

Understanding and Applying Exodus 19:4–6: A Case Study in Exegesis and Theology

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Perhaps more than any other single text, Exodus 19:4–6 provides the Bible’s clearest and simplest snapshot of God’s revealed purpose for the old covenant. This essay seeks to interpret this passage within its immediate and broader biblical context, understanding and applying it as the Christian Scripture God intended (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11; 2 Tim 3:16–17; 1 Pet 1:12). The study also supplies a case study in exegetical and theological inquiry following the twelve steps outlined in my book, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament*.¹ Recognizably, the nine steps of exegesis and three steps of theology are all interrelated, and distinguishing them is somewhat artificial to the process of interpreting the Bible. Nevertheless, using a single passage to walk through the twelve steps should help students understand better the various aspects of exegesis and theology that are necessary for rightly handling God’s word of truth (2 Tim 2:15).

A. Text

“What is the makeup of the passage?”

1. *The Genre of Exodus 19:4–6*²

In genre analysis we seek to (1) determine the literary form, subject matter, and function of the passage, (2) compare it to similar genres, and (3) consider the

1. Jason S. DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017). I adapt the various exegetical and theological discussions of Exodus 19:4–6 from the following pages in the book: 32, 123–25, 148–50, 170–72, 226–32, 253–56, 265–67, 282–85, 314–17, 329–33, 370–74, 400–407, 422–27. Used with permission.

2. For more on genre, see Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III, eds., *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993); D. Brent Sandy and Ronald L. Giese, eds., *Cracking Old Testament Codes: A Guide to Interpreting Literary Genres of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995); Robert L. Plummer, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible*, 40 Questions, ed. Benjamin L. Merkle (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010); Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th

implications for interpretation. When we consider the genre of Exodus 19:4–6, we immediately recognize two things. First, it is a speech of God recorded by his prophet, and therefore we can rightfully call it a *prophetic speech*. More specifically, it is a messenger speech from God through Moses to the people, and it includes instruction mixed with implied exhortation. Second, the address itself falls within a grand narrative that begins in Genesis and continues unbroken through the end of 2 Kings, only to be picked up again in Daniel and carried on to the end of 2 Chronicles (following the order of Jesus’s Bible as represented in Talmudic Baraita *Baba Bathra* 14b).³ The Old Testament (OT) story relayed in the narrative books overviews the history of salvation that ultimately climaxes in Christ and the New Testament (NT).

Thus, we can tag the genre of Exodus 19:4–6 as a prophetic messenger speech made up of instruction and implied exhortation. It is part of the historical narrative of Exodus, the Pentateuch, and the greater OT.

2. The Literary Units and Text Hierarchy of Exodus 19:4–6⁴

Next, we seek to determine the limits and basic structure of the passage, even establishing a hierarchy of the author’s flow of thought (for more on this, see below). Sometimes establishing the beginning and end of literary units can be a complicated endeavor. Helpfully, however, this is not the case in Exodus 19:4–6. The basic building block of all text analysis is a clause, which is made up of a subject and its predicate, along with all connectors and modifiers. The following figure separates the various Hebrew clauses and includes the ESV translation of the passage. The three colors signal different levels of perspective, as speeches are embedded within speeches. The narrator’s voice begins and ends the unit (highlighted in white, vv. 1–3b, 7); he cites YHWH’s speech to Moses (highlighted in light gray, vv. 3cd, 6b), which includes the words Moses is to relay to the people (highlighted in darker gray, vv. 4–6a).

ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 21–97.

3. See Jason S. DeRouchie, “Is the Order of the Canon Significant for Doing Biblical Theology?” in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 157–70; Jason S. DeRouchie, “The Hermeneutical Significance of the Shape of the Christian Canon,” in *The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings: Studies in Evangelical Old Testament Hermeneutics in Honor of Duane A. Garrett*, ed. Andrew M. King, Joshua M. Philpot, and William R. Osborne (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2021), 29–45.

4. For more on literary units and text hierarchy, see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1981), 87–104, 165–81; David Allan Dawson, *Text-Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 177 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994); David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis–Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 21–35; Robert E. Longacre, *Joseph—A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39–48*, 2nd ed. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003); Roy L. Heller, *Narrative Structure and Discourse Constellations: An Analysis of Clause Function in Biblical Hebrew Prose*, Harvard Semitic Studies 55 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 98–127.

Fig. 1. Literary Units in Exodus 19:1–7 in the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) and ESV		
בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁלִישִׁי לְצֵאת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה בָּאוּ מִדְּבָר סִינַי: וַיִּסְעוּ מִרֶפְדִּים וַיָּבֹאוּ מִדְּבָר סִינַי וַיַּחֲנוּ בַּמִּדְבָּר וַיַּחֲזֶק שָׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגֶד הַהָר: וַיִּמְשָׁה עָלָה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים	1 2 b c d 3	1 On the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. 2 They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, 3 while Moses went up to God.
וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה מִן־הָהָר לֵאמֹר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יַעֲקֹב וּתְגִיד לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרָיִם וְאֲשָׁא אֶתְכֶם עַל־כַּנְּפֵי נְשָׁרִים וְאָבֹא אֶתְכֶם אֵלָי: וְעַתָּה אִם־שָׁמוּעַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סִגְלָה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים כִּי־לִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ: וְאַתֶּם תְּהוֹיֵדוּ לִי מַמְלַכַת כְּהֹנִים וְנָוִי קָדוֹשׁ אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תְּדַבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:	b c d 4 b c d 5 b c d 6 b	The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: 4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel."
וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וַיִּקְרָא לְזִקְנֵי הָעָם וַיִּשָׂם לִפְנֵיהֶם אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר צִוָּהוּ יְהוָה:	7 b c	7 So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him.

Exodus 19 opens with an asyndetic clause (i.e., a clause without any connector) that signals a major fresh beginning within the book. Since 3:12 Moses has anticipated the day when Israel would arrive at the mountain of God to worship him, and in chapter 19 they reach this destination. Following the initial asyndetic clause we get a chain of four *wayyiqtol* clauses in 19:2, and the initial paragraph concludes with non-*wayyiqtol* clause in 3a (i.e., ו + subject + *qatal*). Paragraph one includes only the voice of the narrator.

Paragraph two opens in 19:3b with a new subject: YHWH speaks from the mountain to Moses. The speech uses a *לֵאמֹר* frame, which marks the quotation as secondary.⁵ It could mean that we have only a synthesis of what God told Moses.

5. Secondary or “non-prototypical” speech frames may (1) summarize several similar speeches or one long speech, (2) present the statements of many people as one statement, (3) have one character in the story quote a prior statement by another character in the story, (4) come through an agent or prop rather than a full character or come from someone who is not actually present and participating in the current conversation, or (5) function as the official record of the principal points made by speakers. See DeRouchie, “Marked Primary and Secondary Citation Formulas,” in chapter 2 of *How to Understand*, 120–23; compare Cynthia L. Miller, “Discourse Functions in Quotative Frames in Biblical Hebrew Narrative,” in *Discourse Analysis of Biblical Literature: What It Is and What It Offers*, ed. Walter R. Bodine, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995), 155–82; Miller, *The Representation of Speech in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Linguistic Analysis*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 55 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999).

