrims; the safe passage of the Israelites through the Reed Sea and the subsequent drowning of the pursuing Egyptian military force; and the Song of the Sea, a celebration of God's rescue of the Hebrews in the preceding events (Exod 15:1–18, or vv. 1–21, if Miriam's song is included). The Song of the Sea played an important role in the life of the Israelites, and in subsequent reflections in scripture.

The wilderness wanderings, in which the Hebrews are led by the presence of God through the desert before they are allowed to enter the promised land, are narrated in 15:22–18:27. First, there is a shortage of water in the wilderness of Shur, about which the people complain before the undrinkable 'bitter' waters are miraculously cured (15:22–27); then there is a trek through further wilderness into the region of Zin, which occurs one month after the exodus, at which point there is a shortage of food for which God provides manna and quails; again there is a water shortage, this time at Rephidim (17:1–7), which is followed by a war against the Amalekites (17:8–16); this is followed by Moses' father-in-law Jethro's visit to the Hebrews' camp where he advises the creation of a group of tribal elders which will alleviate some of the burden of legal responsibility belonging to Moses (18:1–27); at the end of the wanderings, preparations are made for a theophany, an appearance of God (19:1–25).

The wilderness wanderings (15:22–18:27) have received a significant amount of scholarly attention. Martin Noth (1960: 51) argued that the wilderness theme was not part of the original composition of the Pentateuch. Thomas B. Dozeman (1996) similarly argued that the wilderness/pilgrimage theme was only added later, by editors known in scholarly circles as 'Deuteronomists'. Others read the wilderness/pilgrimage motif as an orderly and unified story, from the beginning of the deliverance out from the land of Egypt to the culmination in the conquest of the land of Canaan.

The Sinai experiences, where God appears to the Hebrews upon Mount Sinai, are narrated in 19:1–40:30. Most important here is the long narrative about the 'inauguration of a covenant between Yahweh and Israel that is mediated by Moses' (Longacre 2022: 8). In chapter 19, the people encamp 'facing the mountain' and preparations are made for the communal theophany. In chapter 20, God gives the Ten Commandments, then the book of the covenant (21:18–23:33), which is a complex series of civil, moral, and ritual laws.

In 24:1–18, the covenant between God and the Hebrews is reaffirmed by the people, and Moses ascends the mountain. There, he receives the two tablets of stone on which the laws are written. Chapters 25:1–31:18 contain a large section describing instructions for the building of the tabernacle, along with instructions to the priest for the maintenance of the rituals. Chapters 32:1–34:35 narrate a scene in which the people, blinded by

idolatry, fashion a golden calf as a 'god', risking God's punitive anger until Moses acts as a mediator and the covenant is renewed. The tabernacle is then erected, according to the detailed directions (35:1–40:34). Finally, a short epilogue ensues (40:36–38) which describes God's continued protecting presence with the Israelites during their journeys towards the promised land.

## **1.2 The central role of the Song of the Sea**

The structure of the book of Exodus is reflected in the Song of the Sea (Exod 15:1–21). The first half of the book narrates the many ways in which God exercised his strength to free his people from Egyptian tyranny, through the leadership of Moses. Then, in Exodus 19–40, Israel's Sinai sojourn is a meticulously organized textual unit that culminates with the descent of the spirit of God upon the tabernacle. The triumph hymn, known as the 'Song of the Sea' (Exod 15:1–18, or vv. 1–21, if Miriam's song is included), has been considered by many biblical scholars to be the very centre of the book (Cross 1973; Smith 2014: 496–514). The Song of the Sea reflects a backward-looking and forward-looking structure in its centralizing function: verses 1–12 and 19–21 reflect back on the events surrounding Israel's liberation from the Egyptians, and verses 13–18 anticipate the pilgrimage through the wilderness (Russell 2007: 45–55). In this way, the Song of the Sea reflects the whole book of Exodus. Additionally, some important themes are introduced in the Song.

First, the goal for God's newly freed people is to reach the holy abode of God (Exod 15:13, 17). In the Song itself, this was probably originally conceived as Mount Sinai, but its meaning is extended in other biblical books to be inclusive of other Yahwistic shrines. For example, it was later adapted to mean Gilgal in Joshua 3–5, then later still the poet of Psalm 78 would understand it to refer to Shiloh, and even Jerusalem, or Zion.

Secondly, there are only two places where God is referred to as a warrior in the Hebrew Bible: Exod 15:3 and Isa 42:13. This theme of God as warrior is related to the theme of God as king (Longman and Reid 1995). Incorporated in this larger divine warrior theme is a subtheme called the 'combat myth', which is pervasive throughout the Bible. A common pattern is visible in texts from the ancient Near East (ANE), and in the Bible: some force, such as a monster or tyrant (variously called 'the Sea', Death, Leviathan, or Tannin), threatens the cosmic and political order. The forces of chaos (often represented by the waters) are defeated by the divine warrior and created order is restored, after which the king or divine warrior takes his throne on the mountain and builds his palace. This theme is pervasive in the Psalms and the Prophets, and also extends into apocalyptic literature. In another example of connections between ANE literature and the Bible, there is some kind of relationship between the laws given by God at Sinai and the code of the Laws of

Hammurabi, though what precisely that relationship is has become a focus of debate in biblical studies (Wright 2009; and articles in *Maarav* 24.1–2 [2020]: 85–136).

The third important theme introduced in Exodus is the wilderness or pilgrimage theme. This wilderness/pilgrimage theme emphasizes the important state of ‘betweenness’ memorialized by the Jewish people in the festival of Sukkot, also known as the Festival of Booths. But it also becomes a strong trigger for subsequent biblical books which reflect backwards upon the exodus motif (Mauser 1963). Thus, based on subsequent reflections throughout the Bible, when this article refers to the exodus event it has in view not merely the liberation from Egypt but the wilderness wanderings all the way up into the entrance of the land of Canaan.

