

Will and Way

Exodus 3:17-22

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I. Destination v. 17

- a. I will
 - i. Out of the Affliction of Egypt
 - ii. To Land of Milk and Honey
 - 1. God repeats (cf. Exod 3:8) his goal to give his people a homeland of paradisaal proportions, employing two key words (עֲנָה עֲלֶיהָ,) from Genesis (15:13; 50:24, 25). This was an important promise given to the patriarchs in Genesis, and its partial fulfillment is a major part of the theme of the Pentateuch.

II. Opposition vs. 18-19

- a. They will
 - i. Heed - to listen to, meaning to hearken
- b. You Will Say
 - i. The Lord God
 - 1. Yahweh reveals something of his name here and again in Exod 6:2–5, and even more in 32:6–7, for his name is intimately tied to his character and his actions; in fact they are inseparable.
 - 2. “Yahweh, our God.” This contrast is a skillful anticipation of the dramatic contrast between the respective situations of the Egyptians and the Israelites during the sequence of Yahweh’s mighty acts and the Pharaoh’s progressively changed attitude towards Yahweh
 - 3. He has acted in both deeds and words with this people and their descendants since he called Abraham (Gen 12:1–3), and he continues to do so now and into the future of this people. He will reveal himself more fully in the plagues, in the exodus event, in his theophany at Sinai through both words (esp. 20:1–17; 34:6–7) and deeds and wonders, in the tabernacle; in fact Yahweh continues to reveal himself as his relationship with his people develops. Verses 16–22 give a survey of what he is going to do—his actions will give definition to his name. He will keep his promises past (Gen 15:13–14) and present (3:12; 19:4). The name of Yahweh will not reach its fullest development even in Exodus, for it is to be God’s name forever.

4. Gen 15:7 as referring to Abraham as one whom God called; it was Yahweh “who brought you up from Ur of the Chaldeans.” The similarity to the exodus from Egypt (Exod 20:2; 29:45–46) is evident.
5. As regards the theophany form that structures Exod 3–4, these verses bring to a conclusion the group of *hieroi logoi* that began in v. 14 with the revelation of the divine name of 3:13–22 presents the related narratives on the revelation of the special name of God and the explanation, with illustrations, of the meaning of that name.

ii. God of Hebrews

1. Has met with Us - to **allow oneself to be encountered by, meet**
 - a. There, however, he delivered his favored patriarchs and their families. Now he will deliver a nation. As he has been with the fathers of his covenant, so he will continue with Israel, with a significant difference, as 3:5 and later chapters show (cf. Amos 9:7).
 - b. This name is twice stated to be the equivalent of “God of the Fathers,” guaranteeing a continuity of the most ancient religious traditions of the sons of Israel. And then the authority upon which the promise of Presence has been made, explained in the repeated use of the verb אָהַבָה “I AM” and symbolized, even made present and real by the name “Yahweh,” is illustrated by the introduction of the themes that will provide in the narrative to come the proof of Yahweh’s active Presence.

c. They Will Not

i. Permit- to allow

ii. Except Under Compulsion

1. The verse does not yet indicate the extent of Yahweh’s part in Pharaoh’s stubbornness, for it will be Yahweh’s “strong hand” that defeats the “hand” of Pharaoh.
2. proof of Yahweh’s Presence in Egypt is made in vv 19–20, in which Yahweh reports that he knows even as he commands Moses and the elders to ask the Pharaoh’s permission to make a religious journey that such a request will be denied. The Pharaoh will have no thought of granting such a wish and could not even be forced to do so by any power men could muster.
3. Here God showed his full knowledge of people’s character and thinking processes by predicting that Pharaoh would remain stubborn, thus also anticipating the “hardness of heart” theme that recurs in the plague stories (4:21 and commonly in chaps. 7–14).

III. Provisions vs. 20-22

a. I will

i. Stretch

1. My Hand

- a. The term “strong hand,” *יָד חֲזָקָה*, of Yahweh is found here (3:19) for the first time. It is repeated at key locations in Exodus (3:19; 13:3, 9, 14, 16; 14:31; 32:11). The deliverance of Israel is presented in a powerful narrative as the accomplishment of the “great hand” of Yahweh (Exod 14:31).
- b. These verses constitute a summation of the upcoming plague account. No human threat (the “mighty hand” here refers to human power, not to God’s mighty “hand,” which is introduced immediately thereafter by way of contrast) can intimidate the most powerful potentate in the known world of that day

2. Strike

- a. “Stretch out my hand and strike” is effectively a hendiadys for “unleash my destruction” or “powerfully strike down.” God did not yet reveal to Moses how many plagues and of what sort he would employ, but clearly there would be a variety, and they would be impressively destructive. Divinely unleashed plagues, not any human persuasion, would cause Pharaoh to let the people go
- b. He would not perform these miracles merely for display but as punishments, and thus he would strike/strike down (*hiphil* of *nkh*) the Egyptians with supernatural acts.
- c. “I will strike (נכה) Egypt” recalls Moses’ feeble attempt to “strike” (נכה) down (Exod 2:12) the Egyptian power threatening his kinsmen. In the midst of Egypt Yahweh will do his wonders and make a mockery of the Egyptian gods among their own people. After that, Israel will be sent forth. This is a succinct adumbration of the plagues-exodus complex. As the plagues drag on (7:1–11:10), it is necessary to remember this assertion, for only after all of Yahweh’s blows will Israel be freed from Pharaoh. Yahweh does not clear the guilty (Exod 32:34; 34:7), so judgment must be rendered.
- d. Thus will Yahweh bring *his* power into action and will strike (נכה as in 2:12, 13) Egypt with a series of extraordinary deeds. The term *נִפְלְאוֹת* “extraordinary deeds” is a keyword in the theological rhetoric of the proof of Yahweh’s Presence (note its use in Ps 111:4, cited above).