But that the Lord speaks “from the mountain” could also imply some level of mediation, which would also require a secondary speech frame. Regardless, 19:3c opens YHWH’s speech, and in two clauses he tells us that what follows are the words Moses himself is to speak to the people. In 19:4–6, therefore, we have a speech within a speech (dark gray within the light gray), as highlighted in the figure. 19:6a concludes the embedded speech, and in 19:6b God reaffirms that these are the words Moses is to proclaim. 19:7 then again records the narrator’s voice outside any direct reported speech.

3. Text Criticism in Exodus 19:4–6⁶

Text criticism is the discipline of restoring the biblical authors’ original words by comparing and contrasting the various copies and translations of the Bible. Here, *criticism* means not “finding fault with” but “evaluating” the existing copies. The *BHS* apparatus lists three text-problems associated with Exodus 19:4–6. None of them are substantial.

Fig. 2. Text Critical Issues in BHS of Exodus 19:4–6 (with ESV)	
<p>4 אַתֶּם רִאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרַיִם^a וְאַשָּׂא אֶתְכֶם עַל־בְּנֵי נְשָׁרִים וְאַבֵּא אֶתְכֶם אֵלַי: 5 וְעַתָּה אִם־שָׁמַעַתְּ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי וְהִיתֶם לִי סֵגֻלָּה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים כִּי־לִי כָּל־הָאָרֶץ: 6 וְאַתֶּם תְּהִיוּ־לִי מְמַלְכֵת כְּהֹנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ אֲלֵה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר תְּדַבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:</p>	<p>4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.</p>
<p>4 ^a mlt Mss \mathcal{T}^{Ms} בְּמִצְרַיִם ^b $\Theta(\mathcal{S}\mathcal{T}\mathcal{T}^{\text{JP}})$ ὠσεὶ ἐπί</p>	
<p>5 ^a $\Theta(\mathcal{T}^{\text{P}})$ + λαός</p>	

In Exodus 19:4 problem “a” we read that multiple medieval Hebrew manuscripts (mlt Mss) and a single Targum manuscript (\mathcal{T}^{Ms}) read בְּמִצְרַיִם (“in Egypt”) rather than לְמִצְרַיִם (“to Egypt”). The ESV translates מִצְרַיִם as “Egyptians,” but the plural gentilic “Egyptians” is actually מִצְרַיִם (e.g., Gen 12:12, 14; 43:32; Deut 26:6).⁷ מִצְרַיִם is the proper name “Egypt,” which can refer to a place (thus “in Egypt,” בְּמִצְרַיִם, see Exod 12:40) or can stand collectively for the nation (cf. 18:8–10). Because ב (beth) and ל (lamed) are not easily confused letters in either the square script or the archaic

6. For more on Old Testament text criticism, see Paul D. Wegner, *A Student’s Guide to Textual Criticism of the Bible: Its Methods and Results* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006); Peter J. Gentry, “The Text of the Old Testament,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 52, no. 1 (2009): 19–45; Emanuel Tov, “Textual Criticism (OT),” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:393–412; Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011); Ellis R. Brotzman and Eric J. Tully, *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 128–56.

7. The term “gentilic” (or “demonym”) is a substantival adjective that in grammar relates to words that refer to residents or natives of a particular place, whose title is derived from the name of that particular place (e.g., “Egyptians” is the gentilic from “Egypt”).

script (S and L), it seems most likely that the translators of the multiple Hebrew manuscripts and the single Targum read “Egypt” as the place instead of as the people and therefore felt compelled to switch the preposition from לְ (“to”) to בְּ (“in”).

In problem “b” of 19:4 we read that the Greek Septuagint (G), the Syriac Peshitta (S), and the entire Targum tradition (T) including Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to the Pentateuch (T^J) and the Palestinian Targum (T^P) read the compound preposition עַל־בְּ (“as on”) rather than the single preposition עַל (“on”). This variant likely grew not out of an actual Hebrew text but more simply from a translator making explicit the implied simile in order to ensure readers recognized the metaphorical language and didn’t imagine something like Tolkien’s great eagles from *Lord of the Rings* rescuing the Israelites from the clutches of the Egyptians!

Problem “a” in 19:5 simply notes that the Septuagint (G) and Palestinian Targum (T^P) add אֲנִי (“people”) into the text before הֵגֵלְדָּה (“treasured possession”). Because the Greek term consistently used to translate הֵגֵלְדָּה is the adjective περιούσιος (“special”) and not a noun, the inclusion of λαός was necessary to make sense of the clause. Hebrew and Greek are not equivalent languages, so two words were required to unpack what in Hebrew was represented by a single word. As with the previous text problems, there is no evidence here that a different Hebrew text including אֲנִי stands behind what is found in the LXX. The Greek is just making a dynamic equivalent of the Hebrew.

4. *The Translation of Exodus 19:4–6*⁸

The final step in establishing the “Text” is to translate your passage and compare your work to other English translations. It’s important to note that very often a first draft of a translation will be very different than the final draft after all exegesis is complete. As we make fresh observations and new discoveries, they will challenge our initial decisions. Everything done at this stage is provisional. In figure 3, I compare several contemporary English translations with my initial translation of the reported speech in Exodus 19:4–6. After this, I offer some beginning observations and questions.

8. For more on translation, see Gordon D. Fee and Mark L. Strauss, *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding and Using Bible Versions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007); Andreas J. Köstenberger and David A. Croteau, eds., *Which Bible Translation Should I Use? A Comparison of 4 Major Recent Versions* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012); Dave Brunn, *One Bible, Many Versions: Are All Translations Created Equal?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 157–77.

Fig. 3. Translations of Exodus 19:4–6a	DeRouchie’s initial translation
<p>4 אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרַיִם וְאֲשָׂא אֶתְכֶם עַל-כַּנְפֵי נְשָׁרִים וָאָבֹא אֶתְכֶם אֵלַי׃</p> <p>5 וְעַתָּה אִם-שָׁמַעַתְּ תִשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת- בְּרִיתִי וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סֹגְלָה מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים כִּי-לִי כָל- הָאָרֶץ׃</p> <p>6 וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ-לִי מְמַלְכֵת כְּהֹנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ</p>	<p>4 You have seen what I did to Egypt, and (how) I lifted you on wings of eagles, and (how) I brought you to myself. 5 And now, if you will indeed listen unto my voice and (then[?]) keep my covenant and (then[?]) be my (for me a[?]) treasured possession from (more than[?]) all the peoples, for (though[?]) all the earth is mine (for me[?]), 6 and (then[?]) you will be for me a (my[?]) royal priesthood and a holy nation.</p>
Young’s Literal Translation (YLT)	NASB
<p>4 Ye—ye have seen that which I have done to the Egyptians, and I bear you on eagles’ wings, and bring you in unto Myself. 5 ‘And now, if ye really hearken to My voice, then ye have kept My covenant, and been to Me a peculiar treasure more than all the peoples, for all the earth [is] Mine; 6 and ye—ye are to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.</p>	<p>4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself. 5 Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.</p>
ESV	NIV
<p>4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.</p>	<p>4 You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.</p>