Finally, it should be noted that the many archaic features of the poem lead several scholars to think that a reasonable date for the Song of the Sea is the twelfth century BCE, although there continues to be a lively debate (Smith 2014). One reason to prefer an earlier date is that the Song of the Sea (and the exodus motif) reverberate in the subsequent books of the Bible, suggesting that the Song and the motif are known to the writers of these texts.

### **1.3 Composition of Exodus and historicity of the event**

The final form of the book of Exodus has forty chapters. Most scholars think that the end-product was the result of centuries of composition, and it is still common to divide up the existing text of Exodus by means of the classic ‘documentary hypothesis’, which claimed three different strands of pre-existing material identifiable through diverse literary genres and topics, doublets, apparent inconsistencies, and interpolations (Driver 1913: 22–42). In recent times, this model has undergone many revisions in the study of the book of Exodus, with attempts to subdivide sources and even discover new ones (Sarna 1992).

Trying to discern the historical accuracy of the Exodus account is not easy, partly because the ‘meaning of history’ is a complex and difficult question for biblical scholars. In mainstream biblical studies, scepticism about the historical reliability of the biblical stories is common. This collapse of confidence in historical reality of the biblical story has challenged believers’ understanding of the biblical text and of major salvation events like the exodus (Perdue 1994: 40–41). Many archaeologists have come to the consensus that the exodus and the conquest of Canaan are not truly historical events, and have consequently given up efforts to recover material that would verify such events (Banks 2006: 213–214). One example of this is William G. Dever, who has been one of the main critics of the movement of ‘historical minimalism’ which questions the historicity of ancient Israel as recorded in the Bible. Alongside this critical attitude towards extremely sceptical approaches, Dever also questions the historical veracity of the exodus from Egypt. He writes that there is little actual history in the books of Exodus and Numbers, although there



may be some vague memories of actual events: 'the miraculous, larger-than-life story of the Exodus as it now stands in the Bible cannot be corroborated as factual history' (Dever 2003: 232). Nevertheless, not all scholars have gone in this direction (Hoffmeier 1996; Provan, Longman and Long 2003: 125–137; Longman 2009: 50–92; Hoffmeier, Millard and Rendsberg 2016).

Some scholars have suggested that the accounts in the Bible – and the exodus event in particular – are *remembered* history. Ronald Hendel is a good example of this approach (see also Davies 2008: 105–123). For Hendel, the plague narratives may reflect collective memories of real plagues during the period of the Egyptian empire. Indeed, he notes that there is ample evidence for a devastating outbreak of disease during this era (Hendel 2001: 610). Hendel then traces several extra-biblical records, including letters from Byblos, Megiddo, Ugarit, Hittite, and Egyptian Royal Inscriptions, to support his point. This has been called 'mnemohistory' (Hendel 2001: 603). Hendel is alluding to the term used by Egyptologist Jan Assman (1997). However, Hendel's view is not entirely sceptical, for he says:

The memory of the exodus is not just a memory of historical events, but a conflation of history and memory that suits the conditions of different qualities of time. To view the exodus with an eye to only one of these – whether to historical events, social functions, or enduring themes – is to misjudge the complexity and multiplicity of the whole. (Hendel 2001: 622)

Even a maximalist (one who argues for a large overlap between the biblical account and actual history), like K. A. Kitchen, concedes the point of complexity in history writing when he asks, 'How, then, shall we regard the Exodus? The foregoing survey indicates the nature of the available background. None of it can prove that the Exodus took place, or as narrated' (Kitchen 1992: 707). While this may be true, it is also the case, as Nahum Sarna says, that '[i]t should be stressed that neither the theocentric nature of the biblical presentation nor the hypothetical lateness of the sources used would necessarily preclude the possibility that they may rest on a sound historical foundation' (Sarna 1992: 696). In other words, neither a neutral perspective nor a conclusive consensus is possible.

## **1.4 Prolegomena: key themes/definitions and allusion competence**

A motif in biblical literature is similar to a musical theme, but it accomplishes more. Generally speaking, the Bible is not inclined to make abstract claims but rather communicates using narrative. Although the original motif may be rooted in an historical situation, a biblical motif represents the original occurrence literarily, without merely

reiterating it. It functions as a kind of repristination of the original situation, with a view towards a heightened or intensified representation (Talmon 1993: 225–226).

The term ‘intertextuality’ was first coined by Julia Kristeva (b. 1941), whose goal was to mediate the ideas of the Russian literary thinker Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975). Bakhtin, and Kristeva after him, were concerned to emphasize that a number of influences (cultural influences, previous and contemporary texts under consideration) inform our understanding of what a text means. Intertextual allusion can be broken down into four different categories: *direct quotation*, *subtle citation*, *allusion*, and *echoes*. This article is focusing on allusions to the exodus, meaning not just deliverance out of Egypt, and the wilderness wanderings, but also entry into the promised land.

Quotation has been the category or term that has been primarily recognized and discussed in scriptural intertextuality and inner-biblical studies. A quotation usually contains some kind of citation formula (e.g. ‘it is written’ or ‘for’). It may be defined ‘as a passage that reproduces a portion of text with a degree of verbal similarity and minimal contextual modification’ (Marcar 2022: 164). By contrast, a ‘subtle citation’ is a quotation that does not have an introductory formula. This category may encompass a fairly literal citation without an introductory formula, or even suggest a citation, with some alteration of the word order of the cited text.

An allusion is usually defined as a tacit or indirect reference to another text. Allusions are usually more fragmentary or periphrastic (i.e. paraphrasing) than quotations. Allusions in general merely make indirect reference to known facts. Literary allusion is an activation of two texts. Most literary theorists today would maintain that allusions are intentionally made by an author or narrator.