This will be done, moreover, not in territory identified with Yahweh, but בְּקֶרְבוֹ “in its midst,” in Egypt’s “own backyard.” And the result of *this* display of power will be not just the desired permission; the Pharaoh will “hurl” or “drive” (piel שלח) them out in his eagerness to be rid of them *and* their God. It is a marvelous summary of the whole “plague” sequence.

- b. I will
 - i. My Miracles
- c. I will Grant- to allow
 - i. Favor
 - 1. In the Sight of Egyptians
 - a. It is based on the ability of Yahweh to give grace to the Israelites before the Egyptians (וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־חַן), causing the Egyptians to look on them favorably. “But I will give grace” (Exod 33:19; cf. 34:6–7) is crystallized as a part of God’s goodness (33:19 טוֹב, *after* he has demonstrated this aspect of his character in an actual event. Now the despoiled people become the despoilers. Those who had nothing will go forth full of bounty (cf. Exod 15:14).
 - 2. Not go empty handed
 - a. The “sons and daughters” would need clothing and other valuables because God knew that their generation would grow up in the wilderness; this is the first focus in the narrative on the second generation to whom Moses would eventually preach what we call Deuteronomy.
 - 3. Plunder the Egyptians
 - a. The Egyptians will provide the material wealth and resources with which the Hebrews will build more than store cities and brick monuments. They will build a tabernacle to their own God.
 - b. From another perspective, Yahweh will provide the supplies needed to build his own house of worship, where he will once again dwell among his people (cf. Gen 3:21–24; Exod 25:8) All of these valuables will be used to construct the tabernacle and all of its furnishings (Exod 25:1–9; 35:4–9). Egypt will literally be “delivered” of her wealth (Exod 11:2; 12:35), described by using נָצַל, one of the major words that also describes the rescue of Israel (cf. 3:8; 2:19). The Israelites will willingly work for their new Master. His new tabernacle will be constructed without any oppression
 - c. Now God would engineer events so that Egyptians would willingly give valuables and clothing to Israelites. Clearly,

the women in an ancient family, as often in modern cultures, were normally the custodians of clothing, jewelry, and similar family valuables. By introducing the term “plunder” (*nšl, piel*), a term otherwise associated with gathering up the spoils after battle, God brought to the people’s attention through Moses the concept that they would be involved in a holy war against the Egyptians. But what a war! Instead of having to defeat their enemies in bloody combat to obtain the plunder, it would simply be theirs for the (peaceful) asking. Why? Because God would fight on behalf of his people, defeating and disheartening the enemy and rendering the enemy’s women—who would not be combatants in any case—all too willing to give the Israelites anything that might help them on their journey

Word Studies

I will bring you to the Land

Heed- to hear - ¹

Met with Us-²

Permit - I have (not) allowed

Grant – to allow

¹ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1572.

² Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1138.

Commentary Studies

16–17 V 16 again makes the all-important connection of Yahweh with the God of the fathers and uses niphal of ראה “to see,” as did v 2, to describe the theophany, here as the appearance of Yahweh, there as the appearance of Yahweh’s messenger. The two are understood as one and the same (see *Comment* on 3:2–3). “I have seen clearly,” v 7, becomes “I have paid close attention” here, and v 17 is very close to v 8.

18 To the Pharaoh, Yahweh is to be identified as “Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews” (see *Comment* on 1:19); Moses and the elders are to call him “Yahweh, our God.” This contrast is a skillful anticipation of the dramatic contrast between the respective situations of the Egyptians and the Israelites during the sequence of Yahweh’s mighty acts and the Pharaoh’s progressively changed attitude towards Yahweh. In this speech, the first reference is made to a journey of three days’ distance for the purpose of sacrifice to Yahweh. The reference is not of course to Horeb/Sinai nor to any other appointed place; possibly, only a general destination beyond the border of the delta region is intended (see *Comment* on 13:17–14:4).

19–20 The first reference to the proof of Yahweh’s Presence in Egypt is made in vv 19–20, in which Yahweh reports that he knows even as he commands Moses and the elders to ask the Pharaoh’s permission to make a religious journey that such a request will be denied. The Pharaoh will have no thought of granting such a wish and could not even be forced to do so by any power men could muster. Thus will Yahweh bring *his* power into action and will strike (נכה) as in 2:12, 13) Egypt with a series of extraordinary deeds. The term נפלאות “extraordinary deeds” is a keyword in the theological rhetoric of the proof of Yahweh’s Presence (note its use in Ps 111:4, cited above). This will be done, moreover, not in territory identified with Yahweh, but בקרבו “in its midst,” in Egypt’s “own backyard.” And the result of *this* display of power will be not just the desired permission; the Pharaoh will “hurl” or “drive” (piel שלח) them out in his eagerness to be rid of them *and* their God. It is a marvelous summary of the whole “plague” sequence.

21–22 Finally in this anticipatory section, the theme of the plundering of the Egyptians is introduced. It also functions as a description of Yahweh’s triumph over Egypt and everything Egyptian, and it has been appended here by the compiler of this narrative, admittedly in a somewhat awkward manner (Fohrer, *Überlieferung*, 29–30, 82; Coats, *V³T* 18 [1968] 450–451), to complete the introduction of major themes related to the proof of Yahweh’s Presence. Like the other themes on this subject, it is treated more fully at the appropriate spot in the narrative sequence (11:2–3 and 12:35–36). To have omitted it here would have meant a break in an otherwise consistent pattern.

