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THERE IS A LIGHT THAT NEVER GOES OUT: THE  
SHINING FACE OF MOSES IN EXODUS 34:29–35

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Theology

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by  
Jacob Edward Blair  
December 2023

**APPROVAL SHEET**

THERE IS A LIGHT THAT NEVER GOES OUT: THE  
SHINING FACE OF MOSES IN EXODUS 34:29–35

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10/15/23

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BTS	Biblical Tools and Studies
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

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## PREFACE

This project would not be possible without the support of so many people. Even as I list all the names, I am beyond blessed to know I was never alone in this endeavor. The lines have indeed fallen for me in pleasant places (Ps 16:6).

To my faculty advisor, Dr. Mitch Chase, thank you for guiding me on this journey. It's been a fun and humbling experience, and you have been a gracious guide and mentor in this new world that I have grown to love.

To The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and the RDS Department, thank you for creating a distance program like this that values both biblical scholarship and pastoral ministry. Both lanes sharpened the other. I never had to sacrifice academics for ministry or ministry for academics. Thank you.

To my financial supporters who made all this possible, thank you a million times over. Mike Paulson, Caleb Shrum, Gary Hudson, and Russ Lanier, I would not be here without you. Finances often keep many pastors from sharpening themselves in this way, and I am beyond blessed to know that your regular support paved the way for me to do this. Though you do not know them, hundreds of people in Columbia, South Carolina, are grateful that you gave sacrificially to sharpen their pastor.

To the pastors at Midtown Fellowship in arguably the greatest city on earth, Columbia, South Carolina, thank you for your encouragement, patience, and flexibility as I traveled to Louisville to take classes throughout the years. Adam Gibson, Jay Hendricks, Jon Ludovina, Chris Kakaras, Wes Butler, and Ryan Rike, it's an honor to work alongside you. Even on the sad days (which are a lot!), I can't imagine working anywhere else with anyone else.

To Dr. Thomas Weakley, it felt like a miss not to mention your impact on my life so many years ago. It's only now, as a husband and father in full-time ministry pursuing full-time doctoral work, that I realize I am, in many ways, following the path I saw you take. I'll take it!

To my best friend and wife, Lucy, I love you. You have been my rock, my coach, and my biggest champion since day one of our marriage. You have sacrificed yourself repeatedly because you believe in me and my work. Words cannot begin to describe how much you mean to me.

To my kids, Caroline, Sawyer, Kate, and Margaret—check out what your dad did! This project encapsulates two years of how I've thought of the Bible. I want to know the Bible more and make it understandable and accessible to others—to you four most of all—because that's where the good life is found. It just so happened it was both hard work and fun. I hope you all find the joy of whatever it is that combines hard work and fun and blesses others. I figured you may not understand most of the words in this project, but that's okay. One day, you will.

Soli Deo Gloria.

Jake Blair

Columbia, South Carolina

December 2023

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The shining face of Moses in Exodus 34:29–35 is a peculiar instance that is never explicitly repeated or explained in the Pentateuch, let alone the Hebrew Bible (HB). And yet, John Durham says, “If a narrative paradigmatic of what Exodus is really about were to be sought, Exodus 32–34 would be the obvious first choice.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the renowned scholar Brevard Childs takes this further and says, “Ch. 34 is one of the most difficult chapters in Exodus to analyze and opinions diverge widely. The chapter is integrally related to one’s understanding of chs. 19–24, and indeed to the entire Sinai tradition.”<sup>2</sup> To take Childs’s words a step further, the Sinai tradition makes up most of the Pentateuch (Exod 18–Num 10). Therefore, to understand the Sinai tradition is to understand the overall message of the Pentateuch. So, what exactly is happening in this passage? This dissertation argues that Moses’s shining face in Exodus 34:29–35 is a transformation into a royal priest and a renewed image of YHWH. Interpreting Moses’s encounter this way informs Israel on how to be fully human and relate to the law.

To achieve this argument, the thesis contains four chapters. In chapter 2, I argue that the cosmic geography of the Ancient Near East (ANE), vis à vis the cosmic mountain temple, is the primary theological grid for the Pentateuch, helping the reader understand what occurs atop Mt. Sinai in Exodus 32–34. In chapter 3, I show how the book of Exodus is focused on the cosmic mountain concept by examining Exodus in four literary movements: Exodus 1–18, 19–31, 32–34, and 34:29–25. In each movement, I

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<sup>1</sup> John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 418.

<sup>2</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, ed. Peter Ackroyd et al., Old Testament Library, vol. 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 604–5.

highlight the temple/priestly clues that further inform Moses's transformation in Exodus 34:29–35 concluding with how to interpret the much-debated *qrn* within the passage. In the fourth and final chapter, I explore how this interpretation of Moses's transformation connects to the rhetorical aim of the Pentateuch regarding Israel's anthropology and relationship to the "law."

## CHAPTER 2

### MOSES'S FACE IN THE CULTIC CONTEXT OF THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Understanding the aim of Exodus 34 requires studying the surrounding world in which Moses and primitive Israel found themselves. This chapter will argue that the key theological assumptions in the ANE are the temple-cosmic mountain and, subsequently, the image of God. Through this theology, the Pentateuch is best understood. Specifically, the temple-cosmic mountain and the image of God motifs frame how to view Eden and Sinai, which, in turn, informs how to read Exodus 34:29–35.

#### **Methodology**

Why look to the ANE when discussing the biblical text? In short, the biblical world did not exist in a cultural vacuum. Only within the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries did archaeologists begin to uncover texts and relics from the ANE. Before this, information on other ancient civilizations outside the HB was nonexistent.<sup>1</sup> This information included lamentations, rituals, prayers, wisdom, cosmologies, legal documents, and more. The dating of these texts ranges during and before the traditional dates of the events in the HB. The Epic of Gilgamesh, for example, dates back to centuries before the conventional dating of the Exodus narrative. So, what does one make of this new information? Scholars offer various interpretations. The most notable response of the then newly uncovered ANE documents and artifacts, and indeed considered a historical event in Old Testament studies, came from Friedrich Delitzsch's

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<sup>1</sup> Adam E. Miglio, "Introduction to Ancient Near Eastern Literature," in *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 91.

lectures *Babel-Bible-Streit* in 1902 and following.<sup>2</sup> In his lectures, he argues that the newly uncovered ANE documents prove the derivative nature of the Old Testament. The Old Testament plagiarizes prior ANE literature. This powder keg moment prompted a wave of scholarship arguing for the supremacy of more ancient civilizations to the degradation of the HB.

Shortly afterward, the uncovering of more texts and artifacts prompted further ANE scholarship. Whereas before Delitzsch's lectures, ANE studies were a subset of biblical studies, it soon became more common for scholars to specialize in ANE studies apart from any connection to biblical literature.<sup>3</sup> Among the research over the last century, scholars emphasize the notable similarities between ANE documents and the HB regarding narratives, legal texts, etymology, and theology. The modern impression by scholars such as John D. Currid then is,

The history of Israel, in many scholars' estimation, is really nothing more than a Judaic Iliad, Odyssey, or even Winnie-the-Pooh. One is not hard-pressed to find this perspective in recent literature about the Old Testament. Consider, for example, the conclusion of Thomas L. Thompson: "We have seen that the biblical chronologies are not grounded on historical memory, but are rather based on a very late theological schema that presupposes a very unhistorical world-view. Those efforts to use the biblical narratives for a reconstruction of the history of the Near East, in a manner comparable to the use of the archives at Mari and similar finds, can justly be dismissed as fundamentalist."<sup>4</sup>

Even looking at the biblical data, the ANE is certainly in purview. For example, the Pentateuch acknowledges that Israel's nation began with Abraham leaving a pre-existing country (Gen 12:1). Israel would later be absorbed into the Egyptian culture for four centuries (Exod 12:40–41). Israel's temptation towards idolatry reflects their previous integration into ANE culture (Exod 32). Furthermore, all texts are birthed out of

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<sup>2</sup> Miglio, "Introduction to Ancient Near Eastern Literature," 94.

<sup>3</sup> John D. Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 19.

<sup>4</sup> John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1997), 172–73.

context. From fiction to journalism to biography, all pieces of literature derive from the “cultural signs and phenomena” of their time.<sup>5</sup> In its primary sense, language is a cultural symbol, and it is the reader’s task to understand how such symbols interface with the other texts and their surrounding culture. Jonathan Pennington says regarding the symbolic structure of language,

Rather than thinking about language and texts in terms of a dictionary, we must consider language and texts as products of a certain cultural phenomenon, something that can only be understood and described with a massive encyclopedic understanding. For Eco, the “encyclopedia” is the totality of the collection of all possible cultural interpretations and phenomena in which a text is created; it is the “grand universe of semiosis” or signs. The encyclopedia is “the cultural framework in which the text is situated and from which the gaps of the text are filled.” Therefore, the encyclopedia is never finished and exists only as a regulative idea; the potential associations of meanings are endless as culture continues to develop.<sup>6</sup>

All this to say, when approaching the Pentateuch, one must heed the ANE’s “cultural encyclopedia.” One cannot divorce the narratives, legal texts, or even the language itself without noting the context behind the text. At the same time, some modern scholars note the “cultural encyclopedia” of the Pentateuch to find out how the Jewish community “plagiarized” ANE stories. Another path is offered. John Currid posits the HB ought to be read polemically.<sup>7</sup> The Hebrew authors took ANE theology, stories, and text, infusing them with a “radically new meaning.” This new meaning includes YHWH’s supremacy over the other gods and Israel as his elected people among the nations. To use a modern example, the “diss track” is a genre staple in rap music. Artists will lyricize to attack another person directly or indirectly, typically another recording artist. In short, by creating a diss track, the artist acknowledges that (1) another artist exists and (2) demonstrates why they are better than them. The song is purely polemical.

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (2017; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 20.

<sup>6</sup> Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing*, 22.

<sup>7</sup> Currid, *Against the Gods*, 25.

In the same way, the HB, specifically the Pentateuch, is one “diss track” after another, acknowledging that other ANE cultures exist and demonstrating why YHWH is supreme.

By taking a polemical approach, a careful reader can note the potential influences of Egypt or Babylon, for example, while still affirming the literary power of the Pentateuch. By doing this, the reader recognizes the “cultural encyclopedia” or cognitive environment embedded within the text. No doubt, by taking this approach, there is still a spectrum of interpretive flexibility. For example, to what extent is any given story in the Pentateuch similar or dissimilar to other ANE ideas? How similar is a particular text within the HB to a specific Egyptian or Babylonian text? If a notable similarity is found between one text and another ANE text, does this affirm or put into question the historical validity of a biblical text? These are the questions critical and confessional scholars working with the Pentateuch ask themselves.<sup>8</sup> While there are undoubtedly merits to those questions, this chapter does not dive into those particulars. Instead, the aim is to acknowledge the similarities within the ANE world to better understand the Pentateuch’s cognitive environment and thereby arrive at a more refined interpretation of the biblical text. John Walton sums it up well:

When we see evidence in the biblical text of a three-tiered cosmos, we have only to ask, “Does the concept of a three-tiered cosmos exist in the ancient Near East?” Once it is ascertained that it does, our task becomes to try to identify how Israel’s perception of the cosmos might have been the same or different from what we find (ubiquitously) elsewhere. We need not figure out how Israel got such a concept or from whom they “borrowed” it. Borrowing is not the issue, so methodology does not have to address it. Likewise this need not concern whose ideas are derivative. There is simply common ground across the cognitive environment of the cultures of the ancient world. These are currents in the cultural river and do not depend on transmission through literary sources.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For more on the comparative approach in biblical studies see John Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 19–30.

<sup>9</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 10.



## **The Cosmic Mountain**

With a comparative methodology in place, the reader observes the surrounding world of the ANE and notes a common thread throughout most cultures: the cosmic mountain. By understanding this motif, one better understands the ancient Israelite world. What is the cosmic mountain? Here some orientation is required. In short, the cosmic mountain was a mythic ideal personified in the nation's temple. For the ANE, temple life was everything. There was no bifurcation between "religious" and "secular" life—everything revolved around their theology.<sup>10</sup> Their theology is most clearly on display within their temples. Though not every detail of ANE temples aligned with every nation, the temple can be categorized in terms of cosmogony, cosmic geography, covenant, and cultus. These categories are constructed merely for the sake of organization as the ANE did not view the cosmic mountain as separate categories so much as an all-prevailing worldview.

### **Cosmogony and Cosmic Geography**

The temple represented the cosmic mountain, the first hill that ascended from the chaotic waters of creation. Temples were the ground zero or *axis mundi* of creation by which all life existed. Thus, temples were often depicted as teeming with life and featured gardens, precious stones, and water. The temple contained the "waters of life," representing the chaotic waters now controlled and flowing down to bless the world and the tree of life. The temple's inner chamber, the holy of holies, was like the top of the mountain. It was within this inner chamber that the nation's deity was present. Thus, the temple was a holy ground filled with the potential presence of the deity. Walking through the temple was like climbing up to the heavens, the cosmic mountain peak. The closer one drew near to the temple's holy space, the closer one drew near to life itself. Due to this, the temple was also associated with resurrection, connecting this life with the

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<sup>10</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 47.

afterlife. Resurrection here is viewed both from a corporate sense and from the individual. From a corporate sense, sacred ritual was inherited from the priests and kings that came before, thus symbolizing a “resurrection.” From an individual’s sense, tombs and coffins of kings were considered holy ground, whereby the individual would one day be resurrected.<sup>11</sup>

### **Covenant and Cultus**

The creation of the temple, embodying the *axis mundi* of the world, also represented the covenant pact between the deity and the nation.<sup>12</sup> The nation’s god handed down the temple plans. Temple construction, expansion, and rebuilding were a symbol to reinforce the covenant between the deity and the nation further. As part of this covenant, the temple was where the nation performed rituals, sacrifices, and festivals to appease the nation’s deity. Thus, the deity appointed a king-priest within the temple to attend to such affairs. The deity also handed down to this representative the law for the nation to obey. In turn, the king would appoint a priestly order to meet the deity’s needs. Only the select few could draw near to the holy of holies where the temple’s deity, as expressed via the image, resided. In turn, the nation would be blessed if sacrifices, rituals, and festivities were to the deity’s liking. Life would flow out from the temple and to the people. Conversely, any curses the nation received resulted from the gods’ temperament

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<sup>11</sup> J. M. Lundquist, “The Common Temple Ideology of the Ancient Near East,” in *Cult and Cosmos: Tilting toward a Temple-Centered Theology*, ed. L. Michael Morales, BTS 18 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2014), 52–54; Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 73–96; G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 76–77; L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology 2 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 49.

<sup>12</sup> Jay Sklar, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 38; J. A. Thompson, *The Ancient Near Eastern Treaties and the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale Press, 1964), 9; Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1995), 13, 94–95, 110; Victor Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Old Testament Parallels: Laws and Stories from the Ancient Near East*, 4th ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2016), 65.

or even the gods' absence. Indeed, destroying a temple was seen as a death blow to the community.

In summary, ANE literature *told* the creation of the cosmos; the temple/cosmic mountain *showed* it. The chief theological notion of the ANE was the cosmic mountain temple. While each nation's specific literature and practices differed, all roads led to the same cosmic mountain ideal. With this orientation in mind, the creation of Eden in Genesis 1–3 and the creation of the nation of Israel at Sinai, both situated on mountaintops, are pregnant with meaning. It is to both Eden and Sinai that our attention now turns.

### **Eden as a Cosmic Mountain**

Admittedly, identifying Eden as the first cosmic mountain proves challenging at first glance. There are no specific mentions of “hill” or “mountain” within the Eden narrative—to this initial objection, there are four things to keep in mind. First, the author of Genesis did not exist within a vacuum. The HB's cosmogony shares significant overlap with Israel's ANE contemporaries. More often than not, the Eden narrative takes popular themes, stories, and words from the ANE and polemicizes them for its specific purpose. As Gordon Wenham states concerning Genesis's cosmogony, “[Genesis] is not merely a demythologization of oriental creation myths, whether Babylonian or Egyptian; rather, it is a polemical repudiation of such myths.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, one must not be quick to divorce the theology of the ANE from the theology of the HB. Second, later Jewish and Christian works would see the connection between Eden as a cosmic mountain temple such as The Book of Jubilees and the fourth century work *Hymns of Paradise* by St. Ephrem. Ezekiel 28:13–16, for example, is the most overt connection. Third, Eden's imagery shares significant overlap with Mt. Sinai. A later section will explore this

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<sup>13</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC, vol. 1 (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 9.

overlap later, but it is not a coincidence that Eden in the HB is like a cosmic mountain. Fourth, as previously demonstrated, the temple and the cosmic mountain in the ANE go hand-in-hand. Therefore, if Eden is shown as a temple, we can infer that Eden is a cosmic mountain and vice versa. To demonstrate this connection, a list below points to textual evidence connecting Eden to Sinai, the tabernacle, and/or the ANE conception of the cosmic mountain. Admittedly, while no one point holds up on its own, the overwhelming data leads to the conclusion that the reader is to see Eden as a cosmic mountain temple.

1. On the third day of creation, Elohim causes the land to emerge from out of the waters echoing the primordial hillock, the *axis mundi* of creation by which ANE nations designated by constructing a temple (Gen 1:9–13). Additionally, Elohim creates three distinct spaces on the first three days (heavens, waters, land) and fills in those spaces on days four through six (celestials, birds, fish, animals, humans).<sup>14</sup> This three pattern and three-tiered mapping of creation corresponds to the three-tiered tabernacle brought forth in Exodus.
2. Adam is charged to “work” and “keep” the garden, echoing the same charge given to Israel’s priests to work and keep the temple (Gen 2:5, 15; 3:23; Num 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 18:5–6). Similarly, in the ANE it was the priests’ job to tend to the temple.
3. The tree of life resides in the garden, echoing the menorah within the temple (Exod 25:31–36). This is comparable to the ANE, as many temples contained a tree of life. The tree of life in ANE thought was rich with meaning and represented the embodiment of the deity, king, nation, and/or family line.<sup>15</sup>
4. YHWH’s presence resides in the garden (Gen 3:8). In the same way, a nation’s deity resided in his or her temple.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, Jeffrey Niehaus translates YHWH’s appearance as a glory cloud theophany which corresponds to how ANE deity’s often manifested themselves.<sup>17</sup> The glory cloud theophany is later associated with the temple as well (Exod 40:34–38).
5. YHWH’s cherubim protect the entrance, echoing the presence of cherubim in Israel’s temple (Gen 3:24; Exod 25:18–22). In the same vein, ANE temples depicted otherworldly spirits protecting the temple. Similarly, the snake in Genesis 3, perhaps

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<sup>14</sup> L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, NSBT 37 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 43–44.

<sup>15</sup> William R. Osborne, *Trees and Kings: A Comparative Analysis of Tree Imagery in Israel’s Prophetic Tradition and the Ancient Near East* (University Park: Pennsylvania University Press, 2018), 21, 26–27, 38.

<sup>16</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 66–79; Gordon Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” in Morales, *Cult and Cosmos*, 161–66.

<sup>17</sup> Niehaus, *God at Sinai*, 155–57.

an angelic figure, is seen in proximity to the tree of life. In ANE, snakes were depicted as guarding ANE deities.<sup>18</sup>

6. Eden is the water source for all creation. This likely echoes the basin in the tabernacle (Exod 30:17–21). Furthermore, the unformed waters depicted in Genesis 1:2–10 not only becomes formed by YHWH but now becomes a source of life. Similarly, the *Enuma Elish* depicts the chaotic waters taking form.<sup>19</sup>
7. The image of YHWH in Genesis 1:26–28 is placed in the garden in Genesis 2:8. ANE images—typically anthropomorphized—were placed within the temple to represent the deity. In Genesis 1, the *adam* are that temple image.<sup>20</sup> This is further reinforced as the image language, *tslm*, in Genesis 1:26–28 is later used in the Pentateuch in reference to pagan idols in Numbers 33:52.
8. Cain and Abel perform sacrifices in front of Eden’s gate in Genesis 4, presumably to regain access that was previously lost in Genesis 2–3.<sup>21</sup> This echoes Levitical priests bringing their sacrifices to YHWH (Lev 2:2, 7–8; 27:26; Num 18:17).
9. The cosmos is completed in seven days and YHWH rests from his work over creation. This is reminiscent of Sumerian temple building that took seven days to complete.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Eden is seen as the place of Sabbath where YHWH rests (Gen 2:2–3), according to which, like their ANE neighbors, Israel will later orient their ritual calendar (Exod 20:8–11; Deut 5:12–15).<sup>23</sup>
10. Elohim charges the image bearers to cultivate the earth thereby expanding the “temple” Garden. This corresponds with ANE king-priests charged by the gods to expand their temples as well.<sup>24</sup>

### **Sinai as a Cosmic Mountain Echoing Eden**

When one arrives at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19, the reader will view Mt. Sinai as a cosmic mountain akin to Eden and its ANE neighbors. Observing the literary structure of the Pentateuch, more time is spent here in this geographic location than anywhere else,

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<sup>18</sup> Gerda de Villiers, “Why on Earth? Genesis 2–3 and the Snake,” *Old Testament Essays* 20, no. 3 (January 2007): 636; Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 87–88.

<sup>19</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 20; Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 55–56.

<sup>20</sup> G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 129.

<sup>21</sup> Joaquim Azevedo, “At the Door of Paradise: A Contextual Interpretation of Gen 4:7,” in Morales, *Cult and Cosmos*, 167–82.

<sup>22</sup> J. D. Levenson, “Cosmos and Microcosm,” in Morales, *Cult and Cosmos*, 227–29.

<sup>23</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 74.

<sup>24</sup> Beale, *The Temple and Church’s Mission*, 87–93.

specifically from Exodus 19:1 through Numbers 10:10. This further emphasizes the theological significance of the cosmic mountain in the HB. To ignore this literary setting in the Pentateuch is to ignore what the Pentateuch is implicitly trying to communicate to its reader. Morales even suggests a literary mountain within the Pentateuch with Leviticus and *Yom Kippur* as the theological mountaintop.<sup>25</sup> While his point is not explored further for brevity, Morales correctly sees the mountain as a notable lens through which to interpret the HB.