Echo is the last important concept, if also the most abstract (Porter 2006: 109). Some maintain that echoes are less explicit than allusions, just as allusions are less explicit than quotations – whether subtle or direct (Beetham 2008: 20). However, the discussion of these categories has moved beyond explicit versus implicit towards intertextual relational categories, which are not relevant to this discussion.

## **2 The past is prologue: creation and exodus**

The exodus out of Egypt is one of the great stories of the liberation of a downtrodden captive people. The tyrant Pharaoh gets his comeuppance and the true king, Israel’s God, takes his rightful throne after winning back his people. Not just an earthly battle, this victory occurs along cosmological lines: it is actually a work of new creation (Morales 2012: 195). It is also construed along legal lines (Daube 1963) and relational lines: God is the great King, and Israel will become his subjects in a special covenantal arrangement.

Moreover, the goal is not merely to achieve God's presence with his people, it is also to place his people in the promised land (see Exod 6:6–8, which is a veritable programmatic statement). In many respects this recapitulates the original objective at creation: just as the anticipated goal in the garden of Eden was for a people to be confirmed in holiness and dwell in confirmed righteousness with God, so also now the anticipated goal of the exodus event is the deliverance of a people with the ultimate objective of planting them in the land of Canaan as their home. Their recalcitrant disobedience to God, once in that land, rendered the land forfeit: the ultimate punishment was exile. God graciously restored his people to the land, but that did not meet the expectations set by the words of the prophets. The final anticipated goal, according to the New Testament book of Hebrews (cf. Heb 3–4), was to encompass something even greater than Canaan. There are also more specific individual connections between Exodus and the creation stories, as Moses becomes a new Adam figure: whereas Adam was barred from communion with God at the glory-filled summit of the garden of Eden, and consequently descended the mountain in the garden, Moses is the great ascender who enters the 'new paradisaical Presence of God' (Morales 2012: 246).

### **3 The exodus motif in the historical books**

Alastair Roberts and Andrew Wilson have argued that there are echoes of the exodus motif in Joshua, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings (Roberts and Wilson 2019). In Ruth, they claim that the hoped-for results of the exodus (entry into the land) have gone awry. Although the ark is captured by the enemies of Israel (the Philistines), the book ends – they claim – where exodus stories often do, 'with the successful conquest of the Land and the driving out of God's enemies' (2019: 90–91). In 1 Samuel through 2 Samuel 24, they argue that the figure of David provides messianic hope in ways reminiscent of the exodus, especially the hope for building of the house of God. Furthermore, they argue that the end of the exodus occurs with the downfall of the monarchy and the destruction of the kingdom; however, there is hope for an answer to this chaotic destruction: God will raise up a 'mini-Moses' and a prophet from Judah, namely a messiah-king six hundred years after Josiah (2019: 102).

### **4 The exodus motif in the Psalms**

C. S. Lewis, in a book called *Reflection on the Psalms*, wrote: 'If any writer may say more than he knows and mean more than he meant, then these writers will be especially likely to do so. And not by accident' (Lewis 1958: 116–117). This is precisely what the Psalter does with the exodus motif. In this section of the article, some examples will be given from the Psalter.

#### **4.1 Book 1: Psalm 23**

Psalm 23 is one of the best-known psalms. Veiled to a thin reading, a rereading of this psalm uncovers that it too makes use of the exodus motif. Although the psalm lacks a direct reference to the exodus motif, scholars have demonstrated that the new-exodus theme is recognizable there (Freedman 1976; Barre and Kselman 1983). David Noel Freedman had noted the significance of the verb 'to pursue' in 23:6. Here and elsewhere in the Bible, that word is intended to communicate divine accompaniment (Freedman 1976). Michael L. Barre and John S. Kselman, building on Freedman's work, note further that the language of 'goodness and mercy' in 23:6 is new-covenant language that demonstrates a reversal of the covenant curses laid out in Deuteronomy 28 (Barre and Kselman 1983: 104–107). In addition to other evidence from the ANE, they argue that the psalm has to do with a new exodus, a new march through the wilderness, and ultimately a new covenant. The psalm's ultimate goal is settlement in the land of promise. In the canonical context, this means the final outcome is hope for renewed settlement in the world-to-come with renewed relationship with God.

## **4.2 Book 3: Psalms of Asaph**

One theme that unifies many of the Asaphic Psalms is that Israel's sacred history is repeated again and again. This is especially the case with Psalms 74, 77, 78, 80, and 81 (Ackerman 1966). It is clear that some of these Asaphite Psalms and the Song of the Sea are clearly moving in the same orbit in the use of similar vocabulary and conceptions. It has been argued by Brian Russell (2007: 113–130) that the Song of the Sea is the source text for the Asaphites. It may be that the Asaphic Psalms, which reflect an exodus influence, are doing so because the question of divine silence and absence receives a partial answer in continual recitation of God's past deeds, especially the exodus tradition (Burnett 2005: 215–235, especially 232–233). The recalling of mighty deeds performed by God could create an awareness of present divine absence, but could also elicit a movement to ask for God's presence and actually create an anticipation of divine presence. As examples, this article will consider Psalms 77 and 78.

It does not seem that Psalm 77 uses the exodus tradition in any obvious manner (Gillingham 1999: 31). The first half of the psalm presents a lament, while the latter half moves in the direction of a hymn (Barre and Kselman 1983: 51–58). The influence of the exodus in the lament section of the Psalms is often neglected (Stevenson 1997: 227), and it is best to view the psalm as an organic whole, the product of a single poet drawing on the book of exodus (Barre and Kselman 1983: 57). In the first half of the psalm, the psalmist remembers the wondrous deeds of the past; however, in verses 7–10, at the very heart of the lament, the psalmist wonders if God has forgotten to show his mercy and power in the present circumstances (verse 10). Then, in verses 11–20, the tone changes as events are described from the perspective of the victory hymn (the Song of the Sea, Exod 15) in verses 11–20. Here one can find many dictional links between the words of the

psalmist and the Song of the Sea. Ironically, the presence of God recedes here, through what is called the dry-shod motif (cf. 77:19). Although God's path lead through the sea, his footprints were not seen.