Explanation

Just as the amalgam of 3:1–12 presents the related narratives of theophany and call, so the amalgam of 3:13–22 presents the related narratives on the revelation of the special name of

³VT *Vetus Testamentum*

God and the explanation, with illustrations, of the meaning of that name. These two sections, along with 4:1–17, constitute a unit on Moses' experience of theophany, call, and commission, to which yet another unit on the same subject has been added to the narrative of Exodus at a later point (6:2–7:7). Vv 1–12 record God's advent and call, and they close with the promise to Moses of God's Presence. Vv 13–22 follow the direction of this introduction and stress the truth of this promise in the most fundamental way, by tying it to the unique and special name of God, Yahweh.

This name is not given until it has been explained, in a logical response to the question Moses asks (albeit on behalf of the sons of Israel in Egypt). The question raises the issue of authority. The reply asserts that authority in terms of an active Presence, "Is-ing." The name Yahweh, in effect the equivalent of that reply, is then given.

This name is twice stated to be the equivalent of "God of the Fathers," guaranteeing a continuity of the most ancient religious traditions of the sons of Israel. And then the authority upon which the promise of Presence has been made, explained in the repeated use of the verb אָהֵיָהּ "I AM" and symbolized, even made present and real by the name "Yahweh," is illustrated by the introduction of the themes that will provide in the narrative to come the proof of Yahweh's active Presence. These themes are (1) the request for permission to worship; (2) confrontation with Pharaoh; (3) the series of extraordinary deeds in Egypt, the unlikeliest of places for such deeds by a "foreign" God; (4) the plundering of a marvelously gullible Egyptian populace; and (5) the sum of them all, the exodus itself.

With the name "Yahweh" revealed and explained and with the proof of this explanation illustrated, at least in prospect, Moses can have no further question about *God's* authority. The narrative deals next with Moses' own authority, and how that is to be made clear.⁴

As regards the theophany form that structures Exod 3–4, these verses bring to a conclusion the group of *hieroi logoi* that began in v. 14 with the revelation of the divine name. Here God's assurances include the revelation of the divine name to the leaders of Israel (v. 16), a prediction

⁴ John I. Durham, [*Exodus*](#), vol. 3, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1987), 40–41.

of the fulfillment of the homeland promise originally given to Abraham (v. 17), the Israelite strategy for requesting freedom (v. 18), prediction of the Egyptian resistance (v. 19), and the power of God on behalf of his people over the various powers of Egypt and its people (vv. 20–22).

3:16–17 God assigned Moses to report on his theophany to the Israelite⁴⁵⁹ leaders so they could share with him the knowledge that the God of their ancestors⁵⁶⁰ would help them out of their suffering as well as an understanding of what a wonderful future God had planned for them in the land he promised centuries prior to Abraham. Thus the promises to Abraham in Gen 12 and 15, of covenant relationship with him and his descendants and the gift of a permanent homeland of abundance, figure prominently here as they do throughout the Scriptures. We should not miss the significance of *pāqōd pāqadtî* (“I have been carefully watching over you”),⁵⁷¹ which is an instance of a biblical semantic idiom in which when God said that he had noticed/seen/known/remembered/watched over/paid attention to/understood or the like what he meant was not merely that he was aware but that *he was going to do something about it*. This is, for example, the implicit meaning of “I have seen” and “has reached me” in 3:9 and “[God] remembered” in 2:24 (cf. 6:5). The different wordings are all variations of an idiom that is essentially a synecdoche—a part for the whole—in which because of God’s nature, his own overt mention of his being *aware* automatically implies additionally his determination to *act*. Thus God’s announcement of awareness of a problem was at the same time an announcement that he would attend to that problem—because it could not be solved by human means, not even “by a mighty hand” (v. 19).

Verses 16–17 repeat much of the language used in vv. 7–9, and v. 17 in particular repeats almost verbatim the end of v. 8. This was not a failure on Moses’ part to vary his vocabulary in telling his story (the sort of thing a modern writer might do) but part of the ancient, well-established narrative method known as “command-fulfillment style” in which the narrator tells what was commanded and then, using entirely or largely the same vocabulary, tells either how it was to be fulfilled or how it actually was fulfilled. Later in Exodus, Moses employed

⁵⁴⁹ Based on the evidence of the SP, LXX, and Vg., the likely original wording here was בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל “[elders of] the Israelites” rather than merely יִשְׂרָאֵל “[elders of] Israel,” reflecting Moses’ original intention of describing the Israelites at this point as still a people group rather than as a unified nation, providing something of a transition from the literal “sons of Israel” in 1:1 to simply “Israel,” the term that will dominate in Exodus hereafter.

⁵⁶⁰ The strong evidence from the LXX and Vg. indicates that the original wording here in reference to the patriarchs was “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob,” i.e., the expected and well-attested pattern, reflecting the tendency in Hb. to avoid composing the genitive/nomen regens of a construct chain out of compound nouns. Cf. 2:24; 3:6.

⁵⁷¹ The sense of פָּקַד פָּקַדְתִּי (*pāqōd pāqadtî*) is stronger than the NIV renders it. A better translation would be “I have been carefully watching over you,” thus emphasizing that God had at all times been concerned and involved and had not decided just recently to become interested in and/or do something about his people’s plight.

command-fulfillment style on a grand scale in describing the command to build the tabernacle and thereafter its implementation.⁵⁸²

3:18 As part of the continuing *hieroi logoi* of this section (3:14–22), God here assures Moses of success—not yet success at bringing the people out of Egypt but success at convincing the leaders⁵⁹³ of his own people to believe in Yahweh and to join Moses and Aaron in confronting Pharaoh with God’s demands. Even though the Israelites were in desperately hard conditions, it could not have been easy for them to rally to a former Egyptian criminal, whose help previously had been spurned (2:14), to accept on faith his report that Yahweh (to many of them a name from the distant past or a new name entirely) had appeared to him as their representative (thus the language “has met with *us*”) and to demand from the great king the right to leave Egypt.