Key Observations on Exodus 19:4–6

- a. The explicit second masculine plural pronoun אַתֶּם (“you”) at the head of 19:4 is unnecessary syntactically but is likely present in order to mark the paragraph’s initiation, using a marked, non-default verb-pattern ([x] + *qatal*).⁹ It may also give added stress that it was the *Israelites* (“you!”) who saw God’s works.
- b. In 19:4, the first common singular *wayyiqtol* (*waw*-consecutive imperfect) verbs וָאֲשָׂא (“and I lifted”) and וָאָבֹא (“and I brought”) appear to be building off the *qatal* (perfect) first common singular relative clause אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי (“what I did”). That is, Israel not only saw *what* God did but *how* he lifted them and *how* he brought them to himself.
- c. וְעַתָּה (“And now”) in 19:5 is an inference-marker,¹⁰ and the inference itself has both a marked protasis (אִם “if”) and unmarked apodosis (“then”).

9. For marked versus default clause patterns, see DeRouchie, “Discerning Sub-Units in Text-Blocks: Paragraph-Breaks,” in chapter 2 and “More on Marked and Unmarked Clauses” in chapter 5 of *How to Understand*, 109–16, 222–26. The marker [x] stands for any subject, object, or modifier in a clause; [x] cannot stand for either a finite verb or a conjunction.

10. See DeRouchie, “The Inference-Markers לָכֵן and וְעַתָּה,” in chapter 5 of *How to Understand*, 206–209.

Key Questions on Exodus 19:4–6

- a. As noted, אִם (“if”) at the beginning of 19:5 signals a conditional protasis. Where does the apodosis begin? YLT begins it with the first *weqatal* (*waw*-consecutive perfect) וְשָׁמְרֶתֶם (“and you shall keep”), but most other English translations place it at the second *weqatal* (וְהָיִיתֶם “and you shall be”) (cf. KJV, NKJV, NRSV, NASB, NET Bible, ESV, NIV, CSB). It’s noteworthy that the majority view stretches way back to the 16th century, which could suggest a firmly fixed tradition rather than careful exegetical assessment.
- b. What is a תְּשׁוּבָה, rendered in the ESV of 19:5 as “treasured possession”?
- c. Does the fronted preposition מִן (“from”) in the phrase מִכָּל-הָעַמִּים in 19:5 express separation (i.e., “from all the peoples”) or comparison (i.e., “more than all the peoples”)?
- d. Does the כִּי clause in 19:5 function as a ground for what precedes (= “for/ because,” so ESV) or as a concessive for what precedes or follows (= “though/ although,” so NIV)?
- e. As at the front of 19:4, the וְאַתָּה (“and you”) in 19:6 is intrusive and unnecessary grammatically. Why is it part of the speech at this point?
- f. What is the significance of “a royal priesthood [*or* kingdom of priests] and a holy nation”?
- g. Do the various לְ prepositional phrases in 19:5–6 express divine possession (i.e., “mine”) or divine advantage (i.e., “to/for me”)? Most English translations treat the two occurrences in 19:5 as expressing possession and the single occurrence in 19:6 as expressing advantage.

As we proceed through our exegesis to theology, we will keep these observations and questions in mind. We have an initial translation and a good list of observations and questions from which to build. We are now ready to move from the “Text” stage into “Observation.”

B. Observation: “How is this passage communicated?”

5. Clause and Text Grammar in Exodus 19:4–6¹¹

The first step in “Observation” and the fifth step in the entire exegetical process is assessing the makeup and relationship of words, phrases, clauses, and larger text

11. For more on clause and text grammar, see Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An*

units. In Exodus 19:4–6 we have four areas to assess: (1) the demarcation of the protasis and apodosis; (2) the text hierarchy of the passage; (3) the specific function of the prepositions מִן and לְ in verses 5–6; and (4) the function of כִּי in verse 5.

Determining the Protasis and Apodosis in Exodus 19:5–6

In this section we want to consider where the apodosis (or “then” section) begins in Exodus 19:5–6. The protasis or “if” section of this two-part syntactic construction clearly starts with the אִם־ (“if”) in 19:5a (“If you will indeed listen unto my voice ...”). But where do we start the “then”? Our translation revealed three possibilities: vv. 5b, 5c, or 6a.

At times there is difficulty discerning the beginning of an apodosis because Hebrew usually doesn’t use an explicit conjunction like “then” or “therefore” to mark it. Instead, Hebrew relies on a mixture of content and grammatical signals. What we are looking for is a clear formal (i.e., grammatical) cue to identify the shift from protasis to apodosis—perhaps a new verb-pattern, a change in subject, or the use of an unnecessary explicit pronoun. So, let’s consider our three possibilities for the apodosis in Exodus 19:5–6. Figure 4 identifies where we left off our text-hierarchy, only having finalized the thought-flow through 19:4.

Fig. 4. Text-Hierarchy in Exodus 19:4–6		
אתם ראיתם	4	You have seen
אשר עשיתי למצרים	b	what I did to Egypt,
ואשא אתכם על-כנפי נשרים	c	and how I lifted you on eagles' wings,
ואבא אתכם אלי:	d	and how I brought you to myself.
ועתה	5	And now,
אם-שמעו תשמעו בקולי	a	if you will indeed listen at my voice
ושמרתם את-בריתי	b	and (then[?]) keep my covenant
והייתם לי סגולה מכל-העמים	c	and (then[?]) be my (for me a[?]) treasured possession from (more than[?]) all the peoples,
כי-לי כל-הארץ:	d	for (although[?]) all the earth is mine (for me[?]),
ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש	6	and (then[?]) you will be for me a (my[?]) royal priesthood and a holy nation.

Option 1: Placing the Apodosis at 19:5b

The 1862 Young’s Literal Translation (YLT) placed the apodosis in 19:5b, directly following the אִם־ (“if”) protasis of 19:5a: “And now, if ye really hearken to My voice, then ye have kept My covenant, and been to me a peculiar treasure....” Positively, this

Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990); Ronald Williams and John C. Beckman, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007); Lee M. Fields, *Hebrew for the Rest of Us: Using Hebrew Tools without Mastering Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008); Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jackie A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 181–236.