Whereas Genesis speaks of humanity as a temple image and all of creation as a temple, the narrative of the Pentateuch zooms further into a particular people as image-bearers, Israel, and a particular place, the tabernacle, to host YHWH's presence. The connection between Mt. Eden and Mt. Sinai is critical. Some of the connections mentioned previously are expanded further to include the following:

1. The burning bush on Horeb/Sinai in Exodus 3 is said to be "holy ground." Thus, it brings to mind a sacred space akin to the temple, with the burning bush potentially pointing back to the sacred tree in Eden and pointing ahead to the menorah within the tabernacle.
2. Elohim utters ten "words" in the Genesis 1 creation narrative, connecting the reader to the ten plagues (or decreation) of Egypt in Exodus 7:14–Exodus 11, and the ten "words" (or creation of a people) in Exodus 20:2–17.
3. Just as a *ruach* oversees the chaotic waters in Genesis 1:2, a *ruach* controls the Red Sea en route to Sinai in Exodus 14:21.
4. Exodus 15:17 says that YHWH will "plant" his people atop Sinai, alluding back to when YHWH planted the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2:8.
5. Just as YHWH appeared as a Glory cloud in Genesis 3:8 walking in Eden, so YHWH's Glory cloud appears to guide the people to Sinai (Exod 16:10; Num 16:42), and later walks "to and fro" with his people in the temple (Lev 26:11–12).
6. The priests are charged to "work" and "keep" the temple like Adam in Eden (Gen 2:5, 15; 3:23; Num 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 18:5–6).

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<sup>25</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, 24–34.

7. The literary structure of the creation and completion of the cosmos in Genesis 1:31–2:3 mirrors the creation and completion of the tabernacle in Exodus 39:43–40:9.<sup>26</sup> Moses finishes the work of the temple in Exodus 40:33 just as YHWH finished the work of creation in Genesis 2:2.
8. In Genesis 3:21, Adam and Eve are clothed in garments by YHWH. The language connects to the Levitical priests being clothed (Exod 40:14, Lev 8:7, 8:13, 16:4).
9. The presumed tripartite structure in creation and Eden is akin to the tripartite structure of Mt. Sinai and the tabernacle.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, a tripartite structure is seen between the tabernacle, Israel’s personnel and holiness status. In other words, the closer one gets to the temple (i.e., cosmic mountain peak), the holier one must be, and the more selective the process becomes.<sup>28</sup>

Stemming from the last point, for simplicity’s sake, table 1 demonstrates the three-tiered gradation echoed within creation in Genesis 1–2 and the formation of Israel’s cultus. For clarity, it is worth noting that while there is a three-tiered demarcation in all of these accounts, not every row corresponds to all the others.

Table 1. The three-tiered gradation of creation, the mountain, and the cultus

<b>Creation</b>	<b>Mountain of Eden</b>	<b>Mountain of Sinai</b>	<b>Tabernacle</b>	<b>Personnel</b>	<b>Holiness Status</b>
Heavens	Eden	Summit	Holy of Holies	High Priest	Most Holy
Earth	Garden	Midsection	Holy Place	Priests	Holy
Seas	Outside world	Base	Outer court	Israelites	Clean

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<sup>26</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, 42.

<sup>27</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, 101.

<sup>28</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *Face to Face with God: A Biblical Theology of Christ as Priest and Mediator*, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology 6 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 43.

To further see the connection between the cosmos and the cultus, the ancients generally thought of their world as split into three spaces: heaven, earth, and sea. For this reason, Figure 1 depicts how the biblical authors thought of their universe. In this graphic, the Earth is modified from traditional renderings to accommodate for the cosmic mountain ideal.<sup>29</sup> As seen, the mountain peak is where heaven and earth touch, and is akin to a temple where humans and deity meet.<sup>30</sup> To be clear this is not to say the ancients thought of the world as one literal giant mountain. Rather, conceptually speaking, they thought of the world as emerging from the primordial waters, and the cosmic mountain was the *axis mundi* of creation. The temple served as the replica of the cosmic mountain. Also, as the next chapter will more fully demonstrate, the understanding of the three-tiered universe is critical in what is happening in the Exodus narrative.

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<sup>29</sup> Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 101, 144.

<sup>30</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, 50, 101.



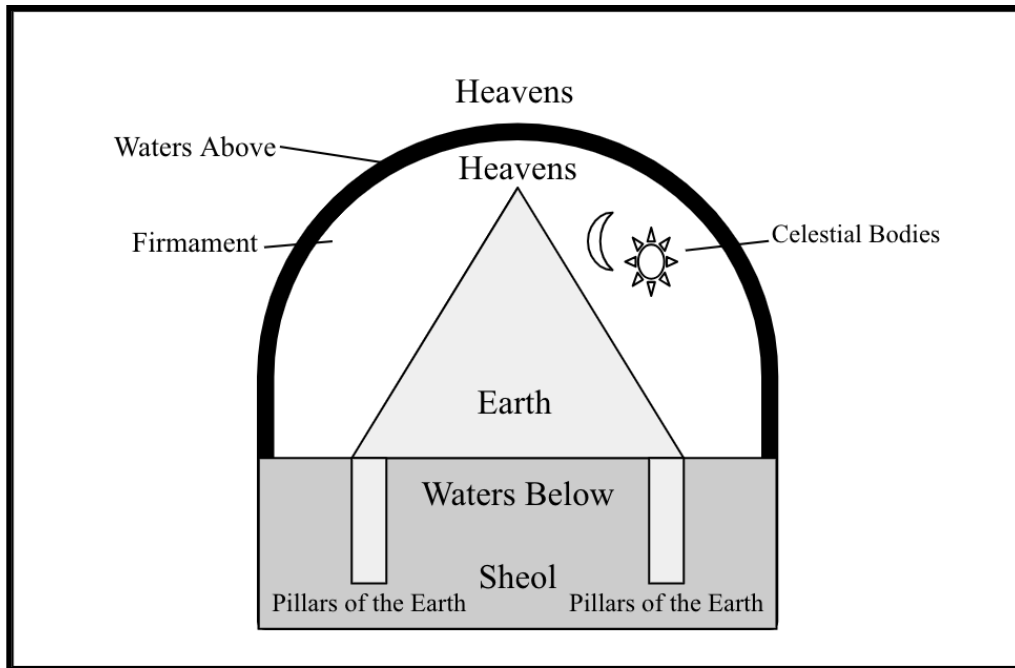


Figure 1. The three-tiered universe according to the Hebrew Bible

Moreover, the three-tiered demarcation in Genesis 2 corresponds to Mt. Sinai and the tabernacle.<sup>31</sup> As will be elaborated in the next chapter, the seven pieces of furniture adorning the tabernacle construction looks back to the Genesis story, the Exodus story, or both. The similarities between Eden, Sinai, and the tabernacle are seen below in figures 2 and 3.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology: The Encroacher and the Levite, The Term 'Aboda* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1970), 44–45; Alexander, *Face to Face with God*, 33–34.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew S. Malone, *God's Mediators: A Biblical Theology of Priesthood*, NSBT 43 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 50–51; Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 74–75; John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIVAC, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2001), 182.

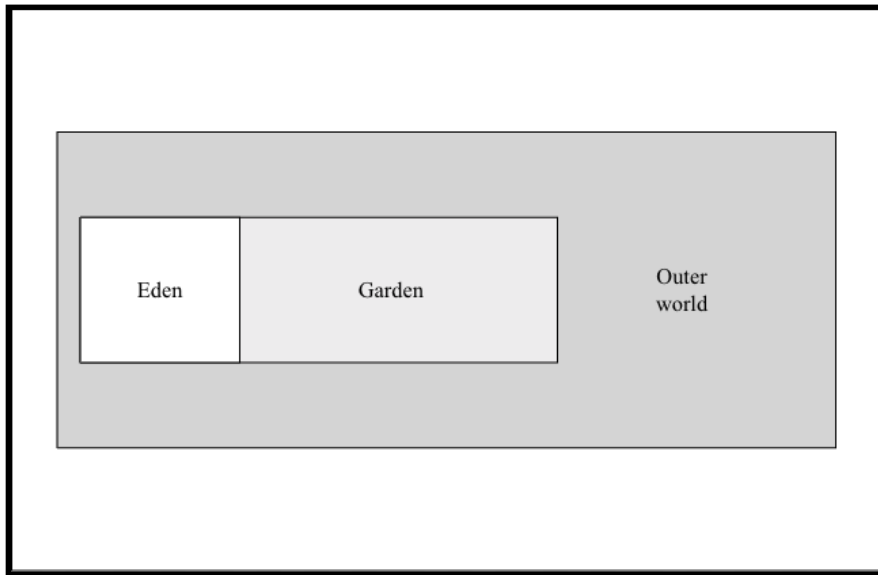


Figure 3. The three-tiered garden in Genesis 2:4–4:16

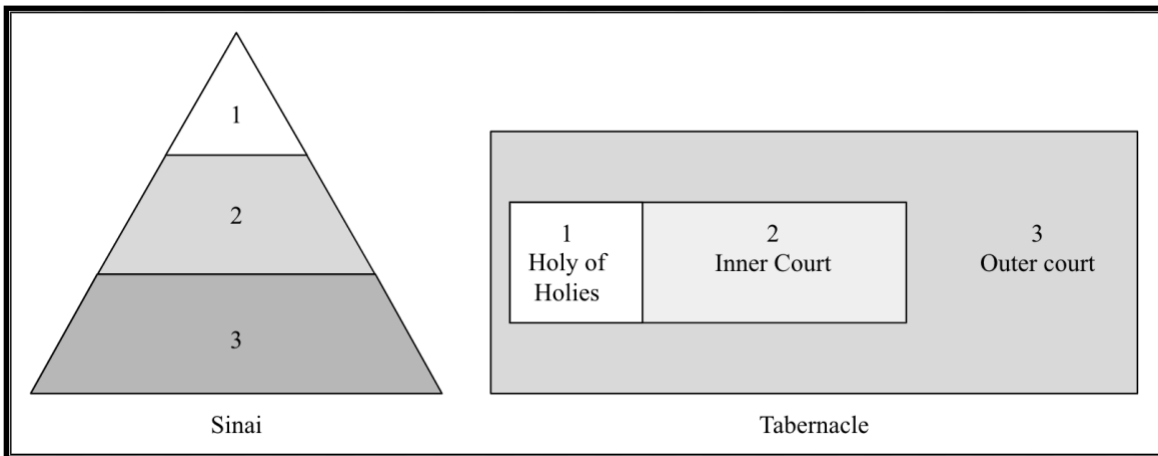


Figure 2. The three-tiered mountain and tabernacle

All this leads to the question, what is the significance of these connections between Eden and Sinai? Namely, just as YHWH created the cosmos, he created a nation. Just as *Elohim* controlled the chaos in Genesis 1, so YHWH controlled the personified chaos of Egypt in Exodus 7–14. The God who spoke everything into existence, who has an affinity for humanity, explicitly has an affinity for Israel. Through

this affinity for Israel, YHWH intends to showcase his presence and power to the cosmos and the rest of humanity.

### **Objections to Cosmic Mountain Theology**

So far, this chapter has explored how the cosmic mountain was integral to ANE theology. This theology, in turn, shapes how to view Eden and Sinai. Before moving on, a few objections must be addressed and answered briefly. While there are certainly more objections than the ones addressed below, this paper will only speak to the ones most pressing for the paper's argument.

One possible objection is that the Eden narrative simply explains the human condition, the origin of creation, and evil.<sup>33</sup> The argument states that this spiritual reading is similar to how those in the ANE would have read their own cosmogonies.<sup>34</sup> To this point, the Genesis story certainly explains the origins of things, but that does not seem to be all the text is doing. With the overt textual and symbolic references to Sinai, there is more in the text than the origin of things. One also questions if a “symbolic reading” of the ANE teaching is a fair assessment. Israel viewed the Sinai narrative as a literal, historical event harkening back to Eden. Would it not assume the ANE thought of their narratives as literal and symbolic rather than purely symbolic?

A second objection is that Eden is not actually a temple atop a cosmic mountain but simply looks ahead to the Solomonic temple. This argument, brought by Wolfgang Richter and later Karl Jaros, argues that events and objects in the Sinai narrative and Solomonic temple, such as the burning snakes, the cherubim, the sacred tree, and the river of life, evolved and were later infused into the Eden story.<sup>35</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>33</sup> T. Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden: Genesis 2–3 and Symbolism of the Eden Garden in Biblical Hebrew Literature*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 25 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2000), 306; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 54.

<sup>34</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 306.

<sup>35</sup> Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden*, 309.

the temple reflects Eden, but Eden does not reflect the temple. The Solomonic temple, adorned with garden and water imagery, certainly harkens to a cosmic Eden-like ideal, but the critique is that “Eden is a temple/mountain” would force the Genesis text to be something it is not. Additionally, Daniel Block argues that it is “doubtful we should characterize the creation accounts of Genesis 1–3 as being built ‘on a platform of temple theology,’ but characterizing the temple-building accounts as being built ‘on a platform of creation theology’ is legitimate.”<sup>36</sup> While critics are correct that the text does not explicitly say Eden is a temple, the evidence implying Eden is a temple (from word associations to imagery to identical phrases to geography) is difficult to ignore.

There is a third objection, though different in scope from the previous. That is, finding any unifying center/theology to unite the HB (whether covenant, holiness, presence, the cosmic-mountain temple, etc.) presupposes a medieval scholasticism that would have been alien to the original HB authors.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, Gerhard Hasel argues that if YHWH serves as the “dynamic unifying center,” then other theological proposals can work in harmony to create a multi-valent theology.<sup>38</sup> I would agree that YHWH should be the starting point for reading the HB. After all, if one reads literarily, one looks to Genesis 1:1 to understand *Elohim*/YHWH as the center point. At the same time, YHWH chooses to reveal his presence to humanity in covenant atop the cosmic mountain. As shown so far, the cosmic mountain is critical in seeing the parallels between Eden and Sinai (and even Zion).<sup>39</sup> If YHWH is the “dynamic unifying center,” it seems the cosmic mountain/temple theology serves as one of, if not the primary,

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<sup>36</sup> Daniel I. Block, “Eden: A Temple? A Reassessment of the Biblical Evidence,” in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Daniel Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 26.

<sup>37</sup> Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 154–55.

<sup>38</sup> Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 171.

<sup>39</sup> Michael A. Fishbane, “The Sacred Center: The Symbolic Structure of the Bible,” in Morales, *Cult and Cosmos*, 407–8.

theological vehicle whereby YHWH reveals himself. I would also add that the aim of this paper is more modest in scope. It could very well be that the cosmic mountain temple is the key to unlocking the entire HB, but this paper argues that, at the very least, it is the dominant theology of the Pentateuch. The reason for such modest aims is literary-critical. If one is to read the Pentateuch in its final form, one looks to Mosaic authorship (Exod 17:14; 34:27; Num 33:1–2; Deut 31:19–22, 24; 32:1–43). Whether a historical Moses penned the Pentateuch is beside the point and left for historical-critical scholars to discuss. What matters is the final composition. If the final composition says one author penned the Pentateuch, then at the very least, literary criticism must look for a unifying theme connecting the Pentateuch. Given the world of the ANE and the biblical text, the data would point to the cosmic mountain temple as that unifying theme.

### **The Image of God**

With cosmic mountain/temple theology in mind, how does the image of God fit into this? As will be argued, the image of God is critical in understanding biblical anthropology and helps the reader understand what will later happen in Exodus 34:29–35. Much like the cosmic mountain, the image of God is also best understood through the lens of the ANE. When looking at the ANE, two ideas emerge: the image represents deity and represents the king-priest.<sup>40</sup>

### **The Image Represents Deity**

As mentioned earlier, regarding the cosmic mountain, the image of a deity was placed within the temple, generally in the most restricted places. The ancients did not necessarily believe the statue of their deity was their god. The image was, first, a symbol of the deity's covenant with his/her nation, and second, a conduit of blessing or cursing.

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<sup>40</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 184–85.

To the first point, the creation of the cosmos, the cosmic mountain, the covenant, and the image of God all went hand-in-hand. The *axis mundi* of creation, the primordial hillock, becomes ground zero by which deity and nation ratify a covenant. The image of the deity atop the cosmic mountain peak in the recesses of the temple symbolized this. As the priests and kings approached the image of the deity in the temple, it was as though they were climbing the cosmic mountain to approach their God's heavenly throne room. The temple statue was placed on the proverbial mountain peak, the holy of holies, to symbolize the deity's rule over the cosmos and nation.

To the second point, the location of the image inside the cosmic mountain temple is either a place of blessing or cursing. It all depended on whether the nation kept to its covenant or not. In ANE covenants, the deity needed something from the people, and the people needed something from their god.<sup>41</sup> The deity needed food, ritual, and specific temple accommodations administered by the priests and kings. If the deity were pleased, he/she would bless the nation. The nation, in turn, needed blessings from its gods, such as military victory, economic flourishing, and agricultural abundance. The nation's priests and kings served as conduits of this transaction. Walton dubs this "the Great Symbiosis."<sup>42</sup> If the deity is pleased by what the nation offers at the altar, the deity's presence would fill the temple image and bless the people. Conversely, if the deity deems the nation's worship and offerings unsatisfactory, the deity's presence would leave the temple, akin to abandoning its home, leaving the nation vulnerable to drought, famine, and attack from the outside.

### **The Image Represents the King-Priest**

Along with the image representing the deity, there was a second function of the image in the ANE: the image representing the king-priest. The god had its image, and the

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<sup>41</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 94.

<sup>42</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 184–85.

king-priest, as the deity's son, had an image too.<sup>43</sup> The image and father-son connection are further enforced by Genesis 5:3. Richard Lints comments, "The connection of 'sonship' and 'image' . . . points to a relationship of honour and respect intrinsic to the ancient familial context. The son was the image of the father by virtue of honouring his father, and therefore the son came to resemble his father. What the son loved and honoured, the son became like."<sup>44</sup>

In a royal sense, the kings served as the human representative of the god. When the nation saw the king, they saw their god. This connection was established, in part, through the use of images. Image statues were propaganda tools scattered throughout the land to communicate dominion and authority to the nation.<sup>45</sup> How the people treated their king was directly tied to how they treated their god and vice versa.

In a priestly sense, the kings served as the nation's representative to the god. The deity commissioned the king via covenant to ensure that the people would be blessed, assuming the needs of the god were met. As a result of fulfilling his covenantal obligations, the king installed priests who oversaw the daily rituals and sacrifices that the god required inside the temple.<sup>46</sup> In this sense, the king served as the high priest who, from time to time, would enter the inner temple chambers to evoke favor and blessing from the god. The annual Egyptian *Opet*-Festival brought these ideas together in one such instance. Once a year, the pharaoh, serving as the king-priest, would undergo various rituals and offerings as he entered the holy of holies. When inside and encountering the

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<sup>43</sup> C. L. Crouch, "Genesis 1:26–27 as a Statement of Humanity's Divine Parentage," *Journal of Theological Studies* 61, no. 1 (April 2010): 1–15; Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 130–31; Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 105–8; Niehaus, *God at Sinai*, 94–98; Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 260.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, NSBT 36 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 72.

<sup>45</sup> J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 104–8.

<sup>46</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 91; Osborne, *Trees and Kings*, 46.

temple image, he would receive a divine blessing to recommission his status as a son of god.<sup>47</sup>

With this backdrop in mind, combined with the cosmic mountain motif, the reader is to see Adam and Eve atop Eden and Moses atop Sinai as royal image-bearing figures. This paper will explore both of these concepts now.

### **The Image in Eden**

Adam and Eve were made in the image of God and placed in Eden, the cosmic mountain (Gen 1:26–27; 2:8). Here the two-fold usage of the image in the ANE comes into focus.

First, the humans are the image of Elohim placed atop the cosmic mountain/temple, just like the ANE statue set within the temple.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, just as the deity was said to fill the image with his presence, this occurs in Elohim’s image bearers in Genesis 2:7, where YHWH breathes his *nephesh* into Adam.<sup>49</sup> Wright states, “‘God breathed into his nostrils’ speak of tender, personal intimacy. It is of course a figure of speech (since God does not have a literal physical breath). But it is a phrase which, from other contexts, would certainly indicate the presence of the Spirit of God, who can also be called the breath of God.”<sup>50</sup>

Kline further connects the dots between their imaging in Genesis 1:26 and Genesis 2:7:

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<sup>47</sup> Lanny Bell, “The New Kingdom ‘Divine’ Temple: The Example of Luxor,” in *Temples of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Byron E. Shafer (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 157–76.

<sup>48</sup> Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 129–32; Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 83; J. L. Morrow, “Creation and Liturgy: The Liturgical Background of Genesis 1–3,” paper presented in Trends of Ancient Jewish and Christian Mysticism Seminar, University of Dayton, February 26, 2008, 13; L. Michael Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus 32–34*, BTS 15 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2012), 88–91.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Hundley, “Divine Presence in Ancient Near Eastern Temples,” *Religion Compass* 9, no. 7 (July 2015): 204.

<sup>50</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing God through the Old Testament: Three Volumes in One* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 424.