According to God’s instruction, the elders were to identify themselves as Hebrews rather than Israelites, thus using terminology Pharaoh would understand.⁵¹⁰⁴ They also were to speak in the name of Yahweh (because the demand was his, not theirs) in spite of the fact that this name might be completely new to Pharaoh, as it indeed proved to be (5:2). Moreover, they were to ask to leave Egypt.

This latter request is easily misunderstood because of its wording here and in several subsequent locations in the story. “Let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness [NIV desert]” seems like a modest enough request. It actually implied, however, full and permanent departure from Egypt, yet without seeming to do so, and thus requires some explanation.

First, we must appreciate the way people in many Eastern societies, including those of the ancient Near East, have preferred to use suggestive, gentle, restrained, and limited ways of making requests as opposed to simply coming right out and asking for what they wanted. There are few analogies in North American/Western culture, but the following might be illustrative: “Would you please hand me the remote?” is actually a way of saying, “I’m going to control what we watch, if you don’t mind.” Likewise, “Dad, can I have the keys to the car?” usually means, “Dad, may I use the car for the next several hours, with no one else being able to use it?” Also, “How much money do you have on you?” is actually a way of indicating, “I’m planning to borrow some money from you.” In particular, English-speaking cultures do this sort of thing with requests for time; “Have you got a second?” is not literal at all but really is a way of saying, “I’d like to take an indefinite amount of your time,” and “He’ll be with you in a moment” is not literally true but can mean “Keep waiting; he’ll be free whenever he’s free.” In these expressions the amount of time literally stated is minuscule compared to the amount of time actually expected.

This is how “Let us take a three-day journey” functions in the speech Moses and the elders of Israel were to make to Pharaoh. The time requested is minuscule compared to the time actually expected. “Three-day journey” was an idiom in the ancient world for “a major trip with

⁸⁵² Thus much of Exod 35–40 repeats verbatim the wording of much of Exod 25–31, with verbs and adverbs changed to reflect that the latter chapters describe how the Israelites *did* what in the earlier chapters they were *told to do*.

⁹⁵³ *zāqēn* actually implies nothing about a person’s age but instead conveys almost precisely what the word “leader” does in English.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Indeed, terminology Moses himself had used when he was still more an Egyptian princeling than a true Israelite (2:13).

formal consequences.”⁵¹¹⁵ Pharaoh would have heard it that way and would also have heard it as meaning “We want to leave Egypt for however long we choose.” Moreover, the demand for the people to “offer sacrifices to the LORD our God” was yet another way of implying—without quite saying so in so many words—that the people would leave Egypt since, as develops later in the actual event (10:25–26) the Israelites expected to worship Yahweh far from Egypt at Mount Sinai, completely out of and free from any Egyptian oversight, having taken all their possessions with them. Pharaoh’s continuing resistance to the demands of Yahweh must be read in this light. He knew from the start that the Israelites were not merely asking for three days off from work; they were asking to migrate from Egypt. Thus his resistance: what they were asking for was the very sort of thing that could create the situation his predecessor feared, namely, an Israelite movement of separate national identity, dissociating itself from Egypt and heading out into Asiatic reaches where the Israelites might join with anti-Egyptian forces and become effective enemies of Pharaoh and his people (see comments on 1:10).

3:19–20 These verses constitute a summation of the upcoming plague account. No human threat (the “mighty hand” here refers to human power, not to God’s mighty “hand,”⁵¹²⁶ which is introduced immediately thereafter by way of contrast)⁵¹³⁷ can intimidate the most powerful potentate in the known world of that day—something Moses, with his experience of living near Egyptian power, could understand well. Here God showed his full knowledge of people’s character and thinking processes by predicting that Pharaoh would remain stubborn, thus also anticipating the “hardness of heart” theme that recurs in the plague stories (4:21 and commonly in chaps. 7–14).

The solution for what otherwise would be an impasse was divine intervention against the Egyptians, those who were oppressing God’s people, through his “miracles” (*nīplē’ôṭay*, “my miracles,” which the NIV obscures slightly with its rendering “all the wonders”). He would not perform these miracles merely for display but as punishments, and thus he would strike/strike down (*hiphil* of *nkh*) the Egyptians with supernatural acts. “Stretch out my hand and strike” is effectively a hendiadys for “unleash my destruction” or “powerfully strike down.” God did not

¹¹⁵⁵ See D. Stuart in connection with Jonah’s “three day journey” to Nineveh (*Hosea-Jonah*, WBC [Waco: Word, 1987], 483–88), and D. J. Wiseman, “Jonah’s Nineveh,” *TynBul* 30 (1979): 38; cf. Gen 30:36 and the general idiom “three days,” which occurs dozens of times in the OT and often means “a while” or “quite some time” (e.g., 2 Kgs 2:17); it can also be used in parallelism with “four” so that many events are described as taking “three days” and then having resolution on the “fourth day,” the exact numbers being nonliteral. See also S. Gevirtz, “Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel” (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 15–30.

¹²⁵⁶ On “hand” as a common synecdoche for “power,” cf., e.g., Exod 7:4; Deut 3:24; Josh 4:24; 1 Sam 7:13; Job 6:8.