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view includes a marked shift from the *yiqtol* תִּשְׁמְעוּ (“you will listen”) in the protasis of 19:5a to the *weqatal* וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם (“and you will keep”) in 19:5b. But the challenge is that, were 19:5b a continuation of the protasis, it would have looked exactly the same way. *Weqatal* usually follows *yiqtol* when a protasis extends over multiple clauses, so we ought to expect a greater marked shift than a simple change from *yiqtol* to *weqatal* in order to signal the start of the apodosis. With this, Davies adds that the language of keeping God’s covenant is “so closely parallel in meaning” to listening to his voice “that it must continue the protasis.”¹²

Option 2: Placing the Apodosis at 19:5c

Since the 1611 KJV, most English translations have placed the apodosis at 19:5c. For example, the NASB reads, “Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine.” Indeed, according to Davies, from a semantic perspective, this is the only “real option.”¹³ However, note that 19:5c simply begins with the *weqatal* verb וְהָיִיתֶם (“and you will be”), which is the same conjugation represented in וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם (“and you will keep”) in 19:5b. There is no grammatical shift at all between 19:5b and 19:5c, and there are no other markers that would tell us that the apodosis should begin in 19:5c. This lack of signal calls into question the majority view. Indeed, this may be an instance where tradition rather than careful reading has guided most of the translations.

Option 3: Placing the Apodosis at 19:6a

What is noteworthy in 19:6a is the explicit presence of the unnecessary pronoun וְאַתֶּם (“and you [masculine plural]”) before the verb תִּהְיֶינָה (“you [masculine plural] will be”): “And *you* will be to me a royal priesthood and a holy nation.” The inclusion of a lexicalized, unnecessary pronoun is exactly what we would expect to mark an apodosis where the main subject does not change. Davies claims that making Israel’s being or becoming God’s special treasure part of their responsibility makes little sense.¹⁴ However, I believe this is exactly what YHWH is calling for,¹⁵ as the parallel in Deuteronomy 26:17–19 makes clear.

Deuteronomy 26:17–19 stands as the climax to the Moab covenant, where God renews his relationship with the post-Sinai generation. Figure 5 shows my translation and basic outline of the passage. You’ll notice a number of allusions to Exodus 19:4–6.

12. John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19.6*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 395 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 42.

13. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 42.

14. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 42.

15. In §7 below I will discuss the meaning of the phrase “treasured possession” and what exactly YHWH is calling for.

Fig. 5. DeRouchie's Translation and Outline of Deuteronomy 26:17–19¹⁶

Today you have caused YHWH to declare to be your God and (for you) to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, his commandments, and his judgments, and to heed his voice. 18 And today YHWH has caused you to declare to be a people of treasured possession, just as he declared to you, and to keep all his commandments, 19 and (for him) to place you high over all nations for praise and for fame and for beauty and to make you a people holy to YHWH your God, just as he declared.

- 1. You have today caused YHWH to declare (v. 17):**
 - a. YHWH's *commitment*: to be God to you
 - b. YHWH's *expectations*:
 - i. To walk in his ways
 - ii. To keep his statutes, commands, and judgments
 - iii. To heed his voice
- 2. YHWH has today caused you to declare (vv. 18–19):**
 - a. Israel's *commitment* (v. 18):
 - i. To be a treasured possession for YHWH
 - ii. To keep all his commands
 - b. Israel's *expectations* (v. 19)
 - i. To set Israel high above the nations
 - ii. To be a holy people to YHWH

There are two parties in the covenant (YHWH and Israel), and here each party's readiness to enter into covenant moves the other to formalize both his covenantal commitments (obligations) and expectations (stipulations). The commitments of one party are equivalent to the expectations of the other. Focusing on the terms that are parallel with Exodus 19:5–6, in Deuteronomy 26 we see God *expecting* Israel to “keep” covenantal statutes, commands, and judgments and to “heed [ESV = obey] his voice” (26:17). We also see Israel *committing* to “be a treasured possession” and “to keep” the covenantal commands (26:18). YHWH calls Israel *to do* these things; they are not what Israel is hoping they will become. These divine expectations and human commitments suggest that all three main clauses in Exodus 19:5 serve as the protasis and that only in 19:6a do we arrive at the apodosis: “If Israel will surely heed his voice and keep his covenant and be a treasured possession—living as if

16. Deuteronomy 26:17–18 contain the only instances of the Hiphil of אמר (“to say”) in the Hebrew OT. The default meaning behind the Hiphil is causative, but most translators render the form as a simple declarative (see Walter T. Claassen, “The Declarative-Estimative Hiph’il,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 2 [1972]: 5–16). In contrast, my rendering retains the causative force, reading it within the covenantal ratification context. As such, Israel first *causes* YHWH to declare both obligation and stipulation, and then YHWH *causes* Israel to declare both obligation and stipulation. A more periphrastic rendering would be, “Today you have ratified YHWH’s declaration. . . . Today, YHWH has ratified your declaration. . . .” My proposal is adapted from Steven Ward Guest, *Deuteronomy 26:16–19 as the Central Focus of the Covenantal Framework of Deuteronomy* (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 72–129, esp. 77–88; however, I disagree with Guest’s treatment of “treasured possession” in verse 18 (pages. 118–19). My rendering is somewhat comparable to the NRSV: “Today you have obtained the LORD’s agreement.... Today the LORD has obtained your agreement” (Deut 26:17–18). It also similar to Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 185–86; and Daniel I. Block, “The Privilege of Calling: The Mosaic Paradigm for Missions (Deut 26:16–19),” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162, no. 648 (2005): 387–405.

they are valued by God, *then* they will fulfill their calling as a royal priesthood and holy nation” (author’s paraphrase). Notice how Deuteronomy 26:19 includes Israel’s becoming “a holy” people in their expectation. This too indicates that Exodus 19:6 is indeed the apodosis. We can thus display a basic outline of Exodus 19:5–6 like this:

1. **Protasis:** “If you will ...” (v. 5)
 - a. Heed God’s voice
 - b. Keep his covenant
 - c. Be his treasured possession
2. **Apodosis:** “Then you shall be ...” (v. 6)
 - a. Royal priesthood
 - b. Holy nation

The Text-Hierarchy of Exodus 19:4–6

If we are on track with the placement of the protasis and apodosis in Exodus 19:5–6, we can expand our text-hierarchy of the passage. Laying out the hierarchy of clauses helps us visualize the relationship of all the parts. It helps us differentiate subordination, embedding, and the various text-blocks.

What you must remember as you visually represent your structural analysis through a text-hierarchy is that you mark subordination by indenting and that in given text-blocks you should always be able to follow the chain of וְ (“and”)-fronted clauses to their source, whether it is an asyndetic clause or a subordinate clause marked by a subordinate conjunction. Our exegetical decisions to date lead us to the breakdown shown in figure 6:

אַתֶּם רְאִיתֶם	4	You have seen
אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְמִצְרָיִם	b	what I did to Egypt,
וְאֵשָׂא אֶחֶכֶם עַל-כַּנְפֵי יְשָׁרִים	c	and how I lifted you on eagle’s wings,
וְאָבֵא אֶחֶכֶם אֵלַי:	d	and how I brought you to myself.
וְעַתָּה	5	And now,
אִם-שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְקוֹלִי	a	if you will indeed listen unto my voice
וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת-בְּרִיתִי	b	and keep my covenant
וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סִגְלָה מִכָּל-תְּעֹמִים	c	and be my (for me a?) treasured possession from (more than?) all the peoples,
כִּי-לִי כָל-הָאָרֶץ: ↑↓	d	↑↓ for (though?) all the earth is mine (for me?),
וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מְלִאֲכָת כַּהֲנָיִם וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ	6	then you will be to me a (my?) royal priesthood and a holy nation.