Psalms 78 'offers the most explicit combination of the exodus and David/Zion tradition in the Psalter' (Gillingham 1999: 30). Compare 78:13, for example, with Exod 15:8, or 78:14 with Exod 14:19–20. Psalm 78 is thick with irony throughout: though God has been constantly gracious to his people by protecting them and blessing them, yet they have failed to serve him (especially verse 32).

### **4.3 Book 4: Psalms 104–106**

Psalms 105 and 106 complement and balance each other as historical psalms. Psalm 105 tells the story of Israel's redemption, and its tone is basically positive, while Psalm 106 emphasizes the constant rebellion on the part of Israel. In Psalm 105, the exodus motif is prominent, especially with the history of the plagues (albeit in a different order). God's covenantal faithfulness is recorded in order to awaken new obedience (Kraus 1989: 312). Psalm 106 picks up where Psalm 105 left off, and verses 7–12 have the longest treatment of the exodus tradition in the entire Psalter (Allen 1983: 49). Psalm 106, in contrast to 105, has a tone of constant admonishment, and the priest Phineas who punished sinful Israelites is presented as a model of piety in verses 28–31.

### **4.4 Book 5: Psalms 114 and 118**

Psalms 114 and 118 begin and end with a formula called the *Hallel*, and were sung during the celebration of Passover. Psalm 114 begins with 'When Israel came out of Egypt', clearly placing it in the ambit of the exodus. In this psalm, God is portrayed as one who subdues the chaotic waters, which are personified. The psalm then invokes the creation to rejoice at the victory.

In Psalm 118, there are straightforward references again to the exodus event. This psalm's genre is a gate liturgy, and its likely original context was entering the temple and proceeding to the altar in order to give thanks to God for a military victory (Brunson 2003). There are clear references here to the Song of the Sea (compare Exod 15:6 with Ps 118:16). There are as many as thirty-five citations or allusions to Psalm 118 in the New Testament, and especially significant is the reference to Psalm 118 in John's Gospel (12:12–19), in his description of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, shortly before his death.

## **5 The exodus motif in Isaiah and the introduction of the Isaianic new exodus (INE)**

The book of Isaiah, especially chapters 40–55, provides a bridge between the exodus motif as developed in the Hebrew Bible and as it appears in the New Testament. As Claus Westermann says, ‘The place which Deutero-Isaiah gives to the Exodus is so conspicuous that all the other events in Israel’s history recede into the background’ (Westermann 1969: 22). In the passages that follow, this new development of the exodus motif will be referred to as the ‘Isaianic new exodus’, or INE. Fundamental to the INE in these chapters is the prophet’s use of the ‘way’ (mostly the Hebrew word *derek*) motif and its relation to the INE. Here, the original exodus has become the means for encouraging the Jews exiled in Babylon: the same God who acted powerfully in the first exodus will now powerfully perform a new ‘way’ in rescuing the exilic community; however, he will provide a way through the desert – not through the Sea – to return to the promised land.

## 5.1 Isaiah 40–55

Isaiah 40:1–11 plays a paradigmatic role for the rest of the passages describing the INE. Here, God prepares a royal road through the desert, verse 3 says: ‘A voice rings out: “Clear in the desert a road for the Lord! Level in the wilderness a highway for our God!”’

Isaiah 41:17–20 is a trial scene. Here, salvation is clothed in exodus garb. Just as God had led his people through the desert by Moses, now he will enact a second exodus which will end Israel’s distress. Creation language is used here to signify that this exodus will be another creation; the exodus theme is ‘eschatologized’ (projected forwards into the future) since a new creation will emerge through a transformation of the wilderness.

Isaiah 42:14–17 reiterates similar themes but now God is portrayed as a warrior (verse 13). Here, figurative allusions to the exodus abound but, rather than simply referring backwards, they suggest a forward-looking anticipation of a new exodus. God will lead his people along new ways (*derek*) they have not known, enabling them to walk the obedient path.

Isaiah 43:1–7 also abounds in creation language, as God delivers through waters and fire, a literary merism (opposites used to express totality, like ‘heaven and earth’ as shorthand for all creation). There are references here to the original exodus out of Egypt; however, rather than being simple references to past events, these instances expand the original events: now, people from all nations – not just the Israelites – will be gathered by God.

Isaiah 43:14–21 is one of the most significant of INE passages: God will provide a way back through the sea and the desert to usher in a new creation. This is expressed in paradisiacal terms, and clearly has the exodus in view. Here, the former things are compared to the future things that God intends to do: the past becomes a solid encouragement for hope in the future. In the process, God will tame unruly forces.

Isaiah 48:15–21 extends the exodus motif further: the prophet urgently exhorts the people to leave Babylon, in a departure patterned after (and using much of the same vocabulary from) the original exodus event. This is legal terminology, as the Lord almighty is a king who releases and liberates his ransomed people. The author looks back not just to the exodus but also to creation. This passage serves as a literary foil to Isaiah 49, which is the beginning of the so-called servant songs.

Isaiah 49:6–13 marks a major turn in the rhetoric of the exodus motif. Whereas chapter 48 focused on Israel's rebellion, this chapter begins to focus on the call and commission of a faithful servant. Again, the servant is like a new Moses, providing deliverance through a new exodus; however, in this passage God is portrayed as gathering his people from the farthest reaches of the world. This 'servant-prophet' will be a light to the nations (49:6).

Isaiah 51:9–11 continues the theme of the divine warrior conquering cosmic and human adversaries. 'Rahab' (*rahab*) is used as a poetic name for Egypt here and in Ps 87:4. The sea serpent (*tannin*) here and in Exodus figuratively embodies evil powers against which the divine warrior displayed powerful liberating freedom in the past for God's people, and the divine warrior can do likewise again in their present plight.