¹³⁵⁷ The Hb. expression *אֲלֵכֶּיךָ* has been misunderstood by the NIV translators of this verse. It does not mean “unless” (which is typically rendered by *אֲלֵכֶּיךָ*) in any of its twenty occurrences in the OT but “and not by” or “not even by.” Cf. Zech 4:6 for a parade example of its meaning “and not by” or “not even by.” Thus the verse should be translated, “But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go, not even by a mighty hand (cf. Durham, *Exodus*, 35–36). God would, of course, supply another sort of “mighty hand”—his own, as predicted in 6:1, which *would* make Pharaoh do his bidding.

yet reveal to Moses how many plagues and of what sort he would employ, but clearly there would be a variety, and they would be impressively destructive. Divinely unleashed plagues, not any human persuasion, would cause Pharaoh to let the people go.⁵¹⁴⁸ The “you” at the end of v. 20 is plural because God here assigned Moses what he was to say to the leaders of the Israelites and what they were therefore to expect.

3:21–22 Moses is the only Old Testament writer to use the precise idiom *nāṭan + ḥēn + bē‘ēnē*, “make favorably disposed toward” (lit., “give favor in the sight of”). He employed this wording previously (Gen 39:21) to describe Joseph’s being in the good graces of the chief jailer at his prison, that is, in narrating the reversing of an expected hostility. Hereafter he used it only twice more (Exod 11:3; 12:36), both times in contexts similar to the present one. God here predicted that he would reverse the attitude of the Egyptians, which had been so anti-Israelite that the Egyptian people in general could be expected voluntarily to help kill Israelite children (1:22), so great was their dread of the Israelites (1:12). Now God would engineer events so that Egyptians would willingly give valuables and clothing to Israelites. Clearly, the women in an ancient family, as often in modern cultures, were normally the custodians of clothing, jewelry, and similar family valuables. By introducing the term “plunder” (*nšl, piel*), a term otherwise associated with gathering up the spoils after battle, God brought to the people’s attention through Moses the concept that they would be involved in a holy war against the Egyptians.⁵¹⁵⁹ But what a war! Instead of having to defeat their enemies in bloody combat to obtain the plunder, it would simply be theirs for the (peaceful) asking. Why? Because God would fight on behalf of his people, defeating and disheartening the enemy and rendering the enemy’s women—who would not be combatants in any case—all too willing to give the Israelites anything that might help them on their journey.⁶¹⁶⁰ Here again God’s beneficent foreknowledge was operating: he knew that their sojourn in the wilderness would be very long and that a poor group hardly could expect to survive without supplies and financial reserves. So from their former persecutors he would supply those needs, further demonstrating his power and control over all people and circumstances.

Assumed in the language of these two verses are two further concepts: (1) In some cases Egyptians and Israelites lived together in the same household (“any woman living in her house”), not necessarily because Egyptians were tenants of Israelites but more often probably because Israelites were household workers in Egyptian homes (cf. Gen 39:2; Prov 31:15). (2) The

¹⁴⁵⁸ Some commentators (e.g., Durham, *Exodus*, 40) have suggested that the *piel* of נָשַׁל, used here, should mean “drive out” or “hurl out,” but its normal meaning is simply “let go,” as it has most often been translated and as the NIV correctly renders it.

¹⁵⁵⁹ Cf. G. W. Coats, “Despoiling the Egyptians,” *VT* 18 (1968): 450–57; Y. T. Radday, “The Spoils of Egypt,” *ASTI* 12 (1983): 125–47.

¹⁶⁶⁰ See P. Galpaz-Feller, “וְנָתַתִּי אֶת-הַזֶּה בְּעֵינֵי מִצְרַיִם” [“And I Will Give This People Favor in the Sight of the Egyptians (Exod 3:22)”], *BMik* 47 (2002): 133–42. Galpaz-Feller takes the willingness of the Egyptians to give valuables to the Israelites as an instance of a practice in ancient Egyptian culture that provided for the receiving of silver, gold, and garments as tokens of the achievement of a new status in society. Galpaz-Feller assumes that the Exodus account was written later, rather than close to the time of the exodus, but nevertheless thinks it preserves with general accuracy the practice of giving and receiving such gifts as status change indicators.

“sons and daughters” would need clothing and other valuables because God knew that their generation would grow up in the wilderness; this is the first focus in the narrative on the second generation to whom Moses would eventually preach what we call Deuteronomy.

With this promise ends the section of *hieroi logoi* that began in 3:14. It was time for Moses to protest again.¹⁷

3:17 God repeats¹⁹¹⁸⁷ (cf. Exod 3:8) his goal to give his people a homeland of paradisaal proportions, employing two key words (עֲנֶה עָלָה,) from Genesis (15:13; 50:24, 25). This was an important promise given to the patriarchs in Genesis, and its partial fulfillment is a major part of the theme of the Pentateuch.

The patriarchs had experienced Yahweh as a God of deliverance, thus foreshadowing the great deliverance of the people under Moses. Moberly rightly points to Gen 15:7 as referring to Abraham as one whom God called; it was Yahweh “who brought you up from Ur of the Chaldeans.” The similarity to the exodus from Egypt (Exod 20:2; 29:45–46) is evident. This raises questions about the standard explanation of the appearance of Yahweh in Genesis and the claims of Exod 6:3 that the patriarchs did not know Yahweh as their God of deliverance, i.e., an exodus experience. There, however, he delivered his favored patriarchs and their families. Now he will deliver a nation. As he has been with the fathers of his covenant, so he will continue with Israel, with a significant difference, as 3:5 and later chapters show (cf. Amos 9:7).¹⁹¹⁹⁸

¹⁷ Douglas K. Stuart, [*Exodus*](#), vol. 2, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 122–127.