One feature of my text-hierarchy worth mentioning is that, with both וְעַתָּה (“and now”) in 19:5a and וְאַתֶּם (“and you [masculine plural]”) in 19:6a, the conjunction וְ (“and”) is not linked to anything before it. Scholars call this the “*waw* of apodosis,”

which usually stands as an optional marker of the main consequence clause following the subordinate protasis: “if-then, when-then, because-*therefore*.” When ׀ signals an apodosis, this coordinator does not join elements of equal syntactic value. The protasis is always subordinate to the apodosis, and I have identified this subordination through indenting both the unmarked protasis of 19:4 and the embedded ׀-protasis in 19:5.¹⁷

The Function of ׀ and ׀ in Exodus 19:5–6

We are now ready to clarify the function of the single ׀ preposition and three ׀ prepositions in Exodus 19:5–6. Was Israel to be a treasured possession to God in distinction “from” all the peoples of the earth (separative ׀) or “more than” all the peoples of the earth (comparative ׀)? Two arguments stand against the comparative reading and therefore support the view that the preposition expresses a relationship of separation between Israel and the rest of the peoples. First, elsewhere Scripture only designates Israel and the church as a “treasured possession” in relation to God (Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Mal 3:17; Ps 135:4; Tit 2:14; 1 Pet 1:14). Indeed, as we will see in §7, the very meaning of תְּרֻמָּה (“treasured possession”) implies a unique and distinctive status. The translation “more than” requires that the peoples of the earth were still, in some lower sense, God’s special treasure, but this is *not* what the rest of the Bible teaches. Second, rendering ׀ as comparative sets us up to read the ׀ as a concessive statement (i.e., “though, although”). The result would be something like, “You shall be to me a treasured possession *more than* all the peoples, *though* all the earth is mine.” However, as the next unit highlights, a concessive translation of ׀ as “though, although” is highly unlikely, and without the contrary-to-fact statement, a translation of ׀ as “more than” makes little sense. We should translate ׀ as “from,” highlighting YHWH’s call for Israel to stand distinct *from* the nations.

The prepositional phrase ׀ occurs in 19:5cd and 19:6a, and each instance most likely expresses either divine possession (“mine”) or divine advantage (“to/for me”). Is Israel to be *YHWH’s* treasured possession or a treasured possession *to YHWH*? Is all the earth *God’s*, or is all the earth *for God*? Will Israel’s obedience result in their being *YHWH’s* royal priesthood and holy nation, or are God’s people to become a royal priesthood and a holy nation *for God’s sake*? The exegetical decisions here are not easy, but thankfully we can say that all these options are true teachings in

17. Richard C. Steiner has proposed that even in conditional sentences the “*waw* of apodosis” may actually still be a coordinator through an abbreviated form of logic. He proposes that the pattern “If A, then B” is equivalent to “If A, then A *and* B,” which both English and Hebrew can express as “If A, then *also* B” (cf. Lev 6:21 with Jer 31:37; 33:20–21; Zech 3:7; Steiner, “Does the Biblical Hebrew Conjunction -ו Have Many Meanings, One Meaning, or No Meaning at All?” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119 [2000]: 264). While Steiner’s proposal provides a likely explanation for the origin of the *waw* of apodosis, one struggles to see explicit patterns in biblical Hebrew for the use or non-use of the *waw* of apodosis. Its presence or absence seems optional in most two-part syntactic constructions.

Scripture. Nevertheless, the question is, “What exactly is the Lord calling for or declaring in *this passage*?”

As suggested in the major translations, the two instances of לִי in 19:5 are probably possessive, stressing that Israel was to exist as *God’s* special treasure and that the whole earth was the *Lord’s*.¹⁸ Only this interpretation counters the unnecessary redundancy of, “You shall be a treasured possession *to YHWH* because all the earth exists *for me*.” The use of לִי in 19:6a, however, may be different. Israel’s priesthood was always *for YHWH’s* sake (Exod 28:1; 1 Chr 23:13), designed to promote his holiness and display his beauty. Most translations render 19:6a as, “And you shall be *to me* a royal priesthood and a holy nation,” and this pattern seems sound.

The Function of כִּי in Exodus 19:5

The final major grammatical question in Exodus 19:5 relates to whether the particle כִּי marks 19:5d as supplying a logical ground for what precedes (i.e., “for, because”) or signals a concessive relationship with what precedes or follows (i.e., “though, although”).¹⁹ Compare the ESV and NIV translations.

Fig. 7. The Function of כִּי in Exodus 19:4–6		
MT	ESV	NIV
וַעֲתָה אִם־שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי	5	5
וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי	b	5
וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סֹגְלָה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים	c	5
כִּי־לִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ:	d	6
וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לִי מְמֻלְכֵת כְּהֹנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ	6	6

The NIV renders the clause in 19:5d (כִּי־לִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ) concessively with what follows: “*Although the whole earth is mine*, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” While כִּי גַם (“even though”) is the more natural way in Hebrew to express concession (e.g., Isa 1:15; Ps 23:4), scholars recognize that a כִּי clause can bear concessive force when it precedes the main clause (e.g., Jer 51:53; Ezek 11:16).²⁰ A strength of the NIV’s rendering is that it explains the explicit subject וְאַתֶּם (“and you”) in 19:6a by seeing it as emphasizing contrast with what precedes—as if God were saying, “Although I own all the world, *you alone* are my kingdom of priests.” Furthermore, the NIV translation of 19:5d–6a reads smoothly, treating

18. So, too, Ernst Jenni, *Die hebräischen Präpositionen*, vol. 3, *Die Präposition Lamed* (Stuttgart: Kohlhamer, 2000), 23–25, 54–57, 77.

19. For a more thorough assessment of the syntax and meaning with different conclusions, especially due to his alternative placement of the apodosis, see Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 55–60.

20. Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 2nd ed., *Subsidia Biblica* 27 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006), 602 (§171.b).

the last sentence of the speech as an inner paragraph restatement of 19:5c. In this interpretation, being God's "treasured possession" (19:5c) is parallel to Israel's being a "royal priesthood and a holy nation" (19:6a) whereas "out of all nations" (19:5c) is parallel to "the whole earth is mine" (19:5d).

In spite of these strengths, the NIV reading fully depends on viewing the statement about the "treasured possession" in 19:5c as the start of the apodosis. And I already showed the unlikelihood of this reading, seeing as there are no grammatical signals that suggest any major change happens in 19:5c. The explicit subject וְאַתָּה ("and you") in 19:6a marks the start of the apodosis, and, therefore, we should read the כִּי as supplying support to what precedes. Scholars believe that the concessive force is unlikely whenever כִּי follows its main clause,²¹ so we are on most stable ground to treat the כִּי as causal (i.e., "because, for"), supplying a reason why Israel needed to live as a treasured possession.