Isaiah 52:11–12 shows clear dictional links to Isaiah 48, and both passages recall the exodus event. In Isa 52:12, there is a clear textual link to Exodus 12, since the same word 'in haste' echoes Exod 12:11. However, there is also a clear contrast between the two passages: the Israelites coming out of Egypt had to eat the Lord's Passover 'in haste' but the exiles are told that they will not have to depart 'in haste'. In this second exodus it is the Lord himself (Isa 52:12) who will lead them (cf. Isa 63:8–9).

Isaiah 55:6–13 forms the conclusion to the Book of Consolation (chapters 40–55) in which the INE is seen. This section provides a grand climax to the INE, and makes frequent use of *derek* ('way') to provide a contrast between God's ways and Israel's ways. The pinnacle of this section, in verses 12–13, focuses on the second exodus. But this passage also shows an undoing of the conditional elements attached to the Sinaitic covenant which was so intimately connected with the first exodus event: this second exodus will be accomplished apart from mere human efforts. Isaiah 55:5, 'For the sake of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel who has glorified you', signals that God alone will accomplish what the Israelites were unable to do. As Westermann says, '[t]he covenant is altogether an act of God's grace towards Israel; there is no suggestion of Israel's being laid under any obligation' (1969: 285). The result will be creation itself breaking forth in praise so that nature itself will exult in festal celebration.

## **6 The exodus motif in the exile and post-exilic period**

## 6.1 Jeremiah

Jeremiah, known as the 'weeping prophet', who reveals his inner anguish perhaps more than any prophet, is a good example of how the books of the biblical prophets contain links to the exodus. Jeremiah 23 is a pertinent example of the Lord's promise to replace bad shepherds (i.e. leaders) with good ones (see especially 23:4–8). In Jeremiah's famous passages on consolation (especially in chapters 30–33), the readers will note how Jeremiah promises a new covenant in the future that will be better than the old Sinaitic covenant which the people persistently break (see especially 31:31–34). These categories all are drawn from the exodus event and Moses, but that first redemption is here emerging into a future redemption that far outstrips the former. Jeremiah extends this retrospective use of exodus-salvation language to reach beyond the old exodus to include an implied return in a second exodus (Bellis 2001).

## 6.2 Ezekiel

Ezekiel, like his contemporary Jeremiah, also develops many themes of the exodus (Idestrom 2009: 489–510), and many parallels may be drawn between Moses and Ezekiel (DeLapp 2014: 56–60). Reading the book of Exodus alongside the book of Ezekiel may bring to light many citations and allusions, especially given the frequency of the use of the so-called 'recognition' formula (i.e. 'that they may know that I am the Lord') in both books (cf. Evans 2006).

Throughout Exodus, as well as Ezekiel, divine action in judgment and salvation lead to a knowledge of God. In fact, a second exodus motif is introduced in Ezek 11:14–21. The central concern is with the exiles; God says that he will stand in for them during the exile, to be what the temple had previously been for God's people (Block 1997: 346). However, it is especially Ezekiel 20 that brings together two concepts: a new exodus promise, and a theme of covenant renewal (Idestrom 2009: 500). Here, as Walther Zimmerli recognized, 'the tradition of the exodus dominates the theology [of the chapter]' (Zimmerli 1979: 41). Michael Fishbane observed that the sarcastic use of the exodus motif in chapter 20 was not lost on the first audience (Fishbane 1979: 133).

## 6.3 Ezra-Nehemiah

Assigning a firm date to Ezra-Nehemiah is a controverted and difficult topic, let alone discerning their chronological relationship to one another. Nevertheless, one needs to understand the message and missions of Ezra and Nehemiah against the backdrop of Achaemenid imperial history. From the beginning of the book of Ezra, the language of the people 'going up from Babylon to Jerusalem' is deliberately meant to echo being 'brought up from the land of Egypt' and viewing the restoration from exile as a kind of second exodus (Williamson 1985: 111). As K. Koch has demonstrated, 'Ezra's march



from Babylonia to Jerusalem was a cultic procession which Ezra understood as a second Exodus and partial fulfillment of prophetic expectation' (Koch 1974: 84), though this action was 'a sign of a coming fulfillment and not the eschatological fulfillment itself' (1974: 201).

Nehemiah 9, the theological high point of the two books, is a masterpiece of inner-biblical exegesis, encapsulating what this article has described as the essence of the exodus motif: liberation from Egypt, wilderness wanderings up to Sinai and beyond, and finally crossing into the promised land. The prayer demonstrates that the remembrance of the exodus is wholly integrated into the thought and writing of later biblical authors.

## **7 Exodus in the Second Temple period and the introduction of the new exodus in New Testament theology**

During the Second Temple period, the transmission and reception of the book of Exodus was rich and complex. (Longacre 2022). For example, nineteen copies of parts of Exodus have been recovered from the Judean Desert at Qumran, all fragmentary (published in the Judean Desert series [DJD] by Oxford University Press; see the table in Longacre 2022: 15). Given this widespread availability, and the influence of the book of Exodus on the Hebrew Bible, it is no surprise that, in the New Testament, the 'exodus and new exodus' grammar is applied to the burgeoning church. As Augustine Stock explains:

The coming of Jesus is the new definitive Exodus – this is the burden of the Gospels' message. The New Testament used the Exodus, the decisive divine act of the Old Testament period, to set forth its own meaning. It remained for St. Luke and other later writings of the New Testament to apply the usage to the period of the Church. The Church itself is explained by the Exodus theology and other still more vivid usages of the Exodus theology are elaborated. (Stock 1969: 48)

### **7.1 Mark and Matthew**

As Richard Hays has written, the 'full impact of Mark's Christology can be discerned only when we attend to the *poetics of allusion* imbedded in Mark's intertextual strategy' (Hays 2014: 28). In Mark's prologue, the wilderness theme becomes a unifying theme (Mauser 1963). This prologue provides the framework for interpreting the entirety of Mark's Gospel. The baptism of Jesus, with the heavenly voice breaking through from heaven proclaiming the Father's approbation, demonstrates that Jesus is the true son of Israel who will fulfil all righteousness, thus fulfilling the INE of the latter part of Isaiah the prophet: Jesus is the true Israel. He is the one who is 'called-proven-obedient' (Thompson 1960: 1–12). M. G. Kline (1975) argued previously that the gospel genre had its origin in the exodus motif and, given the many subsequent studies that proved this point, the claim was prescient.