¹⁸¹⁹⁷ The form is אֲמַר, a form close to the אֲמַר used to refer to Moses (2:14). What Moses is accused of thinking in 2:14 Yahweh declares openly. He will rescue the Israelites and deal with the Egyptians (cf. v. 20 below and 2:12). There is a certain parallelism of God’s actions in delivering Israel and Moses’ feeble attempt to do so on his own.

¹⁹¹⁹⁸ Moberly, *Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 66–67.

3:18 God assures Moses that “they will obey your voice,” and adds that the elders, as faithful representatives of the people (cf. Josh 24:31–32), would accompany him to confront the king of Egypt. They were the religious leaders of Israel.¹⁹²⁰⁹ This privileged position continued and was confirmed in Mosaic Yahwism (cf. Exodus 24:1–2, 9–11; Num 11:24–25, 30), and Moses did not resist their deserved authority (Num 11:24–30).

The message delivered to the king confirms that the purpose of Israel is to go forth to worship their God (cf. v. 12 above) by offering slaughtered sacrifices. “Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews” is used here, for it would make no sense to identify Yahweh as the God of the patriarchs to Pharaoh. When dealing with foreigners it has been the writer’s custom to employ *Hebrews* to describe the Israelites.²⁰²¹⁰ The basis for the request is the assertion by Moses and the elders that God has “encountered/met concerning his (plans) for us.” The words of Moses are taken as equivalent to Yahweh’s encountering the elders himself, for they had accepted Moses’ report. The fact of the encounter makes the assertion “now” (עַתָּה) the moment of decisive action.

Moses and the leaders request politely, as signaled by a particle of respectful entreaty. The particle also serves to indicate the reasonableness of the request. The request for a three days’ journey is puzzling, but probably was an idiom for a “reasonable amount of time.” In the *Anabasis*²⁰²²¹ a normal day’s march covered 17.5 miles, so a three days’ march would have covered about fifty-two miles. In Gen 30:36 a three-day journey is significant enough to put a “safe” distance between Laban and Jacob (cf. Gen 31:22). Israel was presumably in no hurry. Thutmose III covered fifteen miles per day (Sarna, 68) in an extraordinary forced march of his army. So the Israelites would have gone a relatively short distance if these days are taken literally, probably around thirty-five to forty miles. Yahweh does not yet reveal what his people are to do after worshiping him. How he would proceed from that point on is open; this first rendezvous was merely a preliminary step.

This request does not represent deceit on the part of Moses. If Pharaoh had acquiesced to this, God would have gradually effected an exodus from Egypt without forcing it on Pharaoh with a “strong hand.” Pharaoh’s stubborn response aggravated the situation (cf. Kaiser, 332). God’s demands of Pharaoh were reasonable and only became violent as he refused to let his people go. The last request for a three-day journey is given in the plague of flies (8:23). The next plague features death for the first time, when some of the livestock of the Egyptians die (9:5–7).

3:19 This verse presents a new aspect to the coming exodus from Egypt. First of all, Yahweh himself knows how Pharaoh will react. The verb used (יָדַע) implies that God knows the king of Egypt as he knows his own people. He knows his inner constitution and character; he can move his heart, as he would, centuries later, move the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia, to let his people return to Judaea (Ezra 1:1–2). But in this case it was only under extreme pressure that Pharaoh would let them go. The verse does not yet indicate the extent of Yahweh’s part in Pharaoh’s

²⁰¹⁹⁹ Cf. note above.

²¹²⁰⁰ See note above.

²²²⁰¹ Cf. S. Paine, *Beginning Greek* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 141–231, where the forced marches under Cyrus averaged 20.6 miles per day. The longest march in a day was 26 miles, the shortest 17.5. The mode was 17.5.

stubbornness, for it will be Yahweh's "strong hand" that defeats the "hand" of Pharaoh.²⁰²³² The hand (power) of Yahweh against the "hand" (power) of Egypt's king becomes a *Leitmotiv* (cf. 7:4–5) until Israel is released and goes forth with a hand raised both defiantly and in self-respect before the Egyptians (Exod 14:8).²⁰²⁴³ The Egyptians regularly cut off the hand of an enemy to prove they had been defeated.²⁰²⁵⁴

The term "strong hand," יָד חֲזָקָה, of Yahweh is found here (3:19) for the first time.²⁰²⁶⁵ It is repeated at key locations in Exodus (3:19; 13:3, 9, 14, 16; 14:31; 32:11). The deliverance of Israel is presented in a powerful narrative as the accomplishment of the "great hand" of Yahweh (Exod 14:31). There are six uses of the metaphor of the strong hand of Yahweh (plus a climactic use of "great hand" in the narrative): a 6 + 1 literary pattern found often in the OT (e.g., Prov 6:16–19) and in the ancient Near East as well. This great deliverance by the hand of Yahweh was so impressive on Israel's mind that Moses used it in Exod 32:11 to seek the favor of Yahweh after Israel had sinned a "great sin" in the golden calf incident. In fact in 32:11 *both* "great power" and "strong hand" (יָד חֲזָקָה וְכֹחַ גָּדוֹל) are used to describe the actions of Yahweh, who had delivered Israel. Moses looked back and summed up the entire exodus (3:8–14:31) and used it to appeal to Yahweh himself. Yahweh's deliverance should not be in vain.²⁰²⁷⁶ In biblical texts in general the phrase "hand of Yahweh" or "his hand" stands for the power/might of Israel's God (Exod 9:15; Deut 3:24; 7:8). In Egypt, as will be noted several times in this commentary, the expressions "hand of Pharaoh" or "strong arm of Pharaoh" were mighty metaphors for the power and might of Pharaoh and/or Egypt (Exod 3:8; 18:19). Pharaoh was the lord of the strong arm (*Neb Khopesh*) throughout Egyptian literature.²⁰²⁸⁷