The offspring of Abraham were to exist with a conscious sense that they were God's special treasure from all peoples *because* all the earth is the Lord's. How does God's ownership of all the earth supply a reason for Israel's being a treasured possession? It could mean two different realities, each of which may be true in this case. *First*, for YHWH to own all things and yet to place special affection on Israel should move them to a distinct awareness that they are valued. In paraphrase, "Because I own all things and yet treasure you uniquely, live as if you are treasured." Much later, the Lord would highlight through Amos, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). And again, Moses elsewhere stressed, "Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn" (Deut 10:14–16; cf. 4:8–10, 33–35; 28:1). Israel's unique position among all the peoples of the earth placed certain demands upon them. *Second*, because God had laid claim to all the earth and was calling Israel as an agent through whom he would make himself known, the people's living with a recognition of their special status before God would have served as a means for God's global sovereignty to be re-realized. From this perspective, we could paraphrase the whole: "Because I deserve allegiance from all the earth, I am giving you a sacred task, part of which is for you to exist as a treasured possession among all peoples. As you revel in my closeness and take pleasure in your sonship, you will in turn point the rest of the world back to the only sovereign, savior, and satisfier. And they will see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (cf. Deut 26:18–19; Jer 33:9; Zeph 3:19–20; Zech 9:16–17; Matt 5:16; 1 Pet 2:11–12). Either of these interpretations fit the grammar and calling in these verses.

21. Joüon and Muraoka, *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 602n1; Anneli Aejmelaeus, "Function and Interpretation of כִּי in Biblical Hebrew," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105, no. 2 (1986): 198–9, 205–7.

We have concluded that כִּי in 19:5 is best read causally (“because, for”). When the conclusions from the last three sections are joined, the result is the following text-hierarchy and translation for Exodus 19:5–6:

Fig. 8. Text-Hierarchy of Exodus 19:5–6

וְעַתָּה	5	And now,
אִם־שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ בְקוֹלִי		if you will indeed listen unto my voice
וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת־בְּרִיתִי	b	and keep my covenant
וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סִגְלָה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים	c	and be my treasured possession from all the peoples,
כִּי־לִי כָל־הָאָרֶץ:	↑ d	↑ for all the earth is mine,
וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים וְגוֹי קֹדֶשׁ	6	then you will be to me a royal priesthood and a holy nation.

6. Argument-Tracing in Exodus 19:4–6²²

Through observing further, the interpreter must now finish tracing the literary argument and create a message-driven outline that is tied to the passage’s main point. In creating an argument diagram, I will trace the various coordinate and subordinate relationships in Exodus 19:4–6 using the semantic categories and symbols from Biblearc.com (see fig. 9).

Fig. 9. Types of Propositional Relationships

Coordinate	Subordinate	
	<i>Restatement</i>	<i>Distinct Statement</i>
Series (S)	Action-Manner (Ac/Mn)	Ground (G)
Progression (P)	Comparison (Cf)	Inference (∴)
Alternate (A)	Negative-Positive (-/+)	Bilateral (BL)
Both-And (B&)	Question-Answer (Q/A)	Action-Result (Ac/Res)
	Idea-Explanation (Id/Exp)	Action-Purpose (Ac/Pur)
	General-Specific (Gn/Sp)	Conditional (If/Th)
	Fact-Interpretation (Ft/In)	Temporal (T)
	<i>Contrary Statement</i>	Locative (L)
	Concessive (Csv)	Anticipation-Fulfillment (Ant/F)
	Situation-Response (Sit/R)	

Analyze literary features and arrangement and create an argument diagram

Before completing our tracing of the argument in Exodus 19:4–6, it is helpful to recall our text-hierarchy in order to visualize the passage’s main sections.

22. For more on argument-tracing, see <http://www.Biblearc.com>; Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 87–104, 149–81; Ryken and Longman, *Complete Literary Guide*; DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 237–68.

Fig. 10. Text-Hierarchy of Exodus 19:4-6

אתם ראייתם	4	You have seen
אשר עשיתי למצרים	b	what I did to Egypt,
ואשא אתכם על-כנפי נשרים	c	and how I lifted you on eagle's wings,
ואבא אתכם אלי:	d	and how I brought you to myself.
ועתה	5	And now,
אם-שמוע תשמעו בקלי		if you will indeed listen unto my voice
ושמרתם את-בריתי	b	and keep my covenant
והייתם לי סגולה מכל-העמים	c	and be my treasured possession from all the peoples,
כי-לי כל-הארץ:	d	↑ for all the earth is mine,
ואתם תהיו לי ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש	6	then you will be to me a royal priesthood and a holy nation.

Note that 19:4 recalls YHWH's great deliverance of Israel from Egypt. And then, with the inference-marker ועתה (“and now”) in 19:5a, 19:5–6 draw a conclusion from the great salvation related to Israel's sacred task. The inference section itself has two units: the conditional protasis in 19:5 (“if”) and the apodosis in 19:6 (“then”). Because God saved Israel, if they will heed his voice, keep his covenant, and be his treasured possession from all the earth, then they will serve for him as a royal priesthood and holy nation. We can now display these various relationships through an arc (fig. 11).



Fig. 11. Arc of Exodus 19:4-6

Our first step is to distinguish the understood *Ground* [G] in 19:4 from the *Inference* (:.) in 19:5-6. There is no כי (“because, for”) in 19:4, but we do find ועתה (“and now”) in 19:5, which identifies the inference.

Within 19:4a we have the initial statement that Moses's audience had seen something. This is the *Idea* (Id), which is then unpacked through the *Explanation*

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(Exp) given in the compound relative clauses in 19:4b–d. A *Progression* (P) is evident: They saw or experienced (1) what God did to Egypt, and (2) how he carried them, and then (3) brought them to himself. Now they were with God at his mountain, and he identifies the implications of this reality in 19:5–6.

The inference section has a conditional protasis in 19:5 and an apodosis in 19:6, which I identify with *If-Then* (If-Th). The “if” section contains a progression of three actions that appear to serve as the means by which Israel will reach God’s goal of them serving as a royal priesthood and a holy nation. Later we will consider more what this task actually means, but here I want to note the type of condition that is evident. I could say, “If I fly on the airplane, I will arrive in Chicago.” Here the arrival in Chicago is an ultimate goal not enjoyed until *after* the flight is complete. In contrast, I could also say, “If I fly on the airplane, I will get some extended time to read.” Here the apodosis is fulfilled while the condition is being met, not after. While I am flying, I am getting to read. This latter example clarifies the type of conditional relationship evident in Exodus 19:5–6. At the very time while Israel is pursuing God by heeding his voice, keeping his covenant, and existing as his treasured possession, the people will be serving as a royal priesthood and a holy nation on behalf of God for the sake of the world. The apodosis identifies the God-honoring calling, and the protasis the means for fulfilling the calling.²³

The final arc is between 19:5cd, with 19:5d providing the *Ground* (G) or reason for 19:5c. Israel must serve as God’s treasured possession amid the earth, *because* all the earth is God’s. As I already noted, the logic here appears to be that Israel bears a God-exalting calling and that their role of serving as God’s treasured people is part of YHWH’s means for reclaiming his rightful place as the recognized and praised Lord of the earth. Because all the world is indeed his, Israel must complete their purpose of reflecting and representing YHWH’s supremacy over the world.