Nevertheless, more recent studies have pushed back on this notion (Brown 2022: 32). Jeannine K. Brown also demonstrates that care should be exercised not to claim too quickly that Jesus is the new and better Moses – Israel, or a complex intertwining of Israel and Moses, may instead be behind the typology in Matthew’s Gospel (Brown 2022). It may be that Mark’s ‘way theme’ in Mark 8:27–10:52 is meant to be a cohesive section demonstrating the fulfilment of the INE.

There is good reason for the canonical position Matthew holds: he intends to write the concluding chapter of the complex Hebrew Bible with which he was intimately familiar (Kennedy 2008). In many respects, Matthew’s use of the exodus motif is meant to show that the ministry of Jesus is a recapitulation of the history of Adam in the garden, but also re-exhibition of the history of Israel (see Beale 2011; Crowe 2012). Matthew 2:15 quotes Hos 11:1: ‘Out of Egypt I have called my son’. Significantly, Matthew does not follow the Greek Septuagint reading but rather a tradition that seems to follow more closely the Hebrew Masoretic text: instead of saying, ‘Out of Egypt have I called *his children*’ (*ta tekna autou*), Matthew says ‘I have called *my son*’ (*ton huion mou*). Matthew transcends the choice between the corporate son or the individual: the manner in which Hosea had expressed himself puts theological pressure on Matthew’s construal. Here it is observed that the original words of Hosea are tethered to the exodus story through the calling of a person belonging to God out of Egypt, and so the latter parts of history are unified with the earlier (Beale 2012: 710). Moreover, it is clear that Jesus undergoes his own temptation in the wilderness, an experience echoing that of Moses on top of Mount Pisgah in the Nebo tradition (Allison 1993: 166). Thus, the second exodus outstrips the first, just as Jesus – the second Moses – does with regard to the ministry of Moses himself. Recent studies relying on the rabbinic document *m. ’Abot* have noted the importance of the number ten with connections between the ten plagues in Exodus and the ten wonders of the messianic age (Brown 2022: 37).

## **7.2 Luke/Acts**

In Luke’s two-part work (Luke/Acts), he picks up and develops the ‘way’ terminology from Isaiah (*derek* in Hebrew, *hodos* in Greek). In the book of Acts, it takes on a technical meaning as a name for the early burgeoning movement of Christianity. Luke uses the passage discussed above (Isa 40:3–5) to announce Jesus as the new exodus, then the temptation narrative in Luke 4 and the programmatic sermon of Jesus found there (4:18–19) also demonstrate that Jesus has come to fulfil the new exodus. Additionally, the transfiguration scene of Luke 9 (especially verses 31 and 51), in which Jesus speaks with Moses and Elijah about his own exodus (*exodon* in Greek), is not only a comment about his imminent departure. Rather, Jesus sets his resolve towards Jerusalem in order to demonstrate that he is bringing a deep, spiritual salvation: liberation from the bondage of Satan and sin and release from the curse of death. Or, as Brian Tabb and Steve Walton

assert, it 'is not his journey to Jerusalem but more likely denotes his "departure" from this world at death and subsequent ascension (cf., v. 51)' (2022: 67). The number of allusions and clear quotations in Acts to the book of Exodus is striking. As Tabb and Walton also note, the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament 'identifies twelve quotations plus 32 allusions and verbal parallels, which is more both numerically and proportionately than any other NT [New Testament] book' (Tabb and Walton 2022: 72), and these scholars also compare dictional links between Stephen's speech in Acts 7 and language from Exodus (2022: 75–83).

### 7.3 John

John's Gospel is unique among the gospel accounts. As stated by Christopher R. Seitz, 'John is not a single Gospel only but a Gospel in a distinct literary position – vis-à-vis the three preceding Gospels' (Seitz 2001: 91–94). Mauser (1963) finds hardly any exodus themes in John, but T. Francis Glasson sees frequent references to the exodus themes in John's Gospel, with increasing attention paid to Jesus in terms of a new exodus (Glasson 1963: 10). Glasson argues that a reader must be willing to follow up on hints and pointers, a more poetic and subtle way of evoking OT images (1963: 36). As Hays puts it, this is John's tendency for 'low-volume' scriptural allusions (2016: 293–294). A robust view of the unfolding influence of the exodus theme on John's Gospel is presented in a recent study by Andreas J. Köstenberger (2022: 88). As Hays eloquently states:

If Luke is the master of the deft, fleeting allusion, John is the master of the carefully framed, luminous image that shines brilliantly against a dark canvas and lingers in the imagination. (Hays 2016: 284)

Köstenberger defends the position that Jesus is the typological fulfilment of the bronze serpent in the wilderness during the exodus (Köstenberger 2022: 93–96). Stock had described the same fulfilment (Stock 1969: 117–118), and Köstenberger contends that Jesus' body is the typological fulfilment of the manna in the wilderness (Köstenberger 2022: 97–100). Jesus is also identified as the 'I Am' who was revealed to Moses in the wilderness (2022: 101), and is presented by John as the one who fulfils the Passover (2022: 106). Stock had already noted that the imagery of 'the lamb of God' appears in various places in John (e.g. John 1:29, 35), and the source of the imagery seems to be the Servant of the Lord passages (e.g. Isa 53), and Passover symbolism (Stock 1969: 112–113). According to John, Jesus is crucified at the same time the Passover is being offered in Jerusalem. However, something occurring on the occasion of a significant ritual is not the same as that thing being the fulfilment of that ritual. Jesus is not merely the fulfilment of the Passover but of the entire sacrificial system by his perfect oblation and merit (contra Morales 2020: 160).