The statement in Genesis 1:27 that God created man in his own image instead finds a concretely specific and in fact a visible point of reference in the Glory-Spirit theophany of Genesis 1:2. This conclusion is enforced by the data in Genesis 1:26 and 2:7, which bring the Spirit of Genesis 1:2 into connection with the act of man's creation. . . .According to the Genesis 2:7 account, man was made a living soul by a divine inbreathing. That this is to be understood in terms of the vitalizing breath of the Spirit is evident from the quickening function attributed to the Spirit in Scripture, sometimes in passages reflective of Genesis 2:7 (c.f. Psalm 104:29–31, Lam 4:20, Ezk 37:1–10, 14; Luke 1:35, John 20:22).<sup>51</sup>

Whether or not the biblical author had in mind the “Spirit” of YHWH in Genesis 2:7 or simply an animating impartation of life, at the very least, this is a connection to temple image themes found in the ANE. The spirit/divine presence would sometimes fill the temple image statue.<sup>52</sup>

Second, the *adam* as image bearers function as a propaganda tool over creation, just like the images of king-priests in the ANE. When creation sees humanity, they are to see Elohim. Moreover, Elohim charges them to exercise dominion over the rest of creation. This is royal language akin to king-priests. As Elohim's image bearers, they are set over all of creation to create order out of chaos, just as Elohim does over the cosmos.

Furthermore, the deity commissions his image/son in the ANE to carry out the work.<sup>53</sup> This commissioning becomes the basis for a covenant with a vertical relationship (deity to image/son) and a horizontal relationship (image/son to creation/people) in mind; this occurs in Genesis 1:26–28. Elohim creates his image atop the cosmic mountain.<sup>54</sup> Elohim commissions the image to exercise sovereignty over creation, produce a royal-

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<sup>51</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf Stock, 1999), 21–22.

<sup>52</sup> Niehaus, *God at Sinai*, 37.

<sup>53</sup> Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 69.

<sup>54</sup> Lints, *Identity and Idolatry*, 50.

priestly line, and expand the temple presence of creation into the rest of the world—on earth as it is in heaven.<sup>55</sup> Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum state,

Genesis 1:26 defines a divine-human relationship with two dimensions, one vertical and one horizontal. First, it defines human ontology in terms of a covenant relationship between God and humans, and second, it defines a covenant relationship between humans and the earth. The relationship between humans and God is best captured by the term (obedient) sonship. The relationship between humans and the creation may be expressed by the terms kingship and servanthood, or better, servant kingship.<sup>56</sup>

As Gentry and Wellum mention, there is also a sense in which the *adam* function as covenant-commissioned king-servants or king-priests for the sake of the argument. Some textual clues point to this—some more overt than others. Genesis 1–4 demonstrates that Eden is like a temple. Thus, one can infer that the humans within the temple space are functioning as priests. Genesis 1 focuses on God creating a cosmic temple. Genesis 2–3 focuses on whether or not the humans, as a kingly-priestly order, will expand the garden temple throughout the land.<sup>57</sup> To cite Mircea Eliade, “The cosmicization of unknown territories is always a consecration; to organize a space is to repeat the paradigmatic work of the gods.”<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the command to “work” and “keep” the garden space echoes the commands given to the priests later in the Pentateuch (Gen 2:5, 15; 3:23; Num 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 18:5–6). Beale stresses this point: “Adam should always be referred to as a ‘priest-king,’ since it is only after the ‘fall’ that priesthood is separated from kingship.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Matthew Habib Emadi, “The Royal Priest: Psalm 110 in Biblical-Theological Perspective” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 33–47; Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 81–87.

<sup>56</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 235.

<sup>57</sup> Morales, *The Tabernacle Prefigured*, 97–98.

<sup>58</sup> Mircea Eliade, “Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred,” in Morales, *Cult and Cosmos*, 298.

<sup>59</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 70.

As priests, they are not only to keep the temple, but in a sense, as YHWH's covenant representatives, they are to embody the covenant as they go. Genesis 2:16–17 demonstrates this with the command to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This prohibition does not come out of nowhere but is an extension of the covenant commissioning of the image bearers as king-priests first initiated in Genesis 1:26–28.<sup>60</sup> They are to embody what it means to be an image bearer. They must embody divine law/covenant.<sup>61</sup> Like ANE king-priests, divine law was handed to the first humans to carry out and fulfill.

Genesis 1:26 expands the idea of the image further. Namely, all of humanity are image-bearers. Here the polemical nature of the Pentateuch shines through against their ANE neighbors. In the ANE, only the king-priest could be the image. In the HB, all human beings are the image.<sup>62</sup> In the ANE, the gods made human beings so that humans might receive blessings. In the HB, humans are blessed prior to anything they have done. In the ANE, the gods needed humans. In the HB, YHWH is not dependent on human beings.<sup>63</sup> In the ANE, the gods gave humans demeaning slave labor.<sup>64</sup> In Genesis 1–2, work is part of the cultural mandate to bless the world. As previously mentioned, in the ANE, the image of the god was placed within the temple. However, the HB has no statue image of YHWH in the holy of holies. Image-making is forbidden (Exod 20:4). Why? YHWH does not need a statue image. He has already made his image. Humanity is his image.

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<sup>60</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 253.

<sup>61</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 91.

<sup>62</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 31.

<sup>63</sup> John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *The Lost World of the Torah: Law as Covenant and Wisdom in Ancient Context*, Lost World Series 6 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 73.

<sup>64</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 186–87.

## The Image in Sinai

So far, this chapter has first explored how Eden is a temple and how this imagery looks ahead to Mt. Sinai as the new sacred temple space. Second, this chapter examined how the image comes into focus within this cosmic mountain temple motif. If Eden is a temple, Adam and Eve are the image bearers, and Sinai is like a temple, then who are the image bearers at Sinai? In one sense, it is Israel. In another sense, it is Moses.

While all of humanity is viewed as the image of God, beginning in Genesis 12, YHWH has a particular affinity for Israel. Following the temple-building disaster of Babel in Genesis 11, the next chapter introduces the reader to Abram, and it is through this Chaldean that YHWH intends to bless the world.<sup>65</sup> Here the connection must be seen between Adam and Abram. Like Adam, YHWH calls Abram to create a family so that YHWH's divine presence would fill the cosmos.

Whereas Genesis 1–11 glosses over thousands of years of primeval history, Genesis 12–50 slows down, zooming in on three generations focusing on how YHWH will fulfill the promises made in Genesis 12:1–3. The cosmic mountain temple motif weaves throughout these stories. This motif reminds the reader that Israel will carry out the charge made initially in Eden. Examples include the promise that Abraham's seed will be fruitful and multiply in Genesis 17:1–6, echoing Genesis 1:28. Lot sees the valley of the Jordan as the garden of YHWH in Genesis 13:10 alluding back to Eden. Jacob's ladder to heaven in Genesis 28:10–17 replicates a temple where heaven and earth meet like Eden.

By the start of the Exodus narrative, Israel as the "image" of YHWH takes sharper focus. In Exodus 1:7, they are "fruitful" and "multiplied," thus partially fulfilling the "image of God" command in Genesis 1:28. The connection to Israel as the image is also alluded to in Exodus 4:22–23. These two verses describe Israel as YHWH's

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<sup>65</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 80–81.

“firstborn son.” This takes on two meanings. First, as previously mentioned, in the ANE, the “image” of god and the “son” of god were interchangeable to communicate a particular human’s status and authority with his patron god. Thus, when YHWH communicates that Israel is the firstborn son of YHWH, he is communicating divine status over the people, echoing the image of God in Genesis 1:26–27. This status as YHWH’s imager bearers takes further shape when they are called to become a royal priesthood (Exod 19:6).<sup>66</sup> Second, when YHWH communicates firstborn status to Israel, he does this in opposition to Pharaoh. As was the norm with kings in the ANE, Pharaoh assumed divine firstborn status. Exodus 4:22–23 turns this idea on its head and reinforces Genesis 1:26: the image/son is not for one man but for a people. Furthermore, Pharaoh is not the firstborn image. Israel is the firstborn image. To further demonstrate this opposition, YHWH will slay the firstborn of Pharaoh. This question of “who is the actual firstborn image of the deity?” sets up the showdown between Israel and Pharaoh from Exodus 4–14.

Upon Israel’s later victory in Exodus 14, YHWH leads them to the cosmic mountain of Sinai, where the text of the Pentateuch will remain from Exodus 19:1 to Numbers 10:10. It is here where YHWH established his covenant, imparts the blueprints to the temple, and commissions the cultic priests so that Israel, as the image bearers, will usher in the presence of YHWH thus fulfilling Genesis 1:28 and Genesis 12:1–3.

While Israel is the collective image of YHWH, there is a sense in which representatives for Israel step up to mediate YHWH’s divine presence for the nation. In the Pentateuch, this happens with the patriarchs, Moses, and the high priest. Given that much of the Pentateuch’s focus is on Sinai, Moses’s role as the mediator between YHWH and Israel demonstrates that uniquely, Moses is a king-priest for the people. Moses will be singled out among the nation, encountering the presence of YHWH beginning in the

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<sup>66</sup> Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 89–90.

desert in Exodus 3 and throughout the rest of his life. Even as Moses appoints elders and a priestly line, only Moses will ascend the cosmic mountain peak. Only Moses receives the Torah. Only Moses sees the glory of YHWH in Exodus 34. Only Moses receives the instructions to construct the tabernacle. In other words, Moses functions in the same way ANE king-priests do.<sup>67</sup> If ANE king-priests were dubbed the “image of God,” it is not a stretch to say that Moses represents the image of God better than any other figure in the Pentateuch, outside of the *adam* in Genesis 1–3. If God treats Israel as his son, that is, the image of God, then Moses operates as a “super-image” to Israel. Table 2 summarizes the connection between the image of God and their cosmic mountain-temple backdrop.

Table 2. Images atop the cosmic mountain peak in the ANE and Pentateuch

<b>Personnel</b>	<b>Location</b>
ANE Deity	Heavens and idol/image in the temple
ANE Priest-King	Earth and image in the land
<i>adam</i>	Mt. Eden
Israel	Over the nations
Moses	Mt. Sinai
High Priest	Holy of Holies

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<sup>67</sup> Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology*, 51, 89.

As the next two chapters cover, Exodus 32–34 further intensifies Moses as the image of God and priest-king.

### **Objections to the Image of God**

While this thesis relies heavily on understanding the image of God in its ANE context, this paper will briefly touch on previous interpretations. Theologians have attempted to shed light on “the image of God” over thousands of years. HB scholar Norman Snaith posits that many biblical scholars lift the “image of God” from the text and attempt to fit with their already preconceived notions of anthropology.<sup>68</sup> Generally speaking, in the West, until Thomas Aquinas, the image of God pointed to humanity’s ability to reason.<sup>69</sup> In fact, Aquinas argues that angelic beings, because of their rational capabilities, are more like the image of God than humans.<sup>70</sup> This line of thinking goes as far back as Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, and Augustine.<sup>71</sup> Augustine would shape the dominant view in the West with the emphasis on man’s memory, intellect, and will, corresponding to the Trinitarian Godhead. In the East, the image of God was less about ontology and more about dynamic relationships; to be the image of God was the ability to conform the soul to the nature of God. This process of the soul conforming to God is divinization or *theosis*.<sup>72</sup>

During the Reformation, this metaphysical interpretation of the image of God that dominated the West transformed into a more dynamic, relational interpretation. Luther would emphasize the image of God to mean that original righteousness, once

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<sup>68</sup> Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 18.

<sup>69</sup> Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 19.

<sup>70</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 36.

<sup>71</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 323.

<sup>72</sup> Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 19–20.

given to Adam, is lost and is later taken up by Christ and imputed to those who follow by faith.<sup>73</sup> Meanwhile, Calvin’s approach to the image of God held two ideas in mind: in one sense, all of humanity is ontologically in the image of God because they possess a soul.<sup>74</sup> In another sense, humanity is restored dynamically/relationally into the image of God through sanctification. In the twentieth century, Karl Barth, using the framework of his contemporaries, described the image of God as humanity’s ability to receive divine revelation.<sup>75</sup> Modern scholar Anthony Hoekema points to the image of God as humanity’s call to have dominion over creation, exercise free will, and be in fellowship with other human beings.<sup>76</sup>

Further splitting hairs, theologians note a distinction between “image” (*tslm*) and “likeness” (*dmth*) in Genesis 1:26.<sup>77</sup> Questions are then posed, such as, “If image and likeness describe humanity, how is humanity both like and unlike God?” Pending that answer a new question arises, “Does the image and likeness change after Genesis 3?” Irenaeus, for example, believed humanity retained the image after Genesis 3 but lost their likeness. Indeed, something happens to humanity after their exile from Eden, but to argue how their image or likeness has changed is absent from the text. Not to mention, the words in question, *tslm* and *dmth*, are virtually synonymous. Therefore, teasing them out would force the text to say something it is not.<sup>78</sup>

While these interpretations are admirable, these views do not acknowledge the ANE world of the Pentateuch. As Snaith acknowledges, these views stem more from a preexisting anthropological framework rather than letting the anthropology of the Bible

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<sup>73</sup> Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 20–21.

<sup>74</sup> Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 42.

<sup>75</sup> Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 22–24.

<sup>76</sup> Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 14.

<sup>77</sup> Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 13.

<sup>78</sup> Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 35.



and its ANE neighbors speak.<sup>79</sup> By recognizing the image of God as a temple idol and a propaganda piece of kings, the other cultic leanings of the Pentateuch come into focus and provide a more suitable approach to reading the Pentateuch on its terms.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the backdrop of the cosmic mountain temple and the image of God in the ANE and how this lens is the dominant way to interpret what is happening in the Eden and Sinai narratives. With this in mind, the next chapter explores the literary structure of Exodus, demonstrating how Moses is a king-priest, leading to his eventual transformation in Exodus 34.

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<sup>79</sup> Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 18.

## CHAPTER 3

### MOSES'S FACE IN THE LITERARY CONTEXT

This chapter will ultimately demonstrate that Moses's face signifies his transformative role as a royal priest-king/image of YHWH. This conclusion will be accomplished first by exploring the themes of a priest-king/image in light of four literary movements: (1) in light of the Exodus narrative so far, (2) in light of the Sinai event beginning in Exodus 19, (3) in light of its narrative within Exodus 32–34 and finally, (4) attention will turn to the literary features within 34:29–35, namely Moses's face described as *qrn* and the accompanying veil covering.

#### **Methodology**

Why study the literary movements of Exodus to understand the interpretation of one smaller text? Simply put, to know the text, one must learn the context. To arrive at an interpretation of one text requires knowing how that text interfaces with the other texts within its proximity. For the sake of the chapter, this intertextual reading assumes two things. First, the book of Exodus reads as one cohesive literary unit. This conclusion derives from the final form of the text. Reading intertextually asks the text, "How do the words and themes within this passage relate to the other words and passages within the Exodus story?" Second and subsequently, the Pentateuch is read as one cohesive unit. More texts are brought into the picture as the reader asks, "How do the words and themes within this passage not only relate to the Exodus but within the entire scope of Genesis–Deuteronomy?" Again, the reason for this conclusion is the final composition. The Pentateuch views itself as a five-volume work originating from one primary source: Moses (Exod 17:14; 24:4–7; Num 33:1–2; Deut 4:14; 5:1–2).

This literary-critical method is relatively new in scholarship as the dominant form of criticism was more source, form, or tradito-historical.<sup>1</sup> However, the literary unity of the Pentateuch existed far before the wave of Pentateuchal criticism began.<sup>2</sup> In 1878, Julius Wellhausen proposed what is now dubbed “the documentary hypothesis.” Though this field started as early as a century before, Wellhausen’s *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* is a landmark work in Old Testament studies.<sup>3</sup> In this proposal, the Pentateuch has four distinct sources: the Yahweh source (J), written around 840 BC; the Elohim source (E), written around 700 BC; the Deuteronomy source (D), written around 623 BC; and finally the Priestly source (P), written around 500–450 BC.<sup>4</sup> Some argue that the P source was the final redactor/editor of the Pentateuch.<sup>5</sup> The reasoning behind breaking the Pentateuch into separate “documents” includes but is not limited to the different names of God (Yahweh and Elohim), the repetition of stories, the different names of characters, and different theologies (God is anthropomorphic at times, elsewhere he wholly set apart from creation). Since Wellhausen’s work, scholars in the source-critical tradition have debated the exact times of each source, with others citing more sources within the Pentateuch, such as the Holiness source (H) written before the Priestly source. Taking this a step further, one could reconstruct Israel’s history by discerning the dating behind the documents, what actually happened (historiography), instead of what was said to have happened (history). One could also trace developments

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<sup>1</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 230–32.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 242–45.

<sup>4</sup> Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2006), 45.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 244.

in their theology, presumably noting the evolution from animism to henotheism to monotheism.<sup>6</sup>

To the source critical method, it is undoubtedly evident that God uses different names within the Pentateuch. Yes, there are two creation stories within Genesis 1–3. It is also likely a final editor was at work within the Pentateuch (Num 12:3; Deut 34). Yet for the literary critic, what ultimately matters is the final form: reading the Pentateuch as a literary unit. History versus historiography is not the primary issue.<sup>7</sup> However, the “differences” within the Pentateuch raise a different set of questions for the literary critic. For example, in the two creation stories within Genesis 1–3, rather than ask, “When were each of these accounts written?” the question is, “If what we have is the final form of the text, then how do the literary features in each reflect the whole composition?” Or, when approaching the different names of God, rather than reconstructing Israel’s history, the literary critic looks for clues within the text as to why the author/final redactor chose to employ different names and how this impacts the overall text. As Robert Alter says of this methodology:

The reading of any literary text requires us to perform all sorts of operations of linkage, both small and large, and at the same time to make constant discriminations among related but different words, statements, actions, characters, relations, and situations. . . . It has been my own experience in making a sustained effort to understand biblical narrative better that such learning is pleasurable rather than arduous. As one discovers how to adjust the fine focus of those literary binoculars, the biblical tales, forceful enough to begin with, show a surprising subtlety and inventiveness of detail, and in many instances a beautifully interwoven wholeness. The human figures that move through this landscape thus seem livelier, more complicated and various, than one’s preconceptions might have allowed.<sup>8</sup>

In sum, examining one piece of biblical data by adhering primarily to a literary methodology requires the interpreter to ask, “How did we get here?” In regards to reading

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<sup>6</sup> Longman and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 43.

<sup>7</sup> Longman and Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 19.

<sup>8</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 234.

the Pentateuch in its final form, to use a cliché, context is king. However, a literary reading of the Pentateuch also necessitates reading Exodus 32–34 in its placement within the canon of the Pentateuch. Thus, reading one passage within the Pentateuch requires a careful balance and interplay of reading it according to its immediate surroundings and larger surroundings within the book and the Pentateuch. The image of a mosaic comes to mind. One can “zoom in” to see the smaller pieces, and as the viewer “zooms out,” they see how it connects to its surroundings and the larger whole. Similarly, in the biblical narrative, a constant “zooming out” and “zooming in” is required to understand all that is happening in Exodus 34:29–35.

### **Exodus 34:29–35 in Light of Exodus 1–18**

Exodus outlines consist of two movements: Exodus 1–18 and Exodus 19–40. Exodus 1–18 will be summarized quickly. Below is a brief outline of Exodus 1–18, highlighting connections to Genesis and the priestly/temple clues that inform the reader of what is happening atop Sinai in Exodus 32–34 when necessary.<sup>9</sup>

#### **PART I: Egypt to Sinai—1–18**

1. From Egypt to Horeb/Sinai—1–4
  1. The Problem—serpent, curse, and death – 1
  2. The Setup—Moses the ironic prince and judge—2

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<sup>9</sup> For further clarity, when I say “priestly” clues, I am not referring to texts that historical critics would refer to as deriving from a “Priestly” source. As stated, reading the biblical text literarily requires reading the text in unity. By “priestly,” I simply mean noting the texts which either directly or indirectly look back to the cosmic mountain ideal in Genesis or look ahead to the establishment of the cultus/tabernacle in Sinai and temple in Jerusalem. By doing so, I wish to demonstrate that most of (if not all of) Exodus and, subsequently, the Pentateuch is “priestly” shaped. L. Michael Morales states, “The increasingly recognized pervasiveness and canonical priority of its theology has made P something of the Cinderella source conceived as an outcast, embraced as a sovereign. Via a canonical approach-pre-requisite for a textual biblical theology one must wonder if any text may be identified confidently as “non-P,” at least in the sense of falling outside the sphere of its comprehensive and systematic cosmic construct, whether influenced at root or redaction. According to our usage, then, we could easily substitute the term “cultic” or “temple” for P. . . for it is precisely here where the purported sources find a common denominator. Life in the ancient Near East was thoroughly cultic in nature, to a degree that defies facile attempts to typecast ancient authors/redactors.” See L. Michael Morales, ed., *Cult and Cosmos: Tilting toward a Temple-Centered Theology*, BTS 18 (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2014), 2.

3. The Plan—YHWH’s revelation, rescue plan, and reassurance—3–4
2. From Horeb/Sinai to Egypt and Back—5–18
  1. Confrontation and Ten Words of Deceation—5:1–12:32
  2. Exodus, Passover, and Victory—12:33—15:21
  3. The Wilderness Trials—15:22—18:27

### **From Egypt to Horeb/Sinai—1–4**

For the paper’s sake, part one of Exodus, chapters 1–18, is divided into two subunits: (1) from Egypt to Horeb/Sinai and (2) from Horeb/Sinai to Egypt and back. By organizing the text this way, the reader will notice the shadow Sinai casts over the entire book and, in so doing, reinforce the cosmic mountain significance, as stated in the previous chapter.