The author paints the contours of the future, even some details,²⁰²⁹⁸ repeatedly claiming that events happened or turned out just as Yahweh had said they would. This involves a conditionally omniscient viewpoint from the human author-editor who had to know

1. what Yahweh had said earlier and

²³²⁰² See note above on use of יָד in Exod 3:8, 19, also 4:17; M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 2:69; for uses of staff/hand in Exodus, see 6:6 for "arm" of Pharaoh.

²⁴²⁰³ J. D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 154–55; D. R. Seeley, "The Image of the Hand of God in the Exodus Traditions" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1990).

²⁵²⁰⁴ Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 2:13, 14, 15, 33.

²⁶²⁰⁵ See discussions at other verses where this expression is used; see further, J. J. M. Roberts, "The Hand of Yahweh," in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 99 and elsewhere.

²⁷²⁰⁶ These references are usually distributed according to source criticism as follows: 3:19 = E; 6:1 = J (all the rest of chap. 6 is usually given to P); 13:3, 9, 14, 16 = R_d and 14:31 = J. The author has maintained an amazing unity with intrinsic creativity in the text that hardly seems possible if this source distribution is accepted!

²⁸²⁰⁷ Carpenter, "Deuteronomy," in *ZIBBC* 1:434–35; *ANET* 257, 436, cf. 443, 623; it is found in other ancient Near Eastern literature as well: Ugaritic texts (*UT*, 54:13) and Akkadian texts (*EA*, 35:37); in Amarna letters: 286:12; 287:27.

²⁹²⁰⁸ Things happen "just as Yahweh had said." Cf. Exod 7:13, 22; 8:11, 15; 9:12, 35.

2. how events and results had been consummated later.

3:20 Yahweh will stretch forth his hand (יָד), therefore, and work all of his wonders to free Israel.²⁰³⁰⁹ “I will strike (נָכָה) Egypt” recalls Moses’ feeble attempt to “strike” (נָכָה) down (Exod 2:12) the Egyptian power threatening his kinsmen. In the midst of Egypt Yahweh will do his wonders and make a mockery of the Egyptian gods among their own people. After that, Israel will be sent forth. This is a succinct adumbration of the plagues-exodus complex. As the plagues drag on (7:1–11:10), it is necessary to remember this assertion, for only after all of Yahweh’s blows will Israel be freed from Pharaoh. Yahweh does not clear the guilty (Exod 32:34; 34:7), so judgment must be rendered.

The story of the exodus is now structured within God’s forced release of his people by Pharaoh and the Egyptians.²¹³¹⁰ His covenant promise to free his people gives coherence to the overall presentation of the exodus of Israel, the birth of his people. The religious, the spiritual, the covenantal aspects of this event are determinative. It would not have happened otherwise. Freedom from economic oppression was important, but was subordinate to Yahweh’s plans to create and build a people whose economic, military, sociological, and political success depended on their faithfulness to him and to his covenant, on their diligently pursuing holiness (3:5), righteousness, love, and wisdom before their covenant God. The exodus itself will be an intersection of the historical and the metahistorical with the suprahistorical painted in clear broad strokes within the narrative—essentially a covenantal event and necessarily a historical event.

3:21–22 These verses present an ironic reversal of the respective material conditions and social situation of the Israelites and the Egyptians. It is based on the ability of Yahweh to give grace to the Israelites before the Egyptians (וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־חַסְדִּי), causing the Egyptians to look on them favorably. “But I will give grace” (Exod 33:19; cf. 34:6–7) is crystallized as a part of God’s goodness (33:19, טוֹב, *after* he has demonstrated this aspect of his character in an actual event. Now the despoiled people become the despoilers. Those who had nothing will go forth full of bounty (cf. Exod 15:14).

The Egyptians will provide the material wealth and resources with which the Hebrews will build more than store cities and brick monuments. They will build a tabernacle to their own God. Israel’s despoiling of the Egyptians occurs only as a result of Yahweh’s orchestration of the event.

From another perspective, Yahweh will provide the supplies needed to build his own house of worship, where he will once again dwell among his people (cf. Gen 3:21–24; Exod 25:8). The exodus is *never* the result of Israel’s efforts; it is Yahweh’s deliverance freely granted to them.²¹³²¹ Willingly the Egyptians provide spoils to the Hebrews; Israel merely needs to ask

³⁰²⁰⁹ For references to “signs, marvels, wonders,” see commentary on 3:8 above and notes.

³¹²¹⁰ See Exod 6:28–7:13 and the discussion in the commentary and notes there as well.