For John, dictional and conceptual links to the exodus are not merely quotation or allusion – they are representative of the whole state of mind created by these Old Testament texts on John’s audience (Morgan 1956: 28). For example, although there is only one unequivocal citation of Psalm 118 in John, Andrew Brunson argues that the psalm is more extensive in its influence than has been previously recognized (Brunson 2003: 21), and that when John does allude to the psalm, he intends to send the reader back not merely to the verses cited but the entire psalm (2003: 186–187). John’s use of the psalm is more subtle than the other gospels in the way he engages with it (2003: 397). The deeds and words of Jesus are intended to demonstrate that the proclamation of salvation, the sacrificial system, the formation of a new people of God, the end of exile, all the signs and works together ‘announced that a new exodus would take place in his own person and ministry’ (2003: 380). A careful analysis of John’s use of the psalm indicates that he believes that a radical reinterpretation of what the messiah is and has done is necessary, allowing a ‘complete identification of Jesus with Yahweh in the Johannine New Exodus’ (2003: 387–388).

For John’s Gospel, all the Old Testament types and shadows, especially the use of each reference to the festivals of the Old Testament, find their realization in the person and work of Christ (Brunson 2003: 45): Jesus is the true feast of tabernacles (2003: 121–125; Stock 1969: 129–30), the pillar of fire (Stock 1969: 133), the fulfilment of the feast of dedication (Morgan 1956: 46–49), and even Yahweh himself, as seen in many subtle allusions to the divine name revealed in the Old Testament (Stock 1969: 141–142). John’s prologue could be called a recapitulation of the Old Testament (Stock 1969: 139), the very purpose of the Hebrew foundations of the Logos (1969: 53).

## 7.4 Paul

Paul and his writings were undoubtedly influenced by the story of Israel, particularly the exodus event itself, the Isaianic new exodus, and their subsequent iterations in the literature of Israel.

The exodus event also informs Paul’s claims in Galatians (Scott 1992; Morales 2010). For David M. Westfall, Paul’s most explicit use of the exodus theme in Galatians serves a ‘decidedly negative purpose, substantiating his claim that God’s promises to Abraham drastically relativizes the Torah’s place in God’s redemptive economy’ (Westfall 2022: 110). Paul is concerned about his beloved Galatians returning to a form of slavery (4:1–7), and therefore, as Westfall notes, Paul’s appropriation of the exodus story ironically turns a

central theme of its source material on its head: whereas in Exodus, God’s covenant with Israel at Sinai is the sequel to Israel’s redemption *from* slavery, the narrative goal toward

which they journey *out* of their servitude, in Paul's implied narrative Sinai represents the narrative point of entry *into* slavery of a new kind. (Westfall 2022: 112, original emphasis)

William David Davies has demonstrated the influence of the exodus event on 1 Cor 10:1–10 (see Evans and Talmon 1997: 444–445). Through a remarkable pivot, Paul's christocentric reading strategy allows him to achieve 'admonitory purposes', and provides him with the opportunity to 'establish a remarkable degree of continuity between the exodus generation and the Corinthians' (Westfall 2022: 114). The exodus backdrop is also written large all over the book of Romans, especially 8:14–23, where the new exodus is pronounced, even if only in the underlying 'backstory' (according to Wright 2008; 2016). Westfall has argued that, in Romans 9–11, the book of Exodus – particularly the golden calf episode of chapters 32–34 – gives Paul 'the canvas on which to paint his sobering analysis of Israel's spiritual condition as well as his hope for their future' (Westfall 2022: 122–126).

## 7.5 The Petrine Epistles

In 1 Pet 1:13–21, Peter describes the scene in exodus terms. In verses 22–25, he claims that demonstrable acts of love must follow in the lives of those who have placed their hope in the new exodus redemption. In the second chapter (2:9–10), which has been called the 'fundamental indicative for the entire epistle' (Pryor 1986: 3), Peter says that Christians are living stones, built into a spiritual house. Katie Marcar has noted that this section of the epistle is 'the theological crescendo of the letter' (Marcar 2022: 176). Peter makes a subtle citation of significant passages from Exodus and Hosea, creating an intertext that would have caught his audience's ear, to make the simple and yet profound point that Christians are now the new people of God. Peter also alludes here to the Isaiah passage already commented on above (Isa 43:20–21). He is also simultaneously citing Hos 2:23 (a passage in which the exodus motif is present): 'But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people [...] Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people.'

## 7.6 Hebrews

The exodus motif is used in Hebrews more subtly than many other biblical books. There are only two clear citations from the book of Exodus, but the exodus event plays a major role for the author's theological reasoning (see Moffitt 2022: 146–163).

The first explicit reference is the Heb 8:5b citation of Exod 25:40 (LXX); here, the differences between the two texts are very minor. The second explicit reference is the Heb 9:20 citation of Exod 24:8b (LXX), where the relationship between the two texts is more complex (Moffitt 2022: 150). Aside from explicit citations, the book of Hebrews is

in some ways unique in how it treats the exodus motif in comparison with the rest of the Bible (Stuart 1973). In numerous verses in Hebrews, the exodus is presupposed but not explicitly mentioned (Stuart 1973: 59–62). If the recipients of this letter (or sermon) had a knowledge of sacred Israelite history, we ‘may assume that as soon as the author alluded or referred directly to any part of the history recorded in the OT, it was understood and placed in the correct historical setting’ (Kistemaker 1961: 114). The writer of Hebrews uses the exodus as a foundation of his presentation (Kistemaker 1961: 151). In chapters 3–4, the disobedience of the wilderness generation of the exodus becomes universalized, and ‘the disobedience and failure of that generation became likened to the disobedience and failure of any generation’ (Kistemaker 1961: 153). As Moffitt has contested, the ‘[e]xodus provides narrative elements that help to structure the main contours of the author’s argument, particularly in the first four chapters of Hebrews’ (Moffitt 2022: 147).