#### *The Problem—Serpent, Curse, and Death—1:1–22*

Exodus begins connecting with what came previously in Genesis.<sup>10</sup> The first word of Exodus, *w’lh*, begins with a *waw*/and, as a literary connector to what came before in the Pentateuch. Furthermore, in Genesis 50, Israel and his line enter Egypt and achieve favor with the people. In Exodus 1:1–7, their family is “fruitful and . . . multiplied,” echoing the language of Genesis 1:28. Thus, Israel is YHWH’s image bearers contributing to the task given in the Garden to fill the world. However, just as YHWH’s image bearers experienced favor in the Garden, a serpent arose in Genesis 3. Similarly, as YHWH’s image bearers, Israel, experience favor in Egypt, another serpent-type figure arises in Exodus 1:8: the pharaoh. In the ANE, the snake/dragon was

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<sup>10</sup> Peter E. Enns, *Exodus*, NIVAC, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 40–43; Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary, vol. 2 (Brentwood, TN: Holman Reference, 2006), 49–51; Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, ed. Peter Ackroyd et al., Old Testament Library, vol. 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 2–3; Graham I. Davies, *Exodus 1–18: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, International Critical Commentary, vol. 1 (New York: T & T Clark, 2020), 117–33.

associated with chaos and death and became associated with the sea.<sup>11</sup> The *Enuma Elish*, for example, depicts Tiamat as a sea dragon rivaling against Marduk for divine control.<sup>12</sup> For this reason, the HB depicts Pharaoh as a sea dragon (Ezek 29:3, 32:2). Ironically enough, the pharaoh's headdress was of a snake, showing divine sovereignty over Egypt.<sup>13</sup> The associations to the snake call back to the taming of the sea in Genesis 1 and look ahead to the conquering of the Red Sea in Exodus 14–15.<sup>14</sup> Genesis 3 is indeed in mind as well. Just as the snake introduced the curse of strenuous labor and death, so this new snake brings about forced labor and institutes the death of the firstborns of Israel. John Currid states, "It was an attempt on the part of Pharaoh and the seed of the serpent to thwart the promise of a male Redeemer given in Genesis 3:15."<sup>15</sup> It is for these reasons that Egypt becomes associated with exile, Sheol, and death in the HB.<sup>16</sup> Admittedly, while most commentators do not overtly connect the pharaoh to the serpent and the curses in Genesis 3, Peter Enns says:

The Egyptian king, as we will see in the following chapters, is presented as an anti-God figure; he repeatedly places himself in direct opposition to God's redemptive plan, and this behavior is already anticipated here. . . . The very oppression of the Egyptians in wanting to reduce the number of Israelites is antithetical to the created order.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology 2 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 55–56.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Luyster, "Wind and Water: Cosmogonic Symbolism in the Old Testament," in Morales, *Cult and Cosmos*, 250.

<sup>13</sup> Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 60.

<sup>14</sup> Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 56–61; Nick Wyatt, "The Mythic Mind," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 15, no. 1 (2001): 38; Luyster, "Wind and Water," 249–58.

<sup>15</sup> John D. Currid, *Exodus*, vol. 1, EP Study Commentary (Welwyn Garden City, England: Evangelical Press, 2014), 52.

<sup>16</sup> Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 51.

<sup>17</sup> Enns, *Exodus*, 43.

*The Setup—Moses as Royal Priest and Forerunner to Rescue—2:1–25*

The narrative quickly zooms in on Moses in Exodus 2:1–10. Moses will dominate the rest of the Pentateuch's narrative and lead YHWH's people out of exile. Some unique details involving his origins in 2:1–10 are pregnant with meaning that bear significance on the rest of the Moses narrative. First, in Exodus 2:1, his mother and father are from the line of Levi, drawing the reader ahead to the eventual establishment of the Levitical cult.<sup>18</sup> Stuart Douglas says of Moses's lineage, "The verse assures the reader that Moses was prequalified for the service God later gave him, even in advance of the revelation that would make that qualification necessary."<sup>19</sup> Second, he is saved through an ark (*tbh*), connecting the reader to the ark (*tbh*) in Genesis 6–8 when YHWH's elect were saved from the water.<sup>20</sup> Interestingly, Steven Holloway connects the ark in Genesis 6–8 to the temple.<sup>21</sup> This rescue will define Moses as his name derives means "drew out."<sup>22</sup> This rescue also points ahead to the eventual rescue of Israel through the Red Sea in Exodus 14.<sup>23</sup> Moses serves as a forerunner for what Israel will experience. Third, he is adopted by the Pharaoh's daughter, making him an adopted royal figure. Moses, now a priestly king, saved through the water, will have enormous implications in the Pentateuch's narrative, not just in Exodus 14–15 but Exodus 32–34. Through his birth, he is a forerunner to the priestly line of Israel. Through his rescue, Moses is a forerunner for Israel. Through his adoption, he is royalty.

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<sup>18</sup> Currid, *Exodus*, 59.

<sup>19</sup> Stuart, *Exodus*, 68.

<sup>20</sup> Stuart, *Exodus*, 69; Currid, *Exodus*, 60.

<sup>21</sup> Steven W. Holloway, "What Ship Goes There?," in Morales, *Cult and Cosmos*, 183–208.

<sup>22</sup> Stuart, *Exodus*, 73.

<sup>23</sup> Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 52–53.



By Exodus 2:11, the text fast forwards some thirty-six years.<sup>24</sup> At this point, Moses identifies with the plight of the Israelites to the degree that he murders an Egyptian overseer (Exod 2:12). Exodus 2:14 is loaded with irony as the fellow Israelite asks, “Who put you as a ruler and a judge over us?” Moses came from royalty and certainly had the power, at least at one point, to be a ruler and judge over them. More than that, Moses will eventually be commissioned by YHWH to be a ruler and judge over the people. The Israelites’ grumbling over Moses’s good intentions also foreshadows the Israelites’ grumbling in the desert (Exod 15:24; 16:2, 7–8; 17:3–5; Num 14:2; 16:11, 41). Out of fear, Moses flees to the wilderness of Midian. In exile, Moses’s life once again previews what the Israelites will experience post–Exodus 14–15: Moses flees to the wilderness for killing an Egyptian. By the tenth plague, the Israelites fled to Midian because YHWH killed the firstborns of Egypt.<sup>25</sup>

*The Plan—Moses as Prophet, Mediator,  
and Forerunner to Sinai—3:1–4:31*

By Exodus 3, Moses finds himself in exile for 40 years. Keeping with the royal and priestly themes in Exodus 2, he marries the daughter of a priest whom the reader first sees shepherding his father’s flock. This may seem like a demotion to the modern reader—from living in the king’s palace to herding sheep? However, the biblical author is again nodding to ANE influences, polemicizing those influences, and foreshadowing events to come, especially Exodus 32–34. Pharaohs were often depicted with a shepherd staff in hand as, in the Egyptian imagination, the staff was a sign of authority and infused with divine power.<sup>26</sup> The staff of Moses is first mentioned in Exodus 4:2 and is the

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<sup>24</sup> Stuart, *Exodus*, 74.

<sup>25</sup> Currid, *Exodus*, 69.

<sup>26</sup> John D. Currid, *Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 114–19.

vehicle by which YHWH's power will manifest itself to Pharaoh.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the staff of Moses demonstrates YHWH's power over Pharaoh and his gods and further showcases Moses as a mediator of the divine.

Also, Moses, the "royal priest" in exile, encounters his first theophany on Mount Horeb/Sinai, the mountain of God.<sup>28</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, the mountain is more than geography, and it is the conceptual backdrop to understanding the cosmos, humanity, and the heavenly realm. Meredith Kline likens this to a divine sanctuary.<sup>29</sup>

Exodus 3–4 is filled with several insights, but six things are of note for the sake of the paper's argument. First, while Horeb/Sinai is first introduced in Exodus 3, this location becomes the leading site for the Pentateuch, starting in Exodus 19 and ending in Numbers 10. Second, Exodus 3 marks the beginning of YHWH's rescue plan to bring his people out of Egypt, to the mountain, and into the Canaan. Third, this is the site where YHWH reveals his name, specifically in Exodus 3:14. In this act of revelation, YHWH communicates his aseity, immutability, and eternity.<sup>30</sup> Fourth, Moses was too afraid to look at the burning bush in Exodus 3:6. The next time he arrives at the mountain top in Exodus 33, Moses is bolder. He dares request to see the glory of YHWH. Fifth, Moses is commissioned by YHWH as his prophet and mediator. In the ANE, the kings spoke with the gods and carried out their will. The kings were image-bearers and a son of the gods. While the text never explicitly calls Moses an image bearer or son of YHWH, what is clear are the thematic connections between Eden and Sinai. Just as Elohim/YHWH

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<sup>27</sup> Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 44.

<sup>28</sup> "Some have attempted to argue that Horeb is not Mount Sinai but another mountain in the same vicinity. Others say it refers to the entire mountain range of which Mount Sinai was a part. It is most likely that it is an alternative name for Mount Sinai and is used interchangeably with it (see 3:12)." Currid, *Exodus*, 80.

<sup>29</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 370.

<sup>30</sup> Currid, *Exodus*, 91.

commissioned the first humans as royal priests to carry out his will, so too will Moses. Sixth, Moses is yet again a frontrunner on behalf of Israel. He will lead his people out of a watery rescue, as he experienced in Exodus 2:1–10. He will lead them into the wilderness, in proverbial exile, just like he experienced in Exodus 2:15. And, he will lead them to the mountain of God as seen in Exodus 3–4. These mentions highlight the prominence of Sinai and Moses’s relation to it, which later takes on more significance in Exodus 32–34.

### **From Horeb/Sinai to Egypt and Back—5:1–18:27**

Exodus 1–4 primarily serves as a setup for what becomes the driving plot behind Exodus 1–18. As seen so far, chapters 1–4 nod heavily to Genesis, ANE concepts, and priestly/temple themes. This next section will demonstrate that chapters 5–18 are the same.

#### *Confrontation and Ten Words of Decreation—5:1–12:32*

Upon returning from the wilderness to his homeland, Moses and his brother Aaron approach the pharaoh and are quickly dismissed. Pharaoh multiplies the work of the Israelites as a result. Moses once again questions YHWH, and YHWH reassures him in Exodus 5:22–6:13 and 6:26–7:9, echoing Moses’s questions, and YHWH’s reassurance in Exodus 3–4. Oddly enough, in Exodus 6:14–25, the narrative flow is interrupted by Moses and Aaron’s genealogy; however, in biblical narratives, genealogies help bolster the plot. In this case, it is to highlight that they are part of the tribe of Levi, foreshadowing the priesthood. Its insertion at this point in the text is to show that, while the Israelites grumble at Moses and Aaron, they are from the line who will mediate for the people. YHWH's reassurance leads to a second confrontation in which Aaron’s staff turns into a snake, which eats Pharaoh’s magicians’ snakes. Polemically speaking, Aaron’s snake eating the Egyptian snakes demonstrates YHWH’s supremacy over the

other gods.<sup>31</sup> This event begins the episode of the “ten plagues” until Exodus 12:32 and foreshadows what is to come in Exodus 14.

Exodus 7:14–12:32 is a famous narrative as YHWH reigns down ten plagues upon Egypt. These plagues contain both an echo of Genesis 1 and a polemical thrust. To the first point, Peter Enns calls the first plague a “creation reversal.”<sup>32</sup> The waters, once controlled, are now chaotic. However, in Genesis 1, there are ten speech acts. Gordon Wenham calls this the “ten words of creation.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the ten plagues are “ten words of decreation.” YHWH is undoing the cosmic order, or *ma’at*, that the Egyptians so dearly valued.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, scholars are divided on whether or not the ten plagues target specific gods in the Egyptian pantheon.<sup>35</sup> Given the polemical intent behind so much of the Pentateuch, especially with its connection to Genesis 1, I lean towards the plagues targeting the gods.

*Exodus, Passover, and Victory—12:33–15:21*

Creation is symbolically undone as death fills the land of Egypt with the final plague. This is perhaps an attack on Osiris, the god of the dead.<sup>36</sup> It could also be a direct polemic against Pharaoh who was venerated as the son of Re.<sup>37</sup> Another likely option is this is retribution for Pharaoh killing the male children in Exodus 1. At this point, the sons of Israel flee from the land of death and into the wilderness. The exodus officially

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<sup>31</sup> Currid, *Against the Gods*, 118.

<sup>32</sup> Enns, *Exodus*, 203.

<sup>33</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC, vol. 1 (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 17.

<sup>34</sup> John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 66.

<sup>35</sup> John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament*, Zondervan Charts (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 85; Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 160.

<sup>36</sup> Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament*, 85.

<sup>37</sup> Enns, *Exodus*, 245.

begins in 12:33. Soon after, the Passover is instituted as the first holiday of Israel's calendar. Michael Morales notes,

Passover redemption is so significant that God reorients time itself. . .such a momentous paradigm shift served to define Israel's deliverance out of Egypt as inaugurating a new beginning, not merely in terms of a fresh start but as a new creation a new life on the other side of their death to the old life. Indeed, every major festival of Israel was associated with the exodus.<sup>38</sup>

Morales also notes, soon after the institution of the Passover, the Red Sea event and its connection to Genesis 1 and Exodus 2. As previously mentioned, Genesis 1 alludes to the Enuma Elish and the taming of the chaotic sea dragon. So, in Exodus 14, the sea is again under the power of the YHWH and his *ruach*. Furthermore, in Exodus 2, YHWH rescued Moses from the waters. Now, in Exodus 14, Moses rescues his people through the waters. The epic of YHWH's mighty acts concludes with a victory song in Exodus 15. In brief, the polemical nature of YHWH versus the other gods is on full display. Second, the song alludes to YHWH's holy abode, mountain, and sanctuary by which YHWH will plant his people (Exod 15:13, 17). Here, YHWH's presence, once remembered in Eden, comes back to mind. YHWH saves Israel from a watery death and, as a new creation, intends to lead them up the holy mountain of Sinai.<sup>39</sup>

#### *The Wilderness Trials—5:22–18:27*

After Israel takes their victory lap, time is spent in the wilderness before arriving at Sinai. For one, the wilderness trials connect back to earlier in Exodus. The

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<sup>38</sup> Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 67.

<sup>39</sup> "God 'redeemed' his people in order to lead them to his 'holy dwelling.' What is the identity of this dwelling? Three options, all of which are amply illustrated in the Old Testament, present themselves: Sinai, the Promised Land of Canaan, and the temple. . . .In the final analysis, however, it poses a false dilemma to have to choose among these three options, as if they are mutually exclusive. In a manner of speaking, they all meld together. Mount Sinai is God's holy dwelling, but he will choose to move his holy presence to live among the Israelites, first in the moveable tabernacle and then in the temple. Mount Sinai and Mount Zion (Jerusalem) are integrally related. So, too, is the land of Canaan. This is no mere patch of land, but God's permanent gift to his people, within which will be his glory and presence. We can say that God is bringing his people out of Egypt in order that he might be present with them, and that presence will be manifest in 'sacred space' that takes three forms. God's self-revelation at Sinai is, although itself a frighteningly powerful reality, a prelude to the permanence of his presence in the land and the temple." See Enns, *Exodus*, 300–301.

Egyptians could not drink the water filled with blood; now, the Israelites cannot drink the bitter water at Marah. YHWH rained down hail on the Egyptians, and now YHWH rains down manna on the Israelites. Locusts covered the ground in Egypt. Now, quail covers the ground in the wilderness. The plagues served to teach the pharaoh and Egypt a lesson. The wordplay in the wilderness trials implies that YHWH wants to teach a similar lesson to Israel, albeit a positive one.<sup>40</sup>

Along with mirroring what came earlier in Exodus, the wilderness trials also mirror what lies ahead post-Sinai in Numbers. This mirroring highlights not only the literary unity of the Pentateuch but creates a literary mountain, so to speak, with Exodus 14–18 leading toward Mt. Sinai and Numbers 10–36 leading away from Sinai. Carmen Imes helpfully lists out the following:<sup>41</sup>

1. The Pentateuch cites six campsites before and after Sinai (Exodus 12–18 and Numbers 11–32), each beginning with the phrase “and they set out.”
2. “Desert” is mentioned seven times before and after Sinai.
3. YHWH satisfies their hunger with manna and quail before and after Sinai (Exod 16 and Num 11).
4. YHWH satisfies their thirst with water from a rock before and after Sinai (Exod 17 and Num 20).
5. YHWH protects Israel via the angel from a foreign king before and after Sinai (Exod 14:19–20 and Num 22:21–35).
6. Israel fights the Amalekites before and after (Exod 17:8–16 and Num 14:39–45).
7. Moses receives wisdom from Jethro, his father-in-law, before Sinai and Hobab, his brother-in-law, after Sinai (Exod 18 and Num 10:29–32).

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<sup>40</sup> Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 177–78.

<sup>41</sup> Carmen Joy Imes, *Bearing God’s Name: Why Sinai Still Matters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 14–16.

8. Moses is burdened with leadership and delegates his authority before Sinai and after Sinai (Exod 18:17–18, 24–26 and Num 11:10–17)
9. The Israelites grumble, wishing they never left Egypt before and after Sinai (Exod 14:10–12 and Num 14).

Furthering the mirroring between Exodus and Numbers, Michael Morales notes the similar word counter with 16,713 words in Exodus and 16,413 words in Numbers.<sup>42</sup> Gordon Wenham notes Miriam’s song of victory in before Sinai in Exodus 15:20–21 and Miriam and Aaron’s rebellion after Sinai in Numbers 12. As well, the text specifies a three day’s journey to Sinai (Exod 15:22) and a three-day journey from Sinai (Num 10:33).<sup>43</sup>

Enns calls these wilderness experiences Israel’s infancy.<sup>44</sup> Hamilton calls it a place of testing.<sup>45</sup> Imes explains that the wilderness serves as “the workshop of Israel’s becoming” and, for that reason, calls the wilderness a “liminal space.”<sup>46</sup> I particularly appreciate Imes’s usage of liminality as it evokes the concept of liminal spaces within the temple, both in the Jewish and ANE understanding.<sup>47</sup> This connection to the wilderness as a liminal temple space towards Sinai makes sense, given that Sinai is a cosmic mountain temple filled with liminal spaces, as the reader will see. In a sense, YHWH prepares Israel to see if they are ready to enter the cosmic mountain space.

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<sup>42</sup> L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, NSBT 37 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 24.

<sup>43</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Pentateuch*, anniv. ed., Exploring the Bible 1, ann. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 109.

<sup>44</sup> Enns, *Exodus*, 321.

<sup>45</sup> Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*, 178.

<sup>46</sup> Imes, *Bearing God’s Name*, 16–18.

<sup>47</sup> Matthew Susnow, “Liminality and Canaanite Cultic Spaces: Temple Entrances, Status Transformations and Ritual in Threshold Contexts,” *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 154, no. 1 (2022): 2–21; Emilie M. VanOpstall, *Sacred Thresholds: The Door to the Sanctuary in Late Antiquity*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 185 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2018).

## **Exodus 34:29–35 in Light of the Sinai Event Starting in Exodus 19**

By chapter 19, Moses has brought the people to Mt. Sinai. Moses's shepherd staff, once used to herd sheep in Exodus 3, has now struck down Pharaoh and his Egyptian gods. Now Moses leads his people through the wilderness like a shepherd, reminiscent of an ANE king-priest.<sup>48</sup> Below is a brief outline of Exodus 19–40, once again highlighting connections to Genesis and the priestly/temple clues that inform the reader of what is happening atop Sinai in Exodus 32–34.

### **PART II: Sinai—Exodus 19–40**

1. Wisdom in Becoming a Royal Priesthood: 19–31
  1. Covenant and Ten Words of new creation: 19–20
  2. Bringing earth to heaven via ethics: 21–23:19
  3. The covenant affirmed: 24
  4. Bringing heaven to earth via the cultus: 25–31
2. The Calf vs Moses: Exodus 32–34
3. Wisdom for God's Portable Cosmic Mountain Temple: Exodus 35–40

### **Wisdom in Becoming a Royal Priesthood—Exodus 19:1–31:18**

Exodus 19–31 feels like a homecoming of sorts. Moses and the Israelites finally made it to Sinai. While this feels like a conclusion after the plagues, the exodus, and the wilderness trials, this also doubles to show how far Israel will fall starting in Exodus 32. For the sake of brevity, the paper will broadly highlight how Exodus 19–31 connects to the Pentateuch and ANE concepts, including cosmic mountain and priestly/temple themes. The focus on treating the law as wisdom and becoming a “royal priesthood” in Exodus 19:6 is connected to the *imago Dei* in Genesis 1 and is treated more extensively in the next chapter.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Currid, *Against the Gods*, 111–19.

<sup>49</sup> J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 89–90.



*Covenant and Ten Words of New  
Creation—19:1–20:26*

At this point, YHWH enacts a covenant with his people. In the ANE, the deity and a human representative, the priest-king, established the covenant. This priest-king was said to be the image and son of the deity. The deity commissions his image/son via the covenant to carry out the work. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this is what Walton dubs “the Great Symbiosis.”<sup>50</sup> The gods needed something from the king and the people, namely food and worship. Likewise, the king and his people needed something from the gods, namely protection and provision. If the king did his part, the god(s) would do their part. However, the biblical narrative diverges the status quo of the ANE. First, in the biblical narrative, the covenant is not simply between a deity and a priest-king. Moses is undoubtedly a mediator between YHWH and the people, but the covenant includes the entire nation.<sup>51</sup> Second, the image-sonship language is not reserved exclusively for Moses as the priest-king. Israel is YHWH’s son. This sonship/image language is reminiscent of Genesis 1:26–28 and borrows from the ANE’s language.

The Decalogue is then introduced in Exodus 20. Two brief observations are to be made here. The first observation is to note how commandments one and two work together. Creating an image, whether that be dedicated towards YHWH or another deity, is to blur the distinction between Creator and creation.<sup>52</sup> YHWH is set apart. Besides, YHWH already has an image, its humanity, and more specifically, Israel (Gen 1:26–28; Exod 4:22). While Exodus 20:3 uses the word *psl* rather than *tslm*, *tslm* is later used in the Pentateuch to describe pagan idols (Num 33:52). This observation further confirms Eden as a temple and humanity as a temple image. A second observation, why ten commandments as opposed to nine or eleven? One clue lies in the fact that the Decalogue

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<sup>50</sup> Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament*, 184–85.

<sup>51</sup> Imes, *Bearing God’s Name*, 62–63.

<sup>52</sup> G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 17–20.

is later called עשרת הדברים, literally “the ten words” (Exod 34:28; Deut 4:13, 10:4).