Draft an exegetical outline

Unlike many outlines, an exegetical outline highlights the passage’s main message along with drawing attention to the relationship of all the parts. I begin by crafting a basic logical outline of the passage, then identify the main purpose and main idea, and then use these elements to draft the exegetical outline.

Draft a basic logical outline of the passage.

23. In Gentry’s words, “The conditional sentence is proclaiming the privileged status of Israel inherent in the covenant relationship.” Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 351–52.

Fig. 12. Basic Logical Outline of Exodus 19:4-6

- I. God Redeems Israel from Egypt (v. 4)**
- II. Implication (“And now”): Israel bears a calling to make much of God (vv. 5-6)**
 - A. The condition (“if”) (v. 5)
 - 1. Heed God’s voice
 - 2. Keep God’s covenant
 - 3. Be God’s treasured possession in the context of the world
 - B. The result (“then”) (v. 6)
 - 1. Be a royal priesthood
 - 2. Be a holy nation

Clarify the main purpose of the passage.

Fig. 13. Main Purpose of Exodus 19:4-6

To motivate Israel to mediate and display God’s greatness and worth in response to God’s gracious redemption and by means of a lifestyle of radical God-centeredness.

State the main idea of the passage in a single sentence.

Fig. 14. Main Idea of Exodus 19:4-6

In response to God’s gracious redemption, the Lord calls his people to a God-exalting task of mediating and displaying his greatness and worth to the world through radical God-centered living.

Reword the basic outline into an exegetically grounded, message-driven outline.

Fig. 15. Exegetical Outline of Exodus 19:4-6

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>You have seen what I did to Egypt and how I lifted you on eagle’s wings, and how I brought you to myself. 5 And now, if you will indeed listen unto my voice and keep my covenant and be my treasured possession from all the peoples, for all the earth is mine, 6 then you will be to me a royal priesthood and a holy nation.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. The Basis of God’s Calling for His People: God’s Deliverance (v. 4) II. The Nature of God’s Calling for His People: To Exalt God in the World (vv. 5-6) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. The means for fulfilling the calling to exalt God in the world: radical God-centered living (v. 5) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Heed God’s voice 2. Keep God’s covenant 3. Exist as God’s treasured possession in the context of the world B. The essence of the calling to exalt God in the world (v. 6) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Serving as a royal priesthood: mediate God’s greatness and worth 2. Serving as a holy nation: display God’s greatness and worth |
|--|--|

While I will comment more about this later, there is an analogy between the structure of grace in the old covenant and the structure of grace in the new. In the old covenant, God graciously redeemed Israel from Egypt and, only in light of this, called them to a life of radical obedience and witness in the world. Following God in obedience was not the means for getting saved from slavery but the proper response to being saved. This is the structure of grace we see in the new covenant as well. God graciously redeems us in Christ and only then calls us to radical Christ-centered living. We bring nothing to our initial salvation. Only after a disciple is reborn does he become an obedient follower of all Jesus commanded.

7. A Word and Concept Study from Exodus 19:5²⁴

The next step in the exegetical process and the last step in “Observation” is to clarify the meaning of key words, phrases, and concepts. After choosing a word to study, one must discover the range of meaning for the particular Hebrew word in the rest of the OT (external data) and then determine the meaning of the Hebrew word within the specific target text (internal data).

One of the words upon which the meaning of Exodus 19:5 hangs is *תְּצַנֵּן* (S 5459; G/K 6035), which the ESV renders “treasured possession.” In previous sections, we finalized our translation of 19:5 as follows: “If you will indeed listen unto my voice and keep my covenant and be my treasured possession from all the peoples...” The term *תְּצַנֵּן* shows up eight times in the OT (Exod 19:5; Deut 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; 1 Chr 29:3; Ps 135:4; Eccl 2:8; Mal 3:17). Its first use in Scripture is in our text, which, as we will see, appears to have impacted the majority of other occurrences, thus showing the foundational role Exodus 19:4–6 played in shaping Israel’s self-understanding.

External data

I have classified the eight passages containing *תְּצַנֵּן* into two groups: (1) non-theological uses and (2) theological uses. This distinction is important, for God’s theological use of the term in our text is most probably applying in a spiritual or religious context how the greater society was using the term in everyday life—its more common or secular use.

Common, non-theological uses (2x)

Our first example comes from Ecclesiastes 2:8, where the Preacher, reflecting on his kingship in Jerusalem, declares, “I also gathered for myself silver and gold *and the treasure of kings* [וְיִסְגָּלֹת מְלָכִים] and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man.” Similarly, in 1 Chronicles 29:3, King David asserts of the temple, “Moreover, in addition to all that I have provided

24. For more on word and concept studies, see John H. Walton, “Principles for Productive Word Study,” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* 1:161–70; Fields, “What Do You Mean?—Hebrew Word Studies,” in *Hebrew for the Rest of Us*, 221–33; DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 269–96. For key tools for word and concept studies, see <http://www.accordancebible.com>; <https://www.logos.com>; Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997); John R. Kohlenberger III and James A. Swanson, *The Hebrew-English Concordance to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Study Edition*, trans. M. E. J. Richardson, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2001); R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, rev. one-volume ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2003); William D. Mounce, ed., *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006).

for the holy house, I have a *treasure* [תְּגִלָּה] of my own of gold and silver, and because of my devotion to the house of my God I give it to the house of my God.”

In both of these texts, the תְּגִלָּה appears to be costly, valued, private property of the king that is normally reserved for his sole use and special purposes. Not only this, both instances show that the property is movable—not palaces but treasures associated with silver and gold that could be gathered from others or given for the building of the temple on the king’s own prerogative. Ecclesiastes 2:8 may also add that the treasury is something personally gained.

In contrast to the narrow focus of תְּגִלָּה, we find in 1 Chronicles 27:25–31 a list of all the stewards who were over King David’s “property” (רְכוּשׁ), which is the broadest term for one’s possessions or goods. For David this meant his entire royal estate reaching over the entire kingdom, including all treasuries, workers of the fields for tilling the soil, vineyards, produce from the vineyards for the wine cellars, olive and sycamore trees in the Shephelah, stores of oil, herds that pastured in Sharon and in the valleys, camels, donkeys, and flocks. Because the text distinguishes “the king’s treasuries” (אֲצִרוֹת הַמְּלָכָה) from those “treasuries” in the country, the cities, the villages, and towers, it seems likely that the תְּגִלָּה was restricted to the private physical but non-living wealth he retained in his personal “treasury of the king.”

Synthesis: Based on these texts, the common, every-day use of תְּגִלָּה appears to have been “a king’s costly, valued, private, movable, non-living, personally gained property normally reserved for his sole use and special purposes.”