³²²¹¹ If Israel’s early traditions are a type of historically based epic, it is necessary to note that Yahweh is the hero, not Moses. Cf. F. M. Cross, “The Epic Traditions of Early Israel: Epic Narrative and the Reconstruction of Early Israelite Institutions,” in *The Poet and the Historian: Essays in Literary and Historical Biblical Criticism*, ed. R. E. Friedman (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 13–39; cf. L. Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 81–92. Ryken notes that the conventional epic is humanistic. Its primary purpose was to praise men by

(שָׂאֵל). Every female Egyptian (וּמִצְרַיִם) is asked to contribute to Israel. All of these valuables will be used to construct the tabernacle and all of its furnishings (Exod 25:1–9; 35:4–9). Egypt will literally be “delivered”²¹³³² of her wealth (Exod 11:2; 12:35), described by using נָצַל, one of the major words that also describes the rescue of Israel (cf. 3:8; 2:19). The Israelites will willingly work for their new Master. His new tabernacle will be constructed without any oppression. To be a part of God’s people means to be a part of a new society and culture based on true religion that produces sound ethical and moral values. But at times it also means to be a part of an oppressed people, oriented to the future, awaiting liberation through God.

Biblical Theology Comments

Moses seeks to know the name of God if he is going to set before the Israelites for the second time the claim that he, Moses, is to deliver them. Yahweh reveals something of his name here and again in Exod 6:2–5, and even more in 32:6–7, for his name is intimately tied to his character and his actions; in fact they are inseparable. But Yahweh’s name is progressively revealed in its relational aspects outside of these verses. The essence of this passage lies in the discussion of God’s name and in that Yahweh ties his name to his presence, and his presence is tied to the relationship he has established between himself and the patriarchs and their descendants, and his presence will continue to become more concentrated and personal among his people. He has acted in both deeds and words with this people and their descendants since he called Abraham (Gen 12:1–3), and he continues to do so now and into the future of this people. He will reveal himself more fully in the plagues, in the exodus event, in his theophany at Sinai through both words (esp. 20:1–17; 34:6–7) and deeds and wonders, in the tabernacle; in fact Yahweh continues to reveal himself as his relationship with his people develops. Verses 16–22 give a survey of what he is going to do—his actions will give definition to his name. He will keep his promises past (Gen 15:13–14) and present (3:12; 19:4). The name of Yahweh will not reach its fullest development even in Exodus, for it is to be God’s name forever.

Application and Devotional Implications

Throughout the OT aspects of God’s name are echoed and reflected on (Deut 32:39; Isa 41:4; 43:10; 44:6; 48:12). The name of Jesus resonates throughout the NT, and the name Jesus received is declared to be far above the name of even the highest angels. The author of Hebrews goes on to declare that Jesus is the perfect or exact representation of the character of God (Heb 1:3–4). Hebrews 13:8 and Rev 1:4 are verses that link to Exod 3:14 and the name of God. Jesus was accused of blasphemy because he used the “I am” of Exodus 3:14 to refer to himself (John 8:59; Ἐγὼ εἰμὶ). The Gospel of John reports at least thirteen times that Jesus

recording and lauding their achievements. The “epic of the exodus” is, if anything, an antiepic, in which the traditional epic values are inverted. For the praise of men, the writer has substituted the glory of God. “Instead of depicting human strength, this epic depicts human frailty and sinfulness” (ibid., 82).

³³²¹² See translation above and see references given in Exod 3:8.

described himself with a statement beginning “I am ...” (Ἐγώ εἰμι ...). In these assertions the Greek first-person pronoun is emphatic.

God’s name continues with his people, as does his presence, now in the person of Jesus Christ through the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Israelites were called the people of the Lord and were expected to wear that name as his people in such a way that he was glorified. God’s presence in Christ abides with his people today, and his name assures his presence.

To be a part of God’s people means to be a part of a new society and culture based on true religion that produces sound ethical and moral values. But at times it also means to be a part of an oppressed people, oriented to the future, awaiting liberation through God. As to the question, “Is the exodus still happening today?” the answer is “Yes!” for the God of the name, the God of the exodus, still exists, creates, and delivers.³⁴

3:16–22. After being apprised of the nature of his mission (vv. 7–10) and of his God (vv. 11–15), Moses received *instructions*, details about how to accomplish the task. The instructions relate to the elders (vv. 16–17), the king (vv. 18–20), and the Israelites (vv. 21–22). God told Moses to **go to the elders** (leaders and counselors) in **Israel** and tell them of the theophany, the appearance of **God** in the bush and His message of concern (**I have ... seen what has been done to you**; cf. 2:24; 3:7) and of His plan to deliver them **out of ... Egypt** and **into** Canaan (cf. v. 8 and comments there). With **the elders** Moses was to approach Amenhotep II. The phrase **the God of the Hebrews** was later used by Moses when he spoke to Pharaoh; it is a term polytheistic people could understand (cf. 5:3; 7:16; 9:1, 13; 10:3).

Moses and the elders were simply to request permission to leave **Egypt** for a short trip (**three-day journey**) for religious purposes. He deliberately said nothing about them returning.

God told Moses (3:19–20) that Pharaoh would **not** respond to his request except by divine imposition. (God’s **mighty hand**, suggesting His firmness and strength in action, is also referred to in 6:1 [twice]; 13:14, 16; 32:11; Deut. 4:34; 5:15; 6:21; 7:8, 19; 9:26; 11:2; 26:8.) But God would perform **wonders** (the 10 plagues) to persuade Pharaoh to **let** them **go**.

The plagues on Egypt would cause **the Egyptians** to be **favorably disposed toward** the Israelites so that when asked **the Egyptians** would give **silver ... gold**, and **clothing** (cf. Gen. 15:14b; Ex. 12:35–36) to the Israelite women (and men, who are mentioned in 11:2). God’s

³⁴ Eugene Carpenter, [*Exodus*](#), vol. 1, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 239–245.

people were **not** to leave **empty-handed**; perhaps this was partial compensation for the 400 years of slavery. Later the gold and silver were used in constructing the tabernacle (35:5, 22).³⁵

³⁵ John D. Hannah, [“Exodus,”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 113.