While the text is not explicit, this seems to allude to Elohim’s ten speech acts in creating the cosmos in Genesis 1 and YHWH’s ten acts in decreating Egypt in Exodus 5–12.

Terence E. Fretheim notes,

This . . . creation theology is a prevailing theme of the book of Exodus. The law fills out that emphasis, thereby integrating cosmic order and social order. . . . The law is a means by which the divine ordering of chaos at the cosmic level is actualized in the social sphere, whereby God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven. The Egyptians have been an example par excellence of how the justice of God’s world order has been subverted, creating injustice, oppression, and social chaos.<sup>53</sup>

*Bringing Heaven to Earth via Ethics—21:1–23:33*

Fretheim describing the law as how to bring YHWH’s order “on earth as it is in heaven,” fits within the conceptual mind of the cosmic mountain temple. As stated in chapter one, in the ANE, the temple was where heaven and earth met. Entering the temple was like ascending to the heavens. As a result, YHWH designed the Sinaitic commands so that the temple ideal, the space of cosmic order, goes “downhill” so that the rest of the cosmos will experience YHWH. Indeed, the covenant relationship between YHWH and Israel does not exist exclusively for one another. The covenant, via Israel’s obedience, is to place the nations so that they will experience YHWH’s blessing. This telos explains the law’s immediate concerns with caring for the destitute and the lowly (21:1–23:9).

*Bringing Heaven to Earth via the Temple and Cultus—25:1–31:18*

Lastly, in this section, YHWH establishes the portable cosmic mountain temple to host YHWH’s presence. The previous chapter discussed the theological significance of this temple already. However, it is worth noting that, as this chapter has

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<sup>53</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus: Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 204.

demonstrated, the temple, YHWH's presence, and the priesthood are key themes in understanding the narrative of the Exodus. Seven pieces of furniture are mentioned within the temple building—echoing the seven days of creation in Genesis 1. Pieces of furniture echo their wilderness travels, the Garden of Eden, or both. Thus, stepping into the temple served as a reminder of the character of YHWH and his creation of the cosmos and the nation of Israel.

Furthermore, the temple needed upkeep: enter the priesthood in Exodus 28–29. G. K. Beale cites the three pieces of the high priest's clothing corresponding to the three sections of the temple.<sup>54</sup> He speaks of the priesthood, adorned in colors of blue, purple, and scarlet as reminiscent of a glory cloud, a perpetual YHWH-ordained theophany to Israel. The priesthood also echoes Adam in the garden, the first king-priest, made in the image of Elohim. So, the priesthood mediating in the new Eden is an image bearer performing the priestly task of mediating on behalf of the people, like Adam failed to do.

### *Conclusion*

Establishing the covenant, the Decalogue, subsequent ethical commands, the temple, and the priestly order set up the drama unfolding in Exodus 32–34. The priestly order and all that it represents concerning the people and the temple are key interpretive grids to understand the shining face of Moses in Exodus 34:29–35.

### **Exodus 34:29–35 in Light of the Golden Calf Incident Starting in Exodus 32**

Before highlighting particular points within the text, it is worth noting that Exodus 32–34 is to be treated as a single literary unit.<sup>55</sup> Admittedly, the narrative flow

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<sup>54</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 39–43; Andrew S. Malone, *God's Mediators: A Biblical Theology of Priesthood*, NSBT 43 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 23.

<sup>55</sup> Herbert Chanan Brichto, "The Worship of the Golden Calf: A Literary Analysis of a Fable on Idolatry," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 54 (1983): 1–44; Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 557–58.

feels bumpy on the surface, which source critics are eager to dissect. However, as argued at the start of this chapter, from a literary point of view, rather than dissect Exodus 32–34, how do the supposed narrative “bumps” fit within the larger whole?

Peter Gentry identifies Exodus 32 as the “worship” portion of the covenant.<sup>56</sup> However, in dramatic irony, all goes wrong quickly in this “worship” portion of the covenant. Here, the text introduces the golden calf. The people need an image. Feeling vulnerable in the wilderness, they need some man-made theophany to protect them (Exod 32:1). Aaron acts as a mediator to the people and creates an idol of a calf or bull, likely using the very jewelry plundered from the Egyptians (Exod 3:21–22; 11:2–3; 12:35–36). Why the bull? The horned bull in the ANE was a symbol of strength and power that was dominant in Egypt.<sup>57</sup> The Israelites were nomads with no strength or power of their own. In this “worship” portion of the covenant, the people rise to eat, drink, and play. The word “play” in 32:6, *tskh*, was a Hebrew idiom most likely referring to sex, a common ritual practice in the ANE.<sup>58</sup> In the course of these six verses, Israel mimics their ANE counterparts.

Along with mimicking the ANE nations, Israel essentially becomes what they worship. The phrase “stiff-necked people” is first in the HB in Exodus 32:9 and is used three other times during the Exodus 32–34 unit (Exod 33:3; 33:5; 34:9). This Hebrew idiom describes stubbornness, obstinacy, or hardness of heart and evokes the imagery of livestock refusing leadership. It is no coincidence that this is first described of Israel as they worship an image of livestock.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 343.

<sup>57</sup> Benjamin Edidin Scolnic, “Moses and the Horns of Power,” *Judaism* 40 (1991): 569–79.

<sup>58</sup> Willem VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 797, Logos Bible Software.

<sup>59</sup> Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 82–83.

YHWH wishes to wipe out the Israelites and start again with Moses, echoing Noah (Gen 6–8).<sup>60</sup> As the YHWH-appointed priest-king, Moses mediates on behalf of the people, citing the Abrahamic promise in Genesis 12 and 15 (Exod 32:13). As a result, YHWH relents from his wrath. Moses comes down the cosmic mountain, smashes the tablets, and recruits the Levites to mete out judgment. The Levites did not participate in the pagan ritual ceremony. Because of their abstinence, YHWH and Moses promote the Levites as priests over Israel.<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, in the ANE, the firstborn son was considered the priest of a family unit. So while Exodus 28–29 does not say explicitly, it seems likely the tribe of Reuben was the original priesthood over Israel.<sup>62</sup> The Levitical promotion also further spotlights Moses as YHWH’s faithful priest, coming from the tribe of Levi (Exod 2:1; 6:14–25) and being the true mediator over his older brother Aaron. The younger supplanting the older, Reuben over Judah and Moses over Aaron, also echoes themes within Genesis (Gen 4:4; 17:19–21; 25:23; 37:3; 48:14–22).

Moses wishes to make atonement for the people (Exod 32:30). Subsequently, he offers himself in place of Israel (Exod 32:32). In chapter 33, YHWH essentially upholds the Abrahamic promises and will give them the promised land without his presence. Moses then turns to the tent of meeting where he can regularly speak with YHWH face-to-face, alluding to what is to come on Sinai in Exodus 34 (Exod 33:7–11) and wants more from YHWH. Moses wants YHWH’s presence to go with them. YHWH again relents because of Moses’s boldness. Moses still wants more. He wants to see the glory of YHWH as assurance before moving forward from Sinai. This scene contrasts with his first encounter with YHWH in Exodus 3. Previously, Moses was too afraid to

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<sup>60</sup> Gordon Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament*, 77.

<sup>61</sup> David Schrock, “How a Kingdom of Priests Became a Kingdom with Priests and Levites: A Filial-Corporate Understanding of the Royal Priesthood in Exodus 19:6,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 23, no. 1 (2019): 23–55.

<sup>62</sup> Schrock, “How a Kingdom of Priests Became a Kingdom with Priests and Levites,” 41.

look upon YHWH's presence, but now he demands to see his presence. Similarly, Moses questioning YHWH connects to the previous interrogations in Exodus 3:11–4:17 and Exodus 5:22–6:1 and is met with approval in Exodus 33:17.

In the next chapter, Moses climbs atop Mt. Sinai again to receive what he asked for, to witness the glory of YHWH. YHWH descends in a glory cloud, echoing Genesis 1–3. As he does, YHWH speaks what is known in the Jewish tradition as the Thirteen Attributes. The Thirteen Attributes carry deep significance as it is the most cited passage in the HB. YHWH's self-revelation also links back to YHWH's first self-revelation when Moses was first on the mountain in Exodus 3.

In this covenant renewal scene in Exodus 34:11–12, YHWH repeats driving out their ANE neighbors (Exod 3:8, 3:17, 23:23, 33:2) emphasizing the forbidding of gods and idol-making (Exod 34:13–17). The institution of the Passover, the Sabbath, and the Feast of Weeks are also mentioned to serve as a perpetual reminder for Israel. Moses spends the next forty days there and rewrites the Decalogue.

### **The Literary Features of Exodus 34:29–35**

After examining the context, we have noted a handful of recurring themes throughout the Pentateuch's narrative. First, Moses is a type of king-priest/image-son to the people of Israel: he represents YHWH to the people and vice versa. Second, understanding Moses's role is aided by understanding the Pentateuch in light of its ANE context: specifically, the cosmic mountain temple and, subsequently, the image of God, and the role of the priest concerning the temple. Third, throughout the book of Exodus, the author regularly showcases Israel's connection to the creation stories in Genesis. This literary unity foreshadows events within its narrative and looks ahead to what will come in the Pentateuch. This last point is explored more fully in the next chapter. With these recurring themes in mind, we now focus on Exodus 34:29–35. If Moses is a priest-king/image-son and an ANE background is assumed, how does the reader make sense of

Moses’s shining face? The two most significant clues to examine are the words “shining” (*qrn*) and “veil” (*mswh*) used in the text.

*Qrn*

The Hebrew verb, commonly translated as “shone,” is *qrn*. *Qrn* is employed three times in vv. 29–35, all in the *Qal* imperfect. As noted below, *qrn* is linked with the phrase קרן עור פניו twice in v. 29 and v. 30, with a slight variation of it in v. 35.

Table 3. Hebrew to English translation of Exodus 34:29, 30, and 35

v.29b	ומשה לא ידע כי קרן עור פניו בדברו אתו	. . .and Moses did not do that the skin of his face shone when he spoke with him.
v. 30	וירא אהרן וכל בני ישראל את משה והנה קרן עור פניו וייראו מגשת אליו	And Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, and behold: the face of his skin shone and they were afraid to approach him.
v. 35	וראו בני ישראל את פני משה כי קרן עור פני משה	And the sons of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’s face shone

How is *qrn* defined? In two notable Hebrew lexicons, *qrn* in the noun form is translated as “horn” and is commonly associated with the horn of an animal and often represented in the ANE as power or strength (cf. Deut 33:17; 2 Sam 22:3; Ps 18:2; Ps

69:31; Dan 8:20–21; Zech 1:18–21).<sup>63</sup> Only rarely is *qrn* translated as a shining light (see, for example, Hab 3:4). With this in mind, would the phrase קרן עור פניו be better translated as “the skin of his face had horns?” Curiously enough, even though *qrn* is most commonly translated as “horn” in Exodus 34:34, most translations often opt for the less-common “shone,” except for the Vulgate. As seen below, the Targums and the Septuagint opt for “shone” to note the connection between Moses’s face and YHWH’s glory.

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<sup>63</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Academic, 1994), 1144, Logos Bible Software; VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 989–90, Logos Bible Software.



Table 4. Targum, Septuagint, and Vulgate translations of Exodus 34:29

<b>Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, section XXI, XXXIV</b>
Mosheh knew not that the visage (form) of his face shone with the splendour which had come upon him from the brightness of the glory of the Lord's Shekinah. <sup>64</sup>
<b>Targum Onkelos, section XXI, XXXIV</b>
And the children of Israel saw the face of Mosheh, that the splendour of the glory of Mosheh's face was great; and Mosheh put the veil again upon his face until he went in to speak with Him. <sup>65</sup>
<b>Septuagint</b>
δὲ αὐτοῦ ἐκ τοῦ ὄρους, Μωυση̄ς οὐκ ἤδει ὅτι δεδόξασται ἡ ὄψις τοῦ χρώματος τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ λαλεῖν αὐτὸν αὐτῷ <sup>66</sup>
Now as he was descending from the mountain, Moses did not know that the appearance of the skin of his face was glorified while he was speaking to him.
<b>Vulgate</b>
Cumque descenderet Moyses de monte Sinai, tenebat duas tabulas testimonii, et ignorabat quod cornuta esset facies sua ex consortio sermonis Domini. <sup>67</sup>
And when Moses came down from the mount Sinai, he held the two tables of the testimony, and he knew not that his face was horned from the conversation of the Lord.

So, which is the more suitable option: “shone” or “horned”? If *grn* connects the reader to the glory of YHWH earlier seen in 33:17–23, as is most overtly seen in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and the Septuagint, then “shone” is appropriate. At the same

<sup>64</sup> J. W. Etheridge, trans., *The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch with The Fragments of the Jerusalem Targum from the Chaldee* (London: Longman, 1862).

<sup>65</sup> Etheridge, *The Targums of Onkelos*.

<sup>66</sup> Ἐξοδος - Κεφάλαιο 34 LXX.

<sup>67</sup> “The Book of Exodus: Liber Exodus,” Catholic Bible Online, accessed September 10, 2023, [http://catholicbible.online/side\\_by\\_side/OT/Ex/ch\\_34](http://catholicbible.online/side_by_side/OT/Ex/ch_34).

time, “horned” as a viable translation should not be ruled out either. As seen previously, “horned” symbolizes strength and power, and Moses’s shining face, in some sense, now radiates with the power and strength of YHWH. Furthermore, ever since Exodus 2, the narrative has gone to great lengths to show Moses’s unique role as a mediator and priest-king over the people.

If shining light is indeed what the author had in mind for *qrn*, why not choose a more appropriate Hebrew word such as *’hr*? This word choice would connect with Genesis 1 and avoid such interpretive difficulties. To answer this question, *qrn* in Exodus 34 connects the reader to the golden calf in Exodus 32. As Hauge notes,

The splendour of the divine light emanating from the face of Moses is combined with the character of his skin as somehow “horned.” The latter aspect is underlined by the context. Given the words accessible to the author for the description of light-phenomena, the choice of the unusual *qr* for a verb can hardly be understood as anything but a deliberate allusion to the other horned being of the context, namely the Golden Calf. Just as an ox conceptually represents an ancient Near Eastern stereotype of a divine being, so any suggestions of horns somehow related to a human figure would refer to iconographical categories. The “horned” character of the shining skin could simply serve as an indication of the divine character of Moses’s presence. Whatever metaphysical questions are involved, the imagery of “horned light,” related to the interplay of divine and human *panîm* and set in the context of the Golden Calf, invites the reader to a rather radical understanding of Moses as a divine figure. Emanating “horned light,” his bodily manifestations have been completely and permanently changed, forever distancing Moses from normal humankind.<sup>68</sup>

This connection between Moses and the golden calf is subtle. Exodus 32 never describes the golden calf as “horned” or “shining,” yet, the motifs and literary parallels between these figures are present in Exodus 32–34. Moses’s shining face as a direct connection/contrast to the golden calf further reinforces the cultic themes already mentioned in the Exodus narrative. In his work, Hauge will later describe this transformation as an “apotheosis.” Apotheosis describes the divinizing of a human,

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<sup>68</sup> Martin Ravndal Hauge, *The Descent from the Mountain: Narrative Patterns in Exodus 19–40* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 168.

typically of kings and priesthood, into the status of a god-like figure.<sup>69</sup> While I question Hauge’s word choice (I would prefer theosis, but that will be treated later), Hauge’s instincts are correct in noticing the connection between Moses and the horned bull in Exodus 32. The bull made of gold is a shining figure believed to be a physical representation of deity. This was common ANE practice. The shining image represented the shining glory of deity.<sup>70</sup> Given all the data shared previously concerning the cosmic mountain, Moses atop Mt. Sinai, representing the cosmic mountain temple, is like an image as well. His shining face as an image of YHWH echoes the *adam* as the image atop the mountain of Eden before him. The shining image concept is reinforced by the text’s usage of *qrn* connecting to the golden calf, thus creating a sort of double entendre with its unusual word choice.<sup>71</sup>

Additionally, in the ANE world, king-priests as the image of deity and adopted son would possess a shining face as well, affirming their favor with the divine and delegated authority over the nation. In Mesopotamian literature, the *melammu* is described as radiant light.<sup>72</sup> Humans could possess *melammu* by wearing a piece of clothing radiating with light, originating from a deity, and possessing divine power. Some scholars, most notably Shawn Aster, see *melammu* as shedding interpretive light on Moses’s encounter.<sup>73</sup> While Aster uses this ANE connection as the main evidence of Moses’s transformation into a higher status, the biblical text’s emphasis on Sinai as a cosmic mountain temple and Moses’s status as priest-king over Israel already supports

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<sup>69</sup> Julia Troche, *Death, Power, and Apotheosis in Ancient Egypt: The Old and Middle Kingdoms* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021), 73–87.

<sup>70</sup> Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 129–30.

<sup>71</sup> Eric X. Jarrard, “Double Entendre in Exodus 34:29–35: Revisiting the ׀ך of Moses,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 131, no. 3 (September 2019): 388–406.

<sup>72</sup> Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 76.

<sup>73</sup> Shawn Zelig Aster, *The Unbeatable Light: Melammu and Its Biblical Parallels* (Münster, Germany: Ugarit Verlag, 2011).

this regardless of parallel ANE literature. Further Amar Annus writes: “The motif of opalescence that surrounds divine persons and objects is amply attested in the Mesopotamian art and literature, and there are quite many terms in Akkadian denoting holy luminosity: *melammu*, *namrirru*, *namurratu*, *puluhtu*, *šarūru*, and others.”<sup>74</sup>

Furthering the ANE connection, Seth Sanders notes “horns and light was in fact a common feature of the international Near Eastern cuneiform high culture of the early first millennium BCE.”<sup>75</sup> In Babylonian literature, for example, astronomers use the Sumerian word *si* when describing the celestial bodies in the sky. In one instance, when the moon eclipsed the sun, rays of light emanated. Thus, *si* described both a horn and light.

In sum, Moses’s shining face transforms him as an image-bearer and confirmed priest-king of YHWH. The evidence includes the following:

1. The backdrop of the cosmic mountain and the image/priest-king in Genesis 1–3.
2. The consistency of Exodus calling back to the Genesis narrative
3. The prominence of Sinai in the book of Exodus
4. The priestly/cultic shape of the Exodus and subsequently the Pentateuch
5. The echoing of Sinai as like a cosmic mountain temple
6. The shining horned calf in Exodus 32 as an image of god
7. The regular confirmation of Moses as a priest-king throughout the Exodus narrative
8. The shining/horned transformation of Moses coming down Sinai in Exodus 34:29–35
9. The ANE commonly associating horn and light together
10. The ANE theology of priest-kings radiating with the light of deity

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<sup>74</sup> Amar Annus, “The Mesopotamian Precursors of Adam’s Garment of Glory and Moses’s Shining Face,” in *Identities and Societies in the Ancient East-Mediterranean Regions: Comparative Approaches*, ed. Thomas R. Kämmerer (Münster, Germany: Ugarit-Verlag, 2011), 8.

<sup>75</sup> Seth Sanders, “Old Light on Moses’s Shining Face,” *Vetus Testamentum* 52, no. 3 (July 2002): 403.

## *Objections*

Understanding the interpretation to *qrn* comes with a myriad of interpretations, some are more confessional in their approach, others critical, others far more creative.

Joshua Philpot's dissertation, "The Shining Face of Moses," focuses on Exodus 34:29–35 and dismisses *melammu* as an interpretive clue. Philpot summarizes Aster's study, *The Unbeatable Light*, and offers four differences between the ANE and Moses's shining face.<sup>76</sup> First, in the ANE, a deity would shine its light on a superior figure; however, Moses's face shines because of proximity to YHWH, not Moses's superiority. Second, the deity's light would shine on the individual via a cultic ritual or ceremony. In Exodus 32–34, no cultic ritual or ceremony takes place. Third, the individual wore a veil representing the deity's light. In Exodus 34:29–35, Moses's face permanently shines and needs a veil to cover it. Fourth, in the ANE, the people were expected to submit to whoever represented the divine light. In Exodus 34, this is not the case.

Philpot concludes, "From a historical perspective . . . they are generally unconnected conceptually, except in Deuteronomy 34:7. Although it is unique, this radiance of Moses's face, therefore, is a development of a biblical concept, not the borrowing of a Mesopotamian one that has similar features."<sup>77</sup> However, as seen so far, the HB, specifically the Pentateuch, is filled with polemical undertones containing similarities and differences from their ANE counterparts. If by "borrowing" Mesopotamian literature, one means that the Israelites took ANE themes and passed them off as their own to create, as Delitzsch calls, "crass plagiarism," that is one thing.<sup>78</sup> However, if by "borrowing" Mesopotamian literature, one means using the concept of

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<sup>76</sup> Joshua Matthew Philpot, "The Shining Face of Moses: The Interpretation of Exodus 34:29–35 and Its Use in the Old and New Testaments" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 97–98.

<sup>77</sup> Philpot, "The Shining Face of Moses," 98.

<sup>78</sup> Currid, *Against the Gods*, 17.

existing ANE motifs and turning them on their heads to showcase the uniqueness of YHWH and his people, it seems this is what the biblical author had in mind. The radiance on Moses's face is a biblical concept *and* can also perhaps borrow and, in turn, polemicize preexisting ANE concepts. Both can be true.