For example, Heb 3:1–6 is an allusion to Num 12:1–7 (especially verse 7), the story in which Aaron and Miriam became jealous of Moses and God rebukes them. These factors ‘all suggest that Exodus plays a foundational role in give narrative form and shape to the author’s theological reflection of what Jesus has done for God’s people’ (Moffitt 2022: 155). Moses was called ‘faithful’ in that passage, and this is the only allusion to that faithfulness in the New Testament; however, the early church fathers often and repeatedly refer to this attribute of Moses, so it is safe to assume that it was circulated in the early church (Kistemaker 1961: 34). The ‘house’ of God is (for Moses) the theocracy of God – or the divine economy – in which Moses was faithful as a servant within the house, whereas Christ was faithful over the house as a son who inherits.

The author of Hebrews continues with a direct quote of Psalm 95. The psalmist probably has in mind Exod 17:1–7 and Num 20:2–13, which have to do with the people quarrelling with Moses about the shortage of water. By quoting Psalm 95, the author of Hebrews probably is also alluding to Numbers 14, since it is there that God swore that the people would never enter his rest. The next section (Heb 3:12–19) gets into the author’s commentary on the psalm, which is clearly in the ambit of Numbers 14. Therefore, although the writer of Psalm 95 probably had a different historical event primarily in mind (Rephidim in Exod 17 and grumbling about water at Massa and Meribah in Num 20), the writer to the Hebrews is clearly thinking of Numbers 14 and the rebellion at Kadesh, when the spies reconnoitered the land and brought a (false) bad report, except for Joshua and Caleb. Each verse in Heb 3:16–18 refers first to Psalm 95 then to Numbers 14:

Heb 3:16a = Ps 95:7–8; Heb 3:16b = Num 14:13, 19, 22

Heb 3:17a = Ps 95:10; Heb 3:17b = Num 14:10, 29, 32

Heb 3:18a = Ps 95:11; Heb 3:18b = Num 14:30, 33, 43

Hebrews 4 takes up the same theme. The text emphasizes the spiritual dimension, or becomes 'eschatologized', through an allusion to Gen 2:2. Again, the author is still referring back to Psalm 95, and the audience or later readers are meant to think of the whole psalm and its context; however, the writer now modifies his citation by interjecting a subtle reference to Gen 2:2. In this move, the author of Hebrews takes a psalm which dealt with a curse and punishment but now extracts a blessing from it by demonstrating that there is a final rest to which those who are faithful can enter.

There are probably two reasons for the author choosing this text of Gen 2:2. First, there is the dynamic called *gězērâ šawâ*, a rabbinic practice of exegesis (probably having precedent in the Hebrew Bible itself) in which one draws an inference based on an analogy of words (see Lane 1991: 95). In Gen 2:2, the Greek LXX says that God 'took rest' (κατέπαυσεν, *katepausen*), a word which is cognate to the term in Psalm 95 (LXX 94:11), which is κατάπαυσι, *katapausis*. Therefore, according to *gězērâ šawâ*: "my rest" in Ps. 95:11 is properly interpreted in terms of God's primordial rest following the works of creation in Gen. 2:1–3' (Lane 1991: 95).

Second, the choice of Gen 2:2 may have been motivated by the fact that it was coupled together with Psalm 95 as part of the Friday evening service which began the Sabbath among the Jews at this time. The writer of Hebrews, and his audience, were probably aware of this ritual (Kistemaker 1961: 36). The conclusion occurs in 4:14:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold on to our confession. (Author's translation)

This verse (and what follows) conclude the entire argument, as the crucial issue for this community was whether they will maintain their Christian faith.

## 7.7 John/Revelation

Like in 1 Peter, allusions to the exodus permeate the book of Revelation. Michelle Fletcher claims that 'the theme and narrative of the exodus/the new exodus is undeniably infused into Revelation' (Fletcher 2022: 185). However, Revelation's relationship with Exodus is unique, compared with the other New Testament books examined thus far. Fletcher has shown how John alludes to Exodus through the complex interplay of previous texts in scripture that have already engaged the Exodus. For Jay Smith Casey, the exodus evocations are irrefutable: 'John unambiguously points forward to Jesus' death as that of the new Paschal lamb, whose blood marks the redemption of God's people from slavery' (Casey 1981: 141). Moreover, Rev 15:1–4 links the Song of the Sea (Exod 15) with the Song of the Lamb (Beale 1999: 619). Revelation not only includes much of its

content under the rubric of the exodus, it also betrays John's interpretation of the exodus as both a liberating and despoiling event (Casey 1981: 134).

The climax of exodus typology is observed in John's description of the new creation in Rev 21:1–8. Here, Isa 43:14–21 is again evoked, and the reader recognizes that Christ himself has led his people on a journey: he is the new 'ascender' that has led his people through the chaos water to the true and final mountain, so that they may worship God. The old order has been replaced with the new, and the new creation has been ushered in (Mathewson 2003: 243–258).

## **8 Conclusions**

The many examples in this article, both from the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and the New Testament, demonstrate the importance of the exodus motif for the Bible's many narratives, prophecies, and psalms. The book of Exodus presents the fullest version of this story, including a condensed version of the narrative in the Song of the Sea. Subsequent books contain allusions to, or citations and echoes of, the exodus motif, reinterpreting its characters and events and using them to refer to contemporary contexts, eventually projecting the exodus motif forwards to describe eschatological concepts. The motif is thus a thread uniting the entire biblical canon and is an ideal lens through which to view the unity, the development, and the complexity of scripture.

## **Attributions**

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