To work through Philpot's points one by one, first, Moses in the Exodus is superior to the Israelites. Yes, he has his flaws. Yes, his face shines because of his proximity to YHWH, but why can Moses access such proximity to YHWH? Because YHWH found favor with Moses (Exod 33:17). Moses is the true mediator for the people. YHWH sets Moses apart from the people for the people. Second, while it is true that no cultic ceremony takes place, there are undoubtedly cultic overtones at play. The whole Pentateuch is shaped with cultic themes. Sinai is a cosmic mountain temple that Israel aims to recreate in Canaan and one day in Jerusalem. Moses is from the line of Levi and mediates on behalf of the people. The meaning behind the temple and priest are embedded within the creation narratives and begin to bloom atop Sinai. Furthermore, much of, if not all of, Israel's liturgical calendar revolves around historical events. While the Exodus 32–34 event is not overtly remembered in the biblical text, early Jewish interpreters viewed Moses's ascension and intercession as the first Yom Kippur.<sup>79</sup> All this to say, the text does not need to mention cultic ceremony explicitly to allude to cultic themes. The entire Pentateuch revolves around cultic themes. To his third point, I fully agree with the difference between the veil in the ANE and with Moses. As with many ANE parallels, there does not need to be a perfect one-to-one correlation for the biblical text to allude to ANE themes. The differences between biblical text and ANE thought are where the polemical nature of the biblical text shines through. Some points will be similar (e.g., in Genesis 1 the waters represent chaos), while others will be dissimilar in

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<sup>79</sup> "Seder Olam Rabbah 6," Sefaria Community Translation, accessed September 10, 2023, [https://www.sefaria.org/Seder\\_Olam\\_Rabbah.6.2?lang=en](https://www.sefaria.org/Seder_Olam_Rabbah.6.2?lang=en); Rashi, "Rashi on Exodus 34:29," in *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Prayers for Sabbath and Rashi's Commentary* (London: Shapiro and Vallentine, 1929–1934), [https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi\\_on\\_Exodus.34.29.2?lang=en](https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_Exodus.34.29.2?lang=en).

order to polemicize the ANE (e.g. in Genesis 1, YHWH stands over the chaos, free of conflict). The same is true in this passage. Ancient Near Eastern priest-kings needed a veil to demonstrate divine light. Moses did not need it. The divine light permanently transformed him from the inside out. Finally, Philpot states that possessors of the divine light required submission, whereas Moses does not. This point is partially true. The people certainly look upon Moses with fear, similarly to how they viewed YHWH atop Sinai (Exod 19:16, 34:30). Thus, we can infer that the people rightly view Moses as a YHWH-created theophany. They expect judgment from Moses upon his descent down the mountain, similar to his last descent (Exod 32:15–19). However, Moses, on behalf of YHWH, delivers mercy and renews the covenant. YHWH expects submission from the people via the Torah that Moses delivers. So, while it is true that the Israelites do not submit to Moses, they do submit to YHWH through Moses's leadership and instruction. Dozeman succinctly states, "Moses's personality is subsumed in a divine Torah, but, paradoxically, this makes him the most authoritative person in all of scripture."<sup>80</sup> Moreover, I question whether the ANE concept of submission to the priest-king is wholly accurate. Indeed, the gods elevated the priest-king to an adopted divine status, but submission to the priest-king was never entirely for the priest-king alone. The people's submission ultimately went to the nation's deity through the priest-king.

An alternative position is that Moses's face literally is horned. This position was taken by more medieval scholars and more recently by Jack Sasson.<sup>81</sup> Sasson argues the literal reading speaks to the transformation of Israel from paganism to monotheism:

In this one vestige of a suppressed cult, this one single depiction of a horned Moses, symbolizing the old pagan faith, being brought face to face with the God of the new creed, YHWH asserts his dominance. It is He who gives the orders. Moses does no

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<sup>80</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, "Masking Moses and Mosaic Authority in Torah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 29.

<sup>81</sup> Jack M. Sasson, "Bovine Symbolism in the Exodus Narrative," *Vetus Testamentum* 18, no. 3 (1968): 380–87; Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Horned Moses in Medieval Art and Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970).

more than present them to the people. From then on, there is no more mention of horns, no more mention of veils. Monotheism triumphs, at least for the time being.<sup>82</sup>

To this interpretation, I appreciate Sasson's connection between the calf/bull in Exodus 32 and Moses face in Exodus 34. Nevertheless, with the shining of the golden bull idol and the *qrn* of Moses's face upon witnessing YHWH's glory in Exodus 33, it appears *qrn* should be treated literarily rather than literally. Furthermore, it seems Sasson's presupposes a historical-critical framework thus explaining his arrival to a different conclusion. Lastly, as will be discussed later, the Aaronic blessing in Numbers 6:25–27 and Moses's obituary in Deuteronomy 34, indirectly reference Moses's face. In both instances, if Moses's face is literally horned rather than shining, then these biblical connections are non-existent.

A more minority position on the Moses's shining face comes from William Propp. Propp reads *qrn* not as radiating light or possessing horns, but as a skin condition. The vision of YHWH's glory leaves Moses permanently disfigured, and the people react in horror in Exodus 34:30. In his own words Propp says, "Moses would have died had he seen Yahweh's face (Exod 33:20), but a glimpse of his back merely disfigures him."<sup>83</sup> The accompanying veil shields the people from his disfigurement. To this viewpoint, I appreciate Propp's serious reading of *qrn*. However, this chapter argues that *qrn* should be read literarily (that is, noting all the prior themes of image/mountain/priest/king), rather than literally. The *qrn* is a connection to the shining horned bull in Exodus 32 and harkens back to the image of Elohim atop the cosmic mountain of Eden.

Recently, Jennifer Koosed noted the myriad of interpretations regarding Moses's shining face and offers a psychological reading of the text. Moses is horned like a bull but still human. He is shining like a divine figure but still a human. Thus, Moses

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<sup>82</sup> Sasson, "Bovine Symbolism in the Exodus Narrative," 387.

<sup>83</sup> William Propp, "The Skin of Moses's Face—Transfigured or Disfigured?," *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (July 1987): 385.



represents a non-binary, ambiguous figure that perplexes the Israelites and the reader.<sup>84</sup> Similar to Propp, while I appreciate Koosed’s connecting the bull to Moses’s *qrn*, I argue for a literary reading of the text rather than a contemporary, psychological reading.

*Mswh*

In keeping with the cultic theme, the veil of Moses is also prominent in Exodus in 34:33–35 and connects to the *qrn*. The *mshw* of Moses is introduced three times during these three verses. The *mshw* is never mentioned again in the Pentateuch or the HB. As seen below, the *mshw* is always in close connection to the shining face of Moses.

Table 5. Hebrew to English translation of Exodus 34:33–35

v. 33	ויכל משה מדבר אתם ויתן על פניו מסוה	And it was after Moses completed speaking with him and he gave upon his face a veil.
v. 34	ובבא משה לפני יהוה לדבר אתו יסיר את המסוה עד צאתו ויצא ודבר אל בני ישראל את אשר יצוה	And when Moses entered before YHWH to speak to him, he removed the veil until he left. And he went out and spoke to the sons of Israel what was commanded.

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<sup>84</sup> Jennifer L. Koosed, “Moses: The Face of Fear,” *Biblical Interpretation* 22, nos. 4–5 (August 2014): 414–29.

v. 35	<p>וראו בני ישראל את פני משה כי קרן עור פני משה והשיב משה את המסוה על פניו עד באו לדבר אתו</p>	<p>And the sons of Israel saw the face of Moses because the skin of the face of Moses shone and Moses placed the veil upon his face until he entered to speak with him</p>
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In *HALOT*, possible translations include veil, covering, or sheath.<sup>85</sup> The Septuagint uses κάλυμμα meaning “covering.” The Targums, Septuagint, and Vulgate translate *mswh* as “veil.” So what, if any, significance does the veil have? Much like the *qrn*, there is a spectrum of interpretations. The interpretations addressed below are not exhaustive and I will treat each position briefly.

#### *The Veil as Simply a Face Covering*

There is certainly a connection between Moses’s face in Exodus 34:29–35 and the face of YHWH in 33:17–23 with the word *pnh* (Exod 33:20; 34:29–30, 33, 35). Moses requests to see the glory of YHWH atop the mountain. Indeed, Moses has come a long way since his first encounter with Yahweh in Exodus 3. Upon the first encounter, Moses hid his face from YHWH (3:6). Now, in this theophany, he boldly requests to see the face of YHWH, and YHWH grants this request, implying relational intimacy.<sup>86</sup> In order to fulfill this request, there must be some distance between YHWH and Moses, so YHWH places Moses in a cleft. Also, YHWH must cover Moses’s face with his hand. Without the distance and concealment, Moses would not be able to witness the glory of YHWH and live (33:20).

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<sup>85</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Academic, 1994), 605, Logos Bible Software.

<sup>86</sup> Mark D. Wessner, “Toward a Literary Understanding of Moses and the Lord ‘Face to Face’ in Exodus 33:7–11,” *Restoration Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2002): 109–16.

In the next chapter, Moses radiates with the divine glory of YHWH, and the Israelites meet him with fear. At 34:30, the text states that they are afraid (*yrr'*), the same verb is mentioned two other times in the Exodus narrative. As previously mentioned, the first is Exodus 3:6, when Moses hides his face from YHWH in the first theophanic encounter on Mt. Sinai. The second is when the Israelites see the peals of lightning atop Mt. Sinai and stand far off (20:18). It is with this latter reference that we can infer why the Israelites are afraid of Moses. Like their previous encounter in 20:18, they view Moses as a theophany of YHWH and to encounter a deity, or some manifestation of him, is frightening. Moses in 3:6 was similarly fearful of such judgment from YHWH's theophany.

If there is a theophanic connection between witnessing YHWH's lightning atop Sinai and Moses's shining face descending from Sinai, could people look upon Moses and live? It seems so. In 34:30, all the people see his face uncovered but are afraid to draw near, even Aaron, the designated priest! Referring to a previous point, some scholars suggest that people fear Moses because his face is horned. Propp says Moses's face is permanently distorted and grotesque by the YHWH encounter, so the people shrink back in fear. As said previously, while "shined" is the preferable translation to note the connection between YHWH's shining divine presence and Moses's face, the implication of "horned" still has theological significance and cannot be ruled out entirely. Also, as mentioned earlier, in light of 20:18, the people fear Moses not just because of the light emanating from his face but of what his face represents: a YHWH theophany with potential divine judgment. After all, Moses's previous descent from Mt. Sinai in Exodus 32 came with judgment.

To quell the fear of the people, Moses places a *mswh* over his face. Thus, one interpretation is that the *mswh* is simply a face covering within the passage's immediate

context and nothing more.<sup>87</sup> If the author wished to create a polemic against masked ANE priests, this would be more obvious, but there is no mention of ANE priests anywhere in the Exodus narrative that the author would want to polemicize. Furthermore, the linguistic connection would be more overt if the author wanted to connect the *mswh* covering Moses's face and the veil covering the YHWH's presence in the holy of holies. The veil in the tabernacle is a *prkth*, not a *mswh*.

### *The Veil as a Sign of Authority*

As cited briefly above, there are alternative interpretations to the significance of the veil. For example, in the ANE, it was common for priests, during cultic ceremony, to don a mask like a shaman.<sup>88</sup> But to counter this interpretation, Moses does not need a mask when entering the temple of YHWH, only when he leaves (Exod 34:34–35).<sup>89</sup> As a king-priest, Moses's face can absorb some of YHWH's glory. Thus, Moses's *mswh* is a polemic against masked ANE priests, thus holding up Moses as a better priest. Furthermore, to the Israelites, the veil and the shining face affirm Moses's authority. This authority, once again, is connected back to the golden calf incident in Exodus 32. The people want an image of YHWH. They want a mediator. In Exodus 32, they get what they want, and Moses, the mediator, mediates judgment. In Exodus 34, this image of YHWH descends the mountain again, this time delivering grace and mercy. The veil serves as a reminder.

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<sup>87</sup> Philpot, "The Shining Face of Moses," 93–94; R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Survey*, TOTC, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 243.

<sup>88</sup> Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 619.

<sup>89</sup> Stuart, *Exodus*, 644.

### *The Veil as an Allusion to the Temple*

Lastly, another option is to view Moses's *mswh* as an allusion to the veil in the temple.<sup>90</sup> Just as the people required a piece of cloth to withstand the glory of Moses's face, the people and priests required a curtain to withstand the glory of YHWH. While this is a less common position, this option has a few literary merits.

First, as noted previously, Moses's face and subsequent fear connect the reader back to theophanic visions in 3:6 and 20:18. In both theophanies, strong allusions point ahead to the temple. The narrative of Exodus even concludes with a final theophany of the YHWH's glory descending on the temple in 40:34–38. Thus, the presence of YHWH is a fearful thing no matter the manifestation—whether that be a burning bush, a pillar of cloud and fire, the holy of holies, or even the face of Moses. The veil then serves as a curtain later established in the Holy of Holies.

Second, in Exodus 33:17–23, YHWH covers Moses's face as he draws near him. In Exodus 34, Moses covers his face as he draws near the people. Also, as mentioned, the word for veil in this text is *mswh*. The word for veil in referencing the holy of holies is *prkth*. Also, the word for cover in 33:22 differs from the word for cover in 34:33–35. To the former, it is *skk*. To the latter, it is *shwv*. Interestingly enough, *skk* in 33:22 is the same word to describe the veil in the holy of holies in Exodus 40:3. So while the word may not be the same in 33:22 and 34:33–35, it seems intentional from the biblical authors to note the connection between YHWH's covering and Moses's covering. Furthermore, it is worth noting that even if the author chooses a different word, the reader is to see some connection. Take, for example, the golden calf in Exodus 32 and Moses's shining face in Exodus 34. There is an apparent connection between Moses's *qrn* and the calf's horns. This thematic connection can exist even if no one-for-one Hebrew word connects these ideas.

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<sup>90</sup> Enns, *Exodus*, 587.

Third, as cited earlier, Exodus is heavily shaped by the temple and its priestly/temple themes. The text sets Moses up early as a king-priest, and the book of Exodus ends with the temple's establishment. In fact, before the Exodus 32–34 narrative, the text describes the tabernacle. After the Exodus 32–34 narrative, the text goes back to describe the tabernacle! Similarly, the story in chapters 32–34 is seemingly “interrupted” by Moses entering the tent of meeting outside the camp in Exodus 33:7–11, a prototype to the eventual tabernacle built in chapter 40. Lastly, Thomas Dozeman notes that Moses established the tabernacle, *Torah*, and the perpetual priesthood atop Sinai.<sup>91</sup> These three are interconnected and are critical to the theme of the Pentateuch. Thus, while a minority position, to not read how the veil might allude to overall cultic themes, especially YHWH's presence within the Holy of Holies, seems overlooked.

#### *Final Thoughts on the Veil*

When examining these interpretive options, they all have their place. Some options are overt. Others are, pun intended, more veiled. From a plain reading of the text, Moses's veil certainly quells the fear of the people. Nevertheless, as this paper has demonstrated, the Pentateuch is deeply polemic, often alluding to ANE stories, themes, and practices and countering them with Israel's interpretation of said stories, themes, and practices, sometimes subtly and nuanced. Therefore, the interpretive option to see the veil as a sign of authority over and against the pagan cult works, too.

Furthermore, as seen in the argument with *qrn*, a parallel can be made in the narrative between the veiled face and the veiled tabernacle without a direct linguistic connection. Lastly, this paper has also noted the cultic theme permeating the bookends of Exodus, the content of Exodus, and the Pentateuch as a whole. Therefore, it is appropriate

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<sup>91</sup> Dozeman, “Masking Moses and Mosaic Authority,” 39–40.

to ask how the established temple, with YHWH's presence in the Holy of Holies, might play a role in interpreting Moses's veiled face that communicates YHWH's presence.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Moses experiences a transformation atop Sinai. He is a priest-king transfigured into the image of YHWH, pointing back to the human ideal of his image bearers atop Eden in Genesis. As this chapter demonstrated, Genesis permeates throughout Exodus, from the narratives, laws, and the tabernacle's construction. All of it points back to the Garden ideal in Genesis across all its literary movements. Seeing the bigger picture behind Exodus and its connections to Genesis and the cosmic temple allows the text to showcase Moses as a transfigured human and an image of YHWH. While the linguistic connections in Exodus 34:29–35 are not as overt (the choosing of *qrn* over *hr*, and *mswh* over *prkth*), reading the text literarily in the context of the narrative arc of Genesis and the Pentateuch allows these connections to come through.

Furthermore, Moses's transformation stands in irony to the golden calf created in Exodus 32. Israel created a visible symbol of YHWH's strength through the calf, whereas YHWH created a visible symbol of his strength through Moses. The calf shines from the gold; Moses shines from the glory of YHWH. The calf was an idol meant to serve as an intermediary; Moses, as a priest-king and image, serves as the trustworthy intermediary. The calf eventually brought judgment and death; Moses's second descent became a conduit for YHWH's blessing and life. Note as well Israel's reaction to both. In Exodus 32, Israel welcomes the golden calf, the false representative of YHWH, with a pagan celebration. In Exodus 34, Israel welcomes Moses, the true representative of YHWH, with fear and trembling. Israel becomes what they worship as "stiff-necked" idol worshippers. Moses becomes what he worships, a reflection of the glory of YHWH. To this last point, the next chapter will speak further.

## CHAPTER 4

### MOSES’S FACE IN THE RHETORICAL/ETHICAL CONTEXT

Chapter 2 explored the concepts of the cosmic-temple mountain and the image of God in light of the ANE and how these concepts interfaced with Eden and Sinai. This mountain/image theme provides a crucial lens for understanding what is happening with Moses’s shining face atop Sinai in Exodus 34:29–35. Moses is a renewed Adam-like figure.

Chapter 3 took a literary approach to see how Exodus builds up to Moses’s mountaintop experience by taking note of the “priestly” shaping of the Exodus narrative and its echoes back to the creation story in Genesis. Thus, Moses’s transformation points to his status as a renewed image and king-priest to Israel. This phenomenon does not come about *ex nihilo* but through deliberate textual clues throughout the Exodus narrative to get this point across.

This chapter explains how Moses’s transformation impacts the rest of the Pentateuch. After all, if Childs claims Exodus 34 is pivotal for understanding Sinai, how might this affect the legal material and rhetorical aim of the Pentateuch?<sup>1</sup> This chapter argues Moses is a paradigmatic figure for Israel to choose obedience over rebellion and blessing over cursing. This is answered in two parts—first, the function of Moses’s face by looking at Exodus 19:1–6 and Numbers 6:22–27. Second, the means of becoming like Moses’s face will be explored by understanding the role of the covenant “law” within the

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<sup>1</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, ed. Peter Ackroyd et al., Old Testament Library, vol. 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 604–5.



Pentateuch. To conclude, the telos of Moses's face will be quickly summarized by looking at the bookends of the Pentateuch in Eden and Canaan.

### Methodology

What role does Moses's face play regarding the literary whole of the Pentateuch, and more specifically, the covenant "law?" This question assumes the Pentateuch is a rhetorical document. The rise of what we now know as rhetorical criticism began with James Muilenburg in his 1969 article "Form Criticism and Beyond," though Aristotle formalized this millennia ago.<sup>2</sup> In 1984, George Alexander Kennedy systematized five features of rhetorical criticism: (1) determine the rhetorical unit, (2) define the situation of that unit, (3) analyze the arrangement of the unit, (4) consider invention and style in the unit, and (5) review the unit's effectiveness.<sup>3</sup> In this process, the author hopes to persuade the reader to a particular thought, feeling, and/or action. Gordon Wenham's *Story as Torah* similarly notes: "All storytelling is implicitly didactic, and because it involves the reader's imaginative involvement, powerfully so. Furthermore the images we derive from narrative become part of us, so that it becomes difficult to distinguish what we were before we read from what we have become through reading stories."<sup>4</sup>

In sum, the Pentateuch is a rhetorical document that seeks to persuade its reader. But what exactly is the Pentateuch persuading the reader of? Given the supremacy of Sinai and the copious lists of legal texts, it seems evident that the author/editor is

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<sup>2</sup> James Muilenburg, "Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, no. 1 (March 1969): 1–18; Wilhelm Wuellner, "Where Is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (July 1987): 448–63.

<sup>3</sup> Steve Walton, "Rhetorical Criticism: An Introduction," *Themelios* 21, no. 2 (January 1996): 4–8, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/rhetorical-criticism-an-introduction>; Wuellner, "Where Is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?"; George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, Studies in Religion (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 33–38.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narrative Ethically* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 12.

persuading the reader to live according to Torah. According to James Watts, “The Pentateuch thus became the first canon of Scripture for the Jewish people as a whole. Its political origins as well as its internal rhetoric ensured that the words ‘canon’, ‘Scripture,’ and ‘Bible’ have carried connotations of Torah, ‘law,’ ever since.”<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, the traditional labeling of “Torah” for the first five books implies the literary unit is more than communicating history with legal lists interspersed throughout. All of it, narrative included, is instruction.<sup>6</sup> Watts goes on to notice that even at the end of the Pentateuch, Israel has yet to reach Canaan. They are still in a state of exile. Thus, the reader is to place themselves in the proverbial shoes of Israel and see themselves in exile, longing for YHWH’s divine presence.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, in determining the rhetorical impact of a passage, scholars within the schools of source, form, and tradition-historical criticism go one step further, attempting to fit passages within a “source” and thereby reconstruct Israel’s history based on the passage’s rhetorical impact.<sup>8</sup> In response, as previously demonstrated, this paper argues for a literary critical method, noting how the rhetorical impact of Exodus 34:29–35 affects the final form of the Pentateuch.

If the thrust of the Pentateuch is “Torah,” or “instruction,” what then of the narratives? The narratives serve to provide context for the instructions. Also, given the framework of rhetorical criticism, the narratives offer persuasive power to live into the Torah. The stories embedded throughout help capture the reader’s imagination and glean wisdom. This point is critical in understanding why Moses’s face shines in Exodus 34:29–35. As Brevard Childs says, understanding what is happening in Exodus 34 is vital

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<sup>5</sup> James W. Watts, *Reading Law: The Rhetorical Shaping of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 160.

<sup>6</sup> Watts, *Reading Law*, 156.

<sup>7</sup> Watts, *Reading Law*, 127.

<sup>8</sup> Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, 34; T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 230–31.

to understanding the Sinai narrative.<sup>9</sup> As I argue below, Exodus 34:29–35 is also critical to understanding the rhetorical power of the Pentateuch and Torah law.

### **The Function of Moses’s Face: Divine Blessing and Royal Priests**

Moses’s encounter on Sinai and the following transformation in Exodus 32–34 play a more significant role in the rhetorical impact of the Pentateuch. More time is spent on Sinai than anywhere else in the Pentateuch (Exod 19:1–Num 10:10). Thus, the reader must be aware of the interplay between narrative and “legal” texts weaved throughout Sinai and how they relate. The reader must also pay attention to Sinai’s rhetorical impact on the Pentateuch’s larger thrust before and after Exodus 18 to Numbers 10. This larger thrust assumes a literary approach to the Pentateuch—what matters is the text’s final form. With this in mind, Exodus 19:6 and Numbers 6:25–27 are similar bookended ideas exemplified in Moses’s encounter in Exodus 32–34. For the sake of argument, I will treat Numbers 6:25–27 first.

#### **Numbers 6:24–26**

David L. Stubbs’s *Numbers* commentary bluntly states, “The connections between Moses’s encounter with God on Sinai and this blessing are too many to ignore.”<sup>10</sup> Likewise, in his dissertation, Joshua Philpot notes the connection between Numbers 6:25–27 and Exodus 34:29–35.<sup>11</sup> Commonly known as the Aaronic blessing, YHWH intended for the priests of Israel to say this regularly to the people:

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<sup>9</sup> Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 604–5.

<sup>10</sup> David L. Stubbs, *Numbers*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 75.

<sup>11</sup> Joshua Matthew Philpot, “The Shining Face of Moses: The Interpretation of Exodus 34:29–35 and Its Use in the Old and New Testaments” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 124.

בְּרַכְּכָהּ יְהוָה וַיְשַׁמְרֶךָ  
יְאֵר יְהוָהוּ פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחַנְּךָ  
יֵשָׂא יְהוָהוּ פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּשֵּׁם לְךָ שָׁלוֹם

May YHWH bless you and may (YHWH) guard you  
May YHWH's face be light to you and show you favor  
May YHWH's face rise to you and set to you peace

This blessing is given as the people pack up, ready to leave Sinai. The tribes of Israel arrange themselves in a tripartite structure, with the temple in the middle, the Levitical priests in the second ring, and the surrounding twelve tribes in the outer ring pointing in each cardinal direction in groups of three. This unique arrangement emphasizes not only the importance of the temple in the middle, but Israel's arrangement echoes the three-tiered structure of the temple itself. This choreography leaving Sinai alludes to the fact that all of Israel is to be temple-centered.<sup>12</sup> They are to be a royal priesthood. Stubbs, in his *Numbers* commentary, describes the opening chapters of Numbers as “a picture of the priestly kingdom,” pointing back to Exodus 19:6.<sup>13</sup>

Looking at Numbers 6:24–26, it's worth noting the literary beauty of this blessing. The blessing consists of three lines. The first line contains three words and twelve syllables. The second line includes five words and fourteen syllables. The third line has seven words and sixteen syllables.<sup>14</sup> In each line, YHWH is the subject, further reinforcing that it is YHWH, not the priests, who ultimately is the source of blessing.<sup>15</sup> In lines two and three, “YHWH's face” is introduced, communicating relational proximity

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<sup>12</sup> John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1995), 371–72.

<sup>13</sup> Stubbs, *Numbers*, 29.

<sup>14</sup> Dennis R. Cole, *Numbers: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary, vol. 3b (Nashville: B & H, 2000), 120.

<sup>15</sup> Stubbs, *Numbers*, 71.

and intimacy. Each line contains two verbs, one before YHWH and the other after. These verbs are pregnant with meaning, connecting the reader back to “priestly” themes, not to mention Moses’s face in Exodus 34.

In 6:24, the blessing begins with the verb bless (*brkh*). Stubbs states, “Blessing is a crucial notion for understanding the intentions behind God’s relationship to his chosen people for all of humanity.”<sup>16</sup> The first encounter with *brkh* goes back to Elohim blessing humanity in Genesis 1:28 and YHWH blessing the Sabbath in Genesis 2:3. It also alludes to YHWH blessing Abraham so that he might bless the nations in Genesis 12:1–3. It also describes one task of the priesthood (Lev 9:22–23; Num 6:23). Thus, while the priesthood is to bless the people, YHWH blesses them too. In turn, YHWH is to bless the nations and fulfill the Abrahamic covenant.<sup>17</sup>

The next verb, “guard” (*shmr*), is introduced in Genesis 2:15 with the man in Eden. In Genesis 2:15, YHWH charges the man to serve (*‘bd*) and guard (*shmr*). These two verbs are also later connected to the priesthood (Num 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 18:5–6). Thus, while the priesthood guards the Torah and Israel, ultimately, YHWH guards them.

The following verb, “light” (*‘wr*), also returns to the Genesis account. Light was the first creative act of Elohim in Genesis 1:3 and doubles as a symbol of divine presence.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, the second line in the blessing introduces YHWH’s face. The combination of “light” and “YHWH’s face” no doubt is a direct reference to Moses’s encounter in Exodus 34:29–35. This connection echoes YHWH’s desire for Israel to be like Moses, a royal priesthood, a radiant image, and an obedient son. Moses served as the forerunner of what this looks like. It’s as though YHWH says, “If you want to know who I want you to be, look at Moses and his shining face.”

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<sup>16</sup> Stubbs, *Numbers*, 70.

<sup>17</sup> Cole, *Numbers*, 120.

<sup>18</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 324–25, Logos Bible Software.

At the same time, if this is an allusion to Exodus 34:29–35, Moses’s face was not said to have “light” (‘*wr*). Moses’s face was *qrn*—shining or horned—not ‘*wr*. But as demonstrated in the previous chapter, a word does not have to necessarily be the same word to allude to the same theme. In Exodus 34, for example, while Moses does not have literal horns, the previous chapter noted this odd word choice connects to the golden calf in Exodus 32.<sup>19</sup> In Exodus 32, while *qrn* is not used to describe the calf, it is inferred. The same principle can apply to ‘*wr* and Moses’s shining face. While ‘*wr* is not used to describe Moses, the combination of light with YHWH’s face connects to Exodus 34.

Most translations take the following verb, *khnn*, as favor, gracious, or merciful. YHWH uses this verb declaratively over Moses in Exodus 33:17 upon his priestly intercession. *Khnn* is also used by YHWH to describe himself in Exodus 34:6–7. Exodus 34:6–7 is one of the highest moments of divine revelation in the Pentateuch and echoes throughout the HB.<sup>20</sup> In short, *khnn* is one of the most highlighted characteristics of YHWH’s nature. In Exodus 34:6–7, YHWH tells Moses who he is, harkening back to YHWH’s first revelation to Moses in Exodus 3, and couples this attribute in Numbers 6:25 by revealing his glory. In Exodus 34:6, this left Moses personally transformed. In Numbers 6:25, YHWH desires to extend that same favor and transformation to Israel.

The following verb, “carry” (*ns*’), is a relatively common verb in the Pentateuch/HB. However, it is worth pointing out that of the 32 times in Exodus this verb is used, ten times it is concerning the ark of the covenant, six times concerning the priesthood—three of which pertain to the priestly vestments (Exod 29:12, 29, 30), and two times regarding the name of YHWH in the Decalogue (Exod 20:7).<sup>21</sup> So while

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<sup>19</sup> R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 22 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1983), 109.

<sup>20</sup> Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 93.

<sup>21</sup> Nathan MacDonald, “The Priestly Vestments,” in *Clothing and Nudity in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Christoph Berner et al. (New York: T & T Clark, 2019), 442–48.

“carry” is a common verb, it is nevertheless packed with priestly connotations. The more significant point to notice is that Number 6:26 parallels the previous line in v. 25, giving a further dimension to YHWH’s face.

Along with this, the direct object of Numbers 6:26 and the final word in the Aaronic blessing, producing, as Gordon Wenham says, a “crescendo,” is the word for peace (*shlm*).<sup>22</sup> *Shlm* does not directly allude to Exodus 34 but is a larger theological concept within the HB. Shalom is more than an absence of conflict. It can refer to deliverance, friendship, prosperity, and completeness.<sup>23</sup> Later in the HB, *shlm* will take on an eschatological undertone connected with restored righteousness and the future messiah.<sup>24</sup> All this to say, *shlm* is an apt word to describe the totality of what YHWH will do for Israel. As *NIDOTTE* says, “From the Aaronic blessing (Num 6:24–26) it is evident that the person to whom God gives peace (שָׁלוֹם) is blessed (בָּרַךְ, #1385), guarded (שָׁמַר, #9068), and treated graciously (נָחַם, #2858).”<sup>25</sup>

In sum, the Aaronic blessing is deeply tied to Genesis and Moses’s encounter in Exodus 32–24. Thus, Moses’s encounter with YHWH and his resulting shining face are the model for how to receive divine blessing called forth in Numbers 6:25–27. As Niehaus sums up,

The ancient Near Eastern background of this idea is clear. The face of a god radiated light and life to those fortunate enough to gaze upon it. Among pagans such an experience was only claimed—and that rarely—by kings. Aaron’s blessing expresses the hope that Yahweh will cause his luminous, life-giving face to shine upon all of God’s people. If God does turn his face toward someone, the result will

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<sup>22</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC, vol. 4 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 82.

<sup>23</sup> Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Academic, 1994), 1506–10, Logos Bible Software.

<sup>24</sup> VanGemenen, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 132, Logos Bible Software.

<sup>25</sup> VanGemenen, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 132, Logos Bible Software.

be “peace” (שלום)—that is, the wholeness that is the “abundant life” that only God can provide.<sup>26</sup>

### **Exodus 19:6**

As noted previously in this thesis, priestly themes heavily influence Numbers 6:25–27. This conclusion is not surprising given the priestly nature of the Pentateuch—the cosmic mountain of creation, the image of God, the intertextual connections between Eden and Sinai, the covenant established, the construction of the temple, and so forth. YHWH intends to covenant with his people so that the world may come to know him as supreme. If Numbers 6:25–27 sums this up towards the end of the Sinai narrative from Exodus 18–Numbers 10, then Exodus 19:6 also neatly summarizes the goal: to be a royal priesthood.

What does it mean to be a royal priesthood? The answer is two-fold: they are to take a royal/kingly status and a priestly status.<sup>27</sup> Regarding the latter, the priesthood was to embody the Torah and mediated on behalf of Israel. A few chapters later, the priests will don special robes emulating YHWH’s glory, thus symbolizing a perpetual theophany of sorts.<sup>28</sup> Priests, particularly the high priest, are granted special access to the divine presence, the cosmic mountain temple. As chapter two demonstrated, the high priest accessed the temple’s Holy of Holies, the cosmic mountain top. Regarding the former, Israel is to be royalty—king and queens of YHWH, commissioned sons and daughters to carry out the deity’s will. As argued previously, royalty, priesthood, sonship, and image-bearing all went hand-in-hand. Thus, while Israel has priests that mediate on behalf of the people. Israel is to be a kingdom of priests that mediate on behalf of the world. J. Richard Middleton says,

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<sup>26</sup> Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1995), 228.

<sup>27</sup> Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 111.

<sup>28</sup> MacDonald, “The Priestly Vestments,” 442.



The *imago Dei*. . . includes a priestly or cultic dimension. In the cosmic sanctuary of God's world, humans have pride of place and supreme responsibility, not just as royal stewards and cultural shapers of the environment, but (taking seriously the temple imagery) as priests of creation, actively mediating divine blessing to the nonhuman world and—in a postfall situation—interceding on behalf of a groaning creation until that day when heaven and earth are redemptively transformed to fulfill God's purposes for justice and shalom. The human vocation as *imago Dei* in God's world thus corresponds in important respects to Israel's vocation as a "royal priesthood" among the nations (Exodus 19:6).<sup>29</sup>

Additionally, John Davies writes,

Israel is to relate to God when thus brought into his presence, as a "royal priesthood and holy nation." Israel is not merely delivered from the hands of one king (Pharaoh), but is drawn to the heavenly court of the divine king. The attribution of a collective royal status to Israel (the active-corporate interpretation) is a reading of (royal) which enjoys widespread ancient support. . . .As a nation, Israel is assured of the privilege of royal status, a royalty characterized by the essence of priesthood, namely, access to the divine presence. Israel's corporate priesthood is pre-eminently that which is exercised towards God, not other nations. Such a privilege is highly prized and is Israel's unique possession so long as the nation keeps the covenant.<sup>30</sup>

Two further insights stem from Davies's comment. First, his mentioning of "active-corporate interpretation" must be addressed. YHWH does not simply desire the priesthood to have divine access to himself but to the whole nation. This interpretation harmonizes with the *imago Dei* ideal in Genesis 1:26–28. Only kings/priests embodied the image of God in the ANE. Genesis 1:26–28 democratizes that idea and says all of humanity is the image. Likewise, a "royal priesthood and holy nation" democratizes the concept of kingship/priesthood. YHWH invites all of Israel in. Second, "access to the divine presence" is critical in understanding how Exodus 19:6 connects to Exodus 32–34. On Sinai, Moses has direct access to the divine presence. He looks upon the divine glory. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Moses intercedes, performing the actions of a

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<sup>29</sup> J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 89–90.

<sup>30</sup> John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 395 (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 102.

priest in Exodus 32–34. Moses prays for the people’s sins and offers himself as an atoning sacrifice.<sup>31</sup>

Also demonstrated, Exodus 32–34 seems oddly placed with the narrative flow of Exodus. Before this encounter, YHWH instructs the building the temple in Exodus 25–31. After the Sinai encounter in Exodus 32–34, Israel constructs the temple in Exodus 35–40. The supposed “interruption” of the temple building with the golden calf/shining face narrative is odd at first glance.<sup>32</sup> Yet, it was commonplace in the ANE for a temple to have an image set within it.<sup>33</sup> The calf in Exodus 32 was the man-appointed image. Whereas Moses, with his shining face, was the YHWH-appointed image. Exodus 19:6 shows YHWH wants all of Israel to experience this transformation as a royal priesthood. To put it another way, Davies notes,

Central to any understanding of what a priest is, is the notion of his fitness to approach the deity and “minister” in his presence like an attendant in the court of a king. The tabernacle cult depicted in Exodus 25–31 and 35–40 is a stylized replica of what, in the widespread ideology of the ancient world, took place within the divine realm of the heavenly temple.<sup>34</sup>

Davies connects the priesthood to the tabernacle building texts directly before and after Moses’s divine encounter in Exodus 32–34. If these tabernacle texts are to replicate the “divine realm,” then Exodus 32–34 shows us the divine realm atop Sinai. Moses, on the cosmic mountaintop, sits within the heavenly temple. He is the faithful priest that the later Levitical tribe will replicate.

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<sup>31</sup> L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology 2 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 86–88.

<sup>32</sup> Peter E. Enns, *Exodus*, NIVAC, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 506–7.

<sup>33</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 89.

<sup>34</sup> Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 98.

Beale and Alexander see a connection between the “royal priesthood” language of Exodus 19:6 and the commissioning made with Adam.<sup>35</sup> In Genesis 1, the humans share in the divine presence on the cosmic mountain temple of Eden, tasked as royal priests to expand the temple through their covenant obedience. While Beale does not connect the dots with Moses on Sinai, echoes of the Genesis story abound at Sinai (see the previous chapters). Enns interprets the “royal priesthood” in Exodus 19:6 in light of the following phrase: a “holy nation,” thus connecting back to the promise with Abraham in Genesis 12.<sup>36</sup> With this Abrahamic lens, the coupling of “royal priesthood” and “holy nation” has, according to Enns, “international implications.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, now that Israel has access to the divine presence, they are to embody the way of YHWH and, in so doing, be YHWH’s instrument for the good of the world. This emphasis on Abraham in Genesis 12 over Adam in Genesis 1 is nevertheless linked by the concept of divine presence, obeying the covenant, and expanding YHWH’s presence.

Moses’s transformation is further clarified by understanding the similarities in the ANE between the image, royal priest, son, and king and overlaying these themes with Genesis 1–3. Julian Morgenstern speculates Moses is now a demi-god.<sup>38</sup> Martin Hauge considers this encounter an apotheosis.<sup>39</sup> Others want to tone down such potential polytheistic implications by noting that Moses’s face indicates he is a divine representative.<sup>40</sup> Genesis 1–2 breaks the tension between these two views. As argued in

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<sup>35</sup> Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 117; Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 111.

<sup>36</sup> Enns, *Exodus*, 389.

<sup>37</sup> Enns, *Exodus*, 389.

<sup>38</sup> Julian Morgenstern, “Moses with the Shining Face,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 2 (1925): 12.

<sup>39</sup> Martin Ravndal Hauge, *The Descent from the Mountain: Narrative Patterns in Exodus 19–40* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 164.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas B. Dozeman, “Masking Moses and Mosaic Authority,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 21–45.

chapter two, there is a significant interplay between Eden and Sinai. The first humans were the first image bearers, placed atop the mountain of Eden, akin to the Holy of Holies. They were the first royal priests and the first children of God. However, this does not imply taking a divine-like status that is, on some level, equal to Elohim/YHWH. Instead, they embody what it means to be fully human: they speak with YHWH face-to-face, work and keep creation, and procreate to produce more image-bearers. Therefore, when thinking of Moses's transformation, he is not becoming god-like as the ANE thought of kings (apotheosis). He is becoming more human. To be human within the Eden narrative is to live in the divine presence all the while retaining the creator-creature distinction. Therefore, Hauge dubbing Exodus 34 as an apotheosis needs more accuracy. It is more a case of theosis.<sup>41</sup> This distinction between ANE kings receiving apotheosis and Moses receiving theosis is another polemic and, I would argue, critical to biblical anthropology. Thus, to be a royal priesthood implies transforming more and more into the image of YHWH—which is to say, learning to be more fully human. As Christopher R. J. Holmes beautifully puts it,

God is intimate with Moses in a way that God is not with others. Moses has experienced terrifying proximity to God, the result being that there is precious little left in Moses that is not of God and commensurate with God. “The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (Exod. 33:11). As Gregory [of Nyssa] notes, Moses “imitates the deity by beneficence, by doing that which is the distinctive characteristic of the divine nature.” The deity whose simple manner of existence is not comprehended by us may nonetheless be imitated by beneficence. The more beneficent we are, the more we are like God and the more we become our true selves—creatures in relation to God.<sup>42</sup>

In sum, both passages near bookend the entire Sinai journey from Exodus 19:1–Numbers 10:10. Becoming a royal priesthood and living into YHWH's blessing are

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<sup>41</sup> For an evangelical breakdown of theosis, see R. Lucas Stamps, “Baptizing Theosis: Sketching an Evangelical Account,” *Perichoresis* 18, no. 1 (2020): 99–115.

<sup>42</sup> Christopher R. J. Holmes, *A Theology of the Christian Life: Imitating and Participating in God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 24–25.

the telos of Israel. Moses's shining face in Exodus 34:29–35 is the tangible expression of these ideals.

### **Excursus: Leviticus 16–17**

Briefly, it is noted by scholars that the Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*, in Leviticus 16–17 serves as the center of the Pentateuch.<sup>43</sup> Michael Morales, for example, says that the entire Pentateuch revolves around the Day of Atonement.<sup>44</sup> It is interesting to note that this annual event in Israel's liturgical calendar is not given a backstory like the other events.<sup>45</sup> The text is not explicit as to why the Day of Atonement came into existence. Certainly, in both the Exodus 32–34 narrative and the Yom Kippur text, atonement (*kpr*) is at play (Exod 32:30; Lev 16–17). Here, Jewish tradition is helpful to an extent. According to Seder Olam Rabbah and the eleventh-century commentator, Rashi, Moses's intercession in Exodus 32–34 is the first Yom Kippur.<sup>46</sup> Moses serves as a mediator between YHWH and Israel, just as the high priest annually mediates between YHWH and Israel. YHWH envelopes Moses with the glory cloud atop Sinai. The high priest envelopes himself with incense, recreating the glory cloud. Moses becomes a YHWH-appointed theophany.<sup>47</sup> The high priest, with a glory cloud-like garb, is YHWH's appointed theophany. Only Moses is allowed atop Sinai. Only the high priest is allowed within the holy of holies, the proverbial “mountain top” of the tabernacle.

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<sup>43</sup> L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, NSBT 37 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 24–25.

<sup>44</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, 38.

<sup>45</sup> John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament*, Zondervan Charts (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 20.

<sup>46</sup> “Seder Olam Rabbah 6,” Sefaria Community Translation, accessed September 10, 2023, [https://www.sefaria.org/Seder\\_Olam\\_Rabbah.6.2?lang=en](https://www.sefaria.org/Seder_Olam_Rabbah.6.2?lang=en); Rashi, “Rashi on Exodus 34:29,” in *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Prayers for Sabbath and Rashi's Commentary* (London: Shapiro and Vallentine, 1929–1934), [https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi\\_on\\_Exodus.34.29.2?lang=en](https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_Exodus.34.29.2?lang=en).

<sup>47</sup> Ramban, “Ramban On Exodus 25:1:1,” *Commentary on the Torah by Ramban (Nachmanides)* (New York: Shilo, 1971–1976), [https://www.sefaria.org/Ramban\\_on\\_Exodus.25.1.1?lang=en](https://www.sefaria.org/Ramban_on_Exodus.25.1.1?lang=en); Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, 98–100.

I am hesitant to say Yom Kippur mimics Exodus 32–34, because the text does not state this explicitly. Reading literarily, Yom Kippur takes place shortly after Nadab and Abihu profane the tabernacle in Leviticus 10. Thus, the subsequent chapters, including Yom Kippur, appears to correct that defilement. At the same time, the defiling of sacred space perhaps alludes to themes and patterns seen previously in the Pentateuch (Gen 3; Exod 32). To this hypothesis, the literary clues within the Pentateuch are certainly there. Moreover, if this hypothesis is correct, then it further reinforces the centrality of Exodus 32–34 within the Pentateuch.

### **The Means of Becoming Like Moses’s Face: The Torah**

Nevertheless, how exactly can Israel live into this ideal? If Moses is the example of achieving royal priestliness and divine blessing, humanity actualized, surely YHWH cannot expect all Israel to rehearse the same events in Exodus 32–34. This question is where Torah instruction comes in. Two things to note: First, the Torah was grace-filled wisdom from YHWH for Israel to embody. Second, the Torah and Moses went hand-in-hand as Moses embodied both divine blessing (Exod 34:29–25) and cursing (Num 20:12).

### **The Torah as Grace-filled Wisdom to Embody**

The Torah instructions hit their stride within the Pentateuch, starting with the Decalogue in Exodus 20. However, to view these instructions apart from the previous narrative would be to miss YHWH’s divine initiative and redemptive work.<sup>48</sup> YHWH remembered the covenant with Israel in Exodus 2 and took action. It was YHWH who raised Moses in Exodus 3. YHWH afflicted the Egyptians in Exodus 7–12 so Israel might be free. Torah instructions are set within the context of grace. YHWH covenants with

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<sup>48</sup> Enns, *Exodus*, 429; Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 111.

Israel based on his mercy, not their effort.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, YHWH demonstrates favor not because of Israel's inherent worthiness but because of the covenant initiated with the patriarchs (Exod 2:24).

Additionally, the Torah instructions were case studies for a particular place and time and not to be viewed as a performance chart whereby one earns the grace of YHWH. Nor are they comprehensive or prescriptive.<sup>50</sup> They illustrate how to live regarding covenant loyalty to YHWH and respect toward human life.<sup>51</sup> The law is wisdom.<sup>52</sup> The law is philosophy to cultivate virtue.<sup>53</sup> Unfortunately, *torah* translated into our English as “law” misses the nuance of what *torah* communicates.<sup>54</sup> “Law” tends to evoke a courtroom setting. This evocation is not the primary concept in Sinai law. Instead, Torah provided a story and a way to embody that story. By weaving narrative and legal material together, the author of the Pentateuch wants to capture the imagination and transform the heart. This combination is similar to other ANE covenant documents as well—narrative and legal lists worked together to create a persuasive effect.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, Torah instruction revealed YHWH's holy character and offered illustrations for how to live. YHWH was not like the other gods in the ANE and the

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<sup>49</sup> For a more extensive analysis on Judaism as a grace-based faith, see E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 422.

<sup>50</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 384.

<sup>51</sup> Alexander, *From Paradise to Promised Land*, 116–17.

<sup>52</sup> John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *The Lost World of the Torah: Law as Covenant and Wisdom in Ancient Context*, Lost World Series 6 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 35.

<sup>53</sup> Yoram Hazony's work, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, argues this. To this point, while the Hebrew Bible is certainly philosophy (i.e., a way to live and think), it is also more. It is revelation and witness as well. See Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 31–65.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 19; Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 184; Jonathan T. Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (2017; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 173.

<sup>55</sup> Watts, *Reading Law*, 101–2.

Mosaic law reflected that.<sup>56</sup> YHWH invited Israel into holiness, that is, to ascend further into his presence.<sup>57</sup> Atonement was available via the sacrificial system, yet another act of grace. Thus, the “law” at Sinai was less like a courtroom and more like a marriage covenant.<sup>58</sup> In a marriage covenant, vows are exchanged. Similarly, vows are exchanged between YHWH and Israel as they step into a covenant relationship together. What proceeds are case studies on living within the covenant and becoming a royal priesthood. The causal “if” in Exodus 19:5 signifies that only through keeping Torah instruction can Israel experience the blessing of Israel royal priesthood status.<sup>59</sup>

Exodus 19–Numbers 10 provides universal principles and hundreds of case studies on living within the covenant. They are not comprehensive but offer examples of how to live as a flourishing community set apart for YHWH.<sup>60</sup> Ironically enough, this inability to follow wisdom bookends the Pentateuch. If Genesis 1–11 is an origin story for humanity and their inability to live wisely, Exodus–Deuteronomy is the origin story of a nation, and Moses foreshadows their inability to live wisely.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, 184.

<sup>57</sup> Richter, *The Epic of Eden*, 225.

<sup>58</sup> Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 75–80; Richter also likens the ANE covenant to a modern-day marriage license or bill of sale. For this reason, I chose the marriage analogy to get across the concept of covenant. See Richter, *Epics of Eden*, 79.

<sup>59</sup> Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 102.

<sup>60</sup> Tremper Longman cites the book of Proverbs as a comparable text to the legal material in the Pentateuch. Both are not comprehensive but descriptive texts on how to live virtuously within the covenant. See Tremper Longman III, *The Fear of the Lord Is Wisdom: A Theological Introduction to Wisdom in Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 169–75.

<sup>61</sup> What about ritual? Suppose Torah is the means to live into a Moses-like transformation, and most of the 613 commands are more like case studies in developing virtue and wisdom. What does one make of the more ceremonial instructions like Yom Kippur or Sukkot? Surely, YHWH expected Israel to obey those and not simply glean wisdom principles from them, right? To this objection, these instructions also instilled wisdom, less through the mind and more through the body. Torah narratives infuse Torah ritual. To perform the ritual is to embody the story to gain wisdom and understanding. Through practicing Torah ritual, one becomes wise and, thus, more human.

Some insights can only be gained by performing the festivals and Sabbaths. By doing these things, they will see Israel’s history differently. . . the festival rites presume that mere we knowledge of the fact is insufficient. The knowledge desired by YHWH requires embodied participation in order to see the history of Israel truly. Merely knowing that Israel was made to live in booths does not bridge the gap between what Israel now knows and what her generations need to know-the special significance of this



In sum, the telos behind external embodied rituals are designed so that they might internally transform the person. On the other side of the coin, the telos behind case studies is designed so that it might internally shape someone to embody the covenant externally. In both cases, YHWH desires inner transformation, or, to put it in the language of the Pentateuch, YHWH desires a circumcision of the heart (Deut 10:16; 30:6). Similarly, Moses's intercessory prayer on behalf of Israel and his desire to see the face of YHWH in Exodus 32–34 showcase both an external and internal desire to live within his covenant. His shining transformation is the consequence. As a result, he is a paradigmatic figure for Israel to follow.

### **Torah and Moses—Transformation and Transgression**

If the goal of obeying the Torah is to become a royal priesthood and receive YHWH's divine blessing, then Moses accomplishes that in his mountaintop experience in Exodus 34:29–35. Moses, like the ANE kings, embodies divine covenant wisdom. He has the shining face to prove it. Later in Jewish tradition, Moses became synonymous with Torah.<sup>62</sup> Not only does tradition and the HB acknowledge Mosaic authorship of the Torah (Deut 1:1; 4:14; 5:1–2; 1 Kgs 2:3; 8:9; 2 Kgs 14:6; Ezra 7:6; Neh 1:7; 8:1; Ps 103:7; Dan 9:13; 2 Chron 23:18; 25:4; Mal 4:4), but Moses with his shining face is the forerunner and positive paradigm for how Israel is to live into Torah.

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history. . . some rituals of Israel have a clear epistemological impetus (e.g., “knowing you will know;” Gen 15:13) and goal (e.g., “so that you will know;” Lev 23:43). See Dru Johnson, *Scripture's Knowing: A Companion to Biblical Epistemology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 76.

Another may object, what about punishments? If Torah instruction is primarily wisdom-based, what about putting to death the idolator, the sorcerer, the adulterer, and the like? The expectation was that Israel obeys, not just glean wisdom without participation, right? The rebuttal to this objection is similar to how one views ritual. YHWH does not desire actions to be performed merely for external action's sake. The telos is wisdom. If ritual is the positive way of embodying YHWH's story, punishments within Israel's community are the negative way. It demonstrates to the individual and corporate Israel the consequence of living in folly instead of wisdom. Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 82.

<sup>62</sup> Wolfgang Oswald, “Veiling Moses's Shining Face (Exod. 34:29–35),” in *Clothing and Nudity in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Christoph Berner et al. (New York: T & T Clark, 2019), 455.

In Israel's context, Moses's embodied transformation and his association with the Torah did not outline how to earn salvation.<sup>63</sup> Instead, in the Pentateuch, one could be in relational favor with YHWH, and sometimes this is described walking with God or being declared righteous by YHWH (Gen 5:22, 24; 6:9; 7:1; 15:6).<sup>64</sup> While Moses is never said to have "walked with God" or be "righteous," Moses is the only character to see YHWH's glory and experience external transformation. He is the only one to receive divine favor, as seen in Exodus 33:17. According to Deuteronomy 34, no prophet has ever matched him. He was a deliver, redeemer, and savior.<sup>65</sup> As the Pentateuch and this paper have demonstrated, he is also a prophet, a priest, and a king.

Even still, if Moses serves as an example of how to live within the Torah, he also serves as a warning. In Numbers 20:10–13, Moses disobeys YHWH and strikes the rock rather than speaking to it. As a result, Moses cannot enter Canaan. YHWH exiles him from the land. Numerous interpreters offer reasons.<sup>66</sup> Suffice it to say that Moses, who embodied the covenant to Israel, now violates the covenant to Israel. This violation is not to say this is the first time Moses ever committed a sin proceeding with his Exodus 34 transformation. Instead, he should have demonstrated covenant loyalty as a covenant

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<sup>63</sup> Peter Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch: An Exegetical Handbook*, Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis 1 (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 26.

<sup>64</sup> Righteousness in the context of the Pentateuch can refer to acting justly and conforming one's actions and character to the will of the divine within covenant relationship. See VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 746–47.

<sup>65</sup> Charles L. Quarles, *Sermon on the Mount: Restoring Christ's Message to the Modern Church*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology 11 (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2011), 37.

<sup>66</sup> Rashi, "Rashi on Numbers 20:11–12," in *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Prayers for Sabbath and Rashi's Commentary* (London: Shapiro and Vallentine, 1929-1934), [https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi\\_on\\_Numbers.20.11.1?lang=en](https://www.sefaria.org/Rashi_on_Numbers.20.11.1?lang=en); David E. S. Stein, ed., "Numbers 20:8 with Ramban," in *The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaption of the JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2006), <https://www.sefaria.org/Numbers.20?lang=bi&with=About&lang2=en>; Joseph Maimonides Gorfinkle, "Eight Chapters 4:13," in *The Eight Chapters of Maimonides on Ethics (Shemonah Perakim): A Psychological and Ethical Treatise, Edited, Annotated, and Translated, With an Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1912), [https://www.sefaria.org/Eight\\_Chapters.4.13?lang=en](https://www.sefaria.org/Eight_Chapters.4.13?lang=en); Ibn Ezra, "Ibn Ezra on Numbers 20:8," in *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch*, trans. and annot. H. Norman Strickman and Arthur M. Silver (New York: Menorah, 1988–2004), [https://www.sefaria.org/Ibn\\_Ezra\\_on\\_Numbers.20.8.1?lang=en](https://www.sefaria.org/Ibn_Ezra_on_Numbers.20.8.1?lang=en).

representative. Punishments within the law were for extreme cases of covenant violation.<sup>67</sup> Presumably, Moses's striking of the rock is such a case of extreme violation. The impression for the reader is that every mediator in the Pentateuch is flawed and serves as a warning and a negative paradigm to the reader.<sup>68</sup> Yoram Hazony says of this:

Moses himself is portrayed as the archetypal exilic figure, and the very model of right behavior for a Jew in Egypt or Babylonia. Standing at the threshold of Canaan, he will not himself enter the land. But he is responsible for teaching Israel their history and their law, and for preparing the way for the next generation to go back and found the kingdom anew.<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, even as his successor and the next generation enter Canaan, Moses's eyes are undimmed (Deut 34:7). This description is likely about his shining face.<sup>70</sup> Deuteronomy 34:10 also likely refers to the ongoing shining face phenomenon in Exodus 34:29–35. While Moses is forbidden to enter the Canaan, he still experiences this transformation. What began on the mountain of Eden with the two image bearers in Genesis 1–3, the Pentateuch ends on the mountain of Pisgah with Moses the image bearer in Deuteronomy 34. The presence of YHWH rests on Moses, but he does not go into the land, perhaps an echo of Moses's prayer on Sinai in Exodus 33:15. It is for this reason one could argue Moses embodies both covenant blessing and cursing—and serves as a forerunner to what Israel will experience. Moses's life becomes a rhetorical case study to future Israel on how to walk and not walk with YHWH so that the reader might live wisely within the covenant. To cite Walter Brueggemann,

Beyond the sixth-century community that generated this articulation of its crisis of life and faith, the open-ended, unresolved, and promissory shape of the Pentateuch may be regarded as broadly paradigmatic for the ongoing life of the communities propelled by this text. In this way, the theological witness of the Pentateuch bears resilient witness to the characteristic situation of Jews as a displaced community. The text, moreover, is left open to all sorts of displaced human communities, for the

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<sup>67</sup> Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 82.

<sup>68</sup> Watts, *Reading Law*, 121.

<sup>69</sup> Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, 58.

<sup>70</sup> Niehaus, *God at Sinai*, 228; Philpot, "The Shining Face of Moses," 98.

Pentateuch, in the end, is a promise of a homecoming and a home, to be given by God of all promises who will not formally settle for wilderness, exile, or displacement. Thus there is in the Pentateuch a tremendous push toward the future that is under the aegis of [God].<sup>71</sup>

## Objections

In this chapter, I argue that Moses is a paradigmatic figure for Israel to follow via the keeping of Torah. The positive effect of Moses's radiant face bookends the Sinaitic covenant in Exodus 19:6 and Numbers 6:25–27 informing how to read the law. Yet, in my research, most scholars do not seek to integrate how the narrative of Exodus 32–34 fits within the scope of the commands within the Torah, or how narratives and legal materials work together for that matter. Narratives are case studies in wisdom just as much as the legal material.<sup>72</sup> This seems missing in the overall conversation regarding the usage of the law. Nevertheless, theologians wrestle with the law's function.

Martin Luther, for example, says that the law is to reveal sin and our need for grace found in Christ.<sup>73</sup> However, if the Pentateuch/Torah is a literary unit, then one cannot separate the narrative from the legal materials within the Torah. Thus, when the HB speaks of “Torah/Law,” what is meant? Is it the origin story of YHWH's people? Is it the legal material within it? Is it YHWH's covenant on Sinai? The answer is all of the above. Separating Torah instruction, or what Luther labels as law, extrapolates the legal text from its narrative context. When this extrapolation happens, it creates confusion. Because of this separation, when Luther speaks of law, he means something different than what the Jewish audience would have thought of law. Moreover, even within Luther's law/gospel dichotomy, there is a wealth of good news in what he labels “law.”

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<sup>71</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 211.

<sup>72</sup> Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach*, ed. Rebecca J. Kruger Gaudino (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 74; Hetty Lalleman, *Celebrating the Law: Rethinking Old Testament Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Bletchley, England: Authentic Media, 2016), 47.

<sup>73</sup> Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch*, 37.

For example, the sacrificial system and the preamble to the covenant in Exodus 19:4 and 20:2 assumes YHWH, not Israel, accomplishes and sustains salvation for the people.

Likewise, the Reformers created three categories of the law to understand its applicability: civil, ceremonial, and moral.<sup>74</sup> According to this schema, one need not follow the civil and ceremonial laws. One ought to follow only the moral law.<sup>75</sup> There are issues with this. First, the Hebrew and Christian Bible do not create such a three-category distinction.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, the reader cannot put an alien filter over the legal material if they are to read the text at face value. Second, because there is no distinction in “types” of law within the Pentateuch—how does one figure out which law falls under which category? Among the 613 commands, there is significant overlap between what qualifies as moral, civil, and ceremonial. Third, as mentioned in Luther’s reading, one cannot separate Torah law from its Torah narrative. While I agree that there are legal commands within the Pentateuch, removing the commands from the narrative context violates the rhetorical power of what the Pentateuch is communicating.<sup>77</sup>

Instead, reading the law/Torah paradigmatically avoids these issues. The narratives and commands work together to inform the reader how to live wisely, often through showing rather than telling. Hetty Lalleman concludes, “The concept of ‘paradigm’ does not mean that Christians simply need to copy Israel’s laws, but rather they are to learn from these laws what God intended to say through them.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, the

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<sup>74</sup> Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch*, 39; Lalleman, *Celebrating the Law*, 44–45.

<sup>75</sup> Willem A. Vangemeren “The Law is the Perfection of Righteousness in Jesus Christ: A Reformed Perspective,” in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Greg L. Bahnsen et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 53–58; Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch*, 39.

<sup>76</sup> Vogt, *Interpreting the Pentateuch*, 43.

<sup>77</sup> While the Reformer’s three categories of the law fall short, John Calvin’s usage of the law does fit within a paradigmatic model. For Calvin, the law served still provide instructions for Christians. In this sense, one can draw wisdom from the Hebrew Bible whether that be from the commands or from the narratives. Admittedly, a sect Calvin’s followers would take this third use of the law to advocate for theonomism. See Lalleman, *Celebrating the Law*, 7–8.

<sup>78</sup> Lalleman, *Celebrating the Law*, 55; While I briefly addressed the paradigmatic approach to festivals and penalties within the legal texts, Lalleman further lays out the paradigmatic approach across the

Torah is ultimately about cultivating wisdom and virtue. Moses's shining face is the positive paradigm and embodiment of the royal priesthood and Aaronic blessing actualized.

### Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that Exodus 34:29–25 is not an isolated event in a sea of Torah instruction. The Sinai event from Exodus 18–Numbers 10 is bookended by Exodus 19:6 and Numbers 6:25–27. Exodus 19:6 points ahead to Moses's transformation in Exodus 34:29–35 while Numbers 6:25–27 points back. Moses is a forerunner for what corporate Israel is to become. By walking in wisdom according to the covenant, Israel could ascend like Moses into royal priesthood status, experience divine blessing, and become more fully human.

Furthermore, the Pentateuch's and Moses's end set the drama for the rest of the HB. Moses embodied the law positively and negatively. He experienced transfiguration, and yet he was exiled for his transgression. Now, the question is: Will Israel faithfully keep within the covenant? As the redeemed people of YHWH, will they ascend like Moses into a royal priesthood and embody divine transformation via the law? Will they experience the light of YHWH's presence? Will they embody the law positively to bring order out of chaos?<sup>79</sup> Through covenant obedience, will they turn Canaan into Eden? Deuteronomy 31:16–29 predicts Israel will violate the covenant to the extreme. Israel, like Moses, will inevitably be exiled from the land (Deut 4:25–30). Given this outcome, will YHWH be faithful if Israel is unfaithful? Will YHWH keep the covenant if Israel breaks the covenant? What of future kings? What of the prophet greater than Moses?

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legal commands in his work, *Celebrating the Law*. Lalleman does not address how narratives fit within a paradigmatic approach. For such work see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011); Wenham, *Story as Torah*.

<sup>79</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, "The Reclamation of Creation: Redemption and Law in Exodus," in Morales, *Cult and Cosmos*, 326.

Moses's transformation in Exodus 34 and eventual exile in Deuteronomy 34 is then a microcosm and paradigm of Israel's story. With this in mind, Torah instruction creates the path to walk with YHWH. It is up to Israel whether they choose to walk in the light of YHWH's presence or not.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Time and scope do not permit me to address other texts within the Hebrew Bible that allude to Moses's shining face. Psalm 34:5 and 36:9, for example, seem to reference the account and further reinforce that Moses's shining face phenomenon is for everyone. Elijah's encounter with YHWH atop Horeb/Sinai in 1 Kings 19:8–18 is also worth examining against this study. Furthermore, in the Christian Bible, part of the agenda of the four-fold Gospel witness is to demonstrate Jesus as a better Moses. The question of the shining face account is without question what is alluded to in Jesus' transfiguration in the Synoptics. There is also Paul's usage of the Exodus 34:29–35 story in 2 Corinthians 3:1–4:6. Perhaps Paul alludes to this as well when speaking of glorified bodies, radiating with glory, bearing the image of the Son of God in 1 Corinthians 15:40–49. This demonstrates just how significant Exodus 24:29–35, as strange as it appears, is actually a key text in understanding the Old Testament, Christology, and anthropology. For now I agree with the *Qoheleth* and say, "Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh" (Eccl 12:12).

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## ABSTRACT

### THERE IS A LIGHT THAT NEVER GOES OUT: THE SHINING FACE OF MOSES IN EXODUS 34:29–35

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The shining face of Moses in Exodus 34:29–35 is a peculiar instance that is never explicitly repeated or explained in the Pentateuch, let alone the Hebrew Bible. To add to the confusion, Moses’s face, if translated literally, is “horned” not “shining.” Again, this is never explicitly explained in the text. However, this event, I argue, is pivotal in understanding the Sinai tradition. Subsequently, understanding the Sinai tradition, which makes up the bulk of the Pentateuch (Exodus 19–Numbers 10:10), is critical to understanding the logic of Genesis to Deuteronomy. So, what exactly is happening in this passage? This thesis argues that Moses’s shining face in Exodus 34:29–35 is a transformation into a royal priest and a renewed image of YHWH. Interpreting Moses’s encounter this way informs Israel on how to be fully human and relate to the law.

To achieve this argument, the thesis contains four chapters. In chapter 2, I argue that the cosmic geography of the ANE, vis à vis the cosmic mountain temple, is the primary theological grid for the Pentateuch, helping the reader understand what occurs atop Mt. Sinai in Exodus 32–34. In chapter 3, I show how the book of Exodus is focused on the cosmic mountain concept by examining Exodus in four literary movements—Exodus 1–18, 19–31, 32–34, and 34:29–25. In each movement, I highlight the temple/priestly clues that further inform Moses’s transformation in Exodus 34:29–35 concluding with how to interpret the much-debated *qrn* within the passage. In the fourth

and final chapter, I explore how this interpretation of Moses's transformation connects to the rhetorical aim of the Pentateuch regarding Israel's anthropology and relationship to the "law."

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