Theological uses (5x + Exodus 19:5)

We first assess the *Law*, which is the canonical section in which our passage falls, the bulk of which Moses authored. Outside Exodus 19:5, the initial few references are all from Deuteronomy. The first two are worded almost identically and both are tied to a reaffirmation of Israel’s identity as a holy people, which, with תְּגִלָּה, alludes to Exodus 19:5–6. Deuteronomy 7:6 gives the reason why Israel must utterly destroy all Canaanite worship implements: “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his *treasured possession* [תְּגִלָּה], out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” Similarly, Deuteronomy 14:2 stresses why God’s people must not engage in pagan worship practices: “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his *treasured possession* [תְּגִלָּה], out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” As in Exodus 19:5, YHWH’s intent for Israel to be his תְּגִלָּה is something not true of all other peoples on the planet. God is calling Israel to live out a distinct status. The text stresses that YHWH *chose* Israel to be a תְּגִלָּה, which highlights the value he places on his people.

We already encountered the next text in our earlier grammatical discussion of the protasis and apodosis in Exodus 19:5–6. Deuteronomy 26:18 reads, “And the

LORD has today confirmed your declaration to be a people of treasured possession [תְּרֻמָּה], just as he declared to you, and to keep all his commandments” (author’s translation). Here, once again, living as YHWH’s תְּרֻמָּה is God’s expectation for Israel.

We next assess the Prophets and Writings. While YHWH called Israel to holiness and to serve as his royal priesthood by pursuing him wholly, the history of Israel showed that their hearts were far from God, just as Moses said they would be.

The LORD warned Israel and Judah by every prophet ... but they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God. They despised his statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers and the warnings that he gave them. They went after false idols and became false, and they followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them that they should not do like them.... Therefore the LORD was very angry. (2 Kgs 17:13–15, 18; cf. Deut 31:27, 29)

Nevertheless, YHWH’s fury was not his final expression. Indeed, out of his great compassion (Deut 4:30–31), the Lord would one day empower a remnant from Israel to be who they could not be on their own. *First*, we read in Malachi 3:17, “They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my *treasured possession* [תְּרֻמָּה], and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him.” No harm will come to those who are God’s. He will protect them, but he will punish the wicked. Malachi goes on to distinguish the righteous from the wicked as “one who serves God and one who does not serve him” (v. 18). To be God’s תְּרֻמָּה—his “treasured possession”—means that you will be his servant. When, therefore, YHWH charges Israel in Exodus 19:5 to “be my treasured possession” (וְהָיִיתֶם לִי תְּרֻמָּה), it seems likely that he is calling them to live in his service.

Second, Psalm 135:3–4 declares, “Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; sing to his name, for it is pleasant! For the LORD has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel *as his own possession* [לְתֻרְמָתוֹ].” The final book of the Psalter celebrates the God who restores and renews in anticipation of his full Davidic kingdom fulfillment.²⁵ Psalm 132 has just reaffirmed the Davidic covenant, and Psalms 133 and 134 celebrate the unity of the righteous and the hope for God’s blessing. Into this context Psalm 135 reaffirms YHWH’s claim on his own: “The LORD has chosen Jacob for himself, Israel *as his own possession*.” The wording is more specific and personal than in earlier texts, using the third masculine singular suffix to emphasize that Israel is *his*.

25. For this reading, see Michael K. Searly, “The Return of the King: Book V as a Witness to Messianic Hope in the Psalter,” in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul*, ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer and David M. Howard (Chicago: Moody Press, 2014), 209–17.

Internal assessment: The meaning of הַלְגָּד in Exodus 19:5

The non-theological uses of הַלְגָּד in Ecclesiastes 2:8 and 1 Chronicles 29:3 pointed to the word meaning “a king’s costly, valued, private, movable, non-living, personally-gained property normally reserved for his sole use and special purposes.” הַלְגָּד was indeed the king’s “treasured possession.”

The theological uses of הַלְגָּד suggest that this is exactly how Israel was to think of themselves in their relationship with God. They were his costly, valued, private, personally gained property reserved for his special purpose. They stood distinct from the world as his special treasure (Exod 19:5; Deut 7:6; 14:2). Their responsibility was to live like it, which meant fleeing wickedness and serving YHWH (Mal 3:17). In the context of celebrating God’s greatness and the hope of complete Davidic kingdom restoration, the psalmist affirms YHWH’s claim on Israel, his treasure (Ps 135:4). The Lord also promises that one day he would bring about by his power what the people could not accomplish on their own (Mal 3:17). They would live as his servants and by this mediate and magnify his greatness to the world.

The LXX translates הַלְגָּד in Exodus 19:5 as λαὸς περιούσιος, which is the same phrase Paul employs in Titus 2:14, where he highlights that Jesus Christ “gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession [λαὸν περιούσιον] who are zealous for good works.” Thus, the church is now fulfilling the God-honoring calling of Israel by the power supplied through Christ. Jesus mediated and magnified the majesty of God perfectly in his life, death, resurrection, and exaltation, and now in him we are enabled to do the same.

Similarly, in a context of calling the church to holiness (1 Pet 1:14–16) and stressing that those who come to Christ “are being built up ... to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (2:5), Peter alludes to Exodus 19:5, using περιποίησις, which means the same thing—a “treasured possession” of God: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, *a people for his own possession* [λαὸς εἰς περιποίησις], that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” In Exodus 19 Israel’s call to be a “treasured possession” was only potential, but in the church of Christ it is already being realized. In Jesus we are enabled to live as God’s “treasured possession,” serving him in the strength he supplies (1 Pet 4:11), and by this we are functioning as a royal priesthood and a holy nation under our king, to the praise of his glorious grace.

C. Context

“Where does this passage fit?”

8. *The Historical Context of Exodus 19:4–6*²⁶

With step 8 we move from “Observation” to “Context.” As we turn our eye to the broader frame in which our passage rests, we first need to understand the historical situation from which the author composed the text and identify any historical details that the author mentions or assumes. Here we ask questions of Who? When? Where? Why? How? and especially What?

In historical narrative texts, it is often difficult to discern the difference between historical and literary context, seeing as the history is bound up in the narrative itself. Such is the case as we approach Exodus 19:4–6. In light of this challenge, I have decided to only deal with the most general historical data, and I will leave a more thorough analysis of the Exodus narrative for the Literary Context discussion. As we approach Historical Context, I have chosen to focus on two areas: (1) The event of the exodus, which 19:4 tells us grounds Israel’s God-honoring calling; and (2) the nature and significance of the “covenant” mentioned in 19:5.

The Exodus

After the Israelites dwelt in Egypt’s east Delta for an extended time (Exod 12:40–41),²⁷ God commissioned Moses to lead a deliverance before the eyes of both Israel and the

26. For more on historical context, see James A. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969); William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr., eds., *The Context of Scripture*, 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1997–2016); K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Eugen H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); John H. Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Old Testament*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009); James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary, eds., *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Walter C. Kaiser and Paul D. Wegner, *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age through the Jewish Wars*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2016); Ian W. Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 299–322.

27. Exodus 12:40–41 tells us that Israel sojourned in Egypt 430 years, and then “at the end of the 430 years, on that very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.” While many scholars believe this means 430 years from the time Jacob entered Egypt to the time of the exodus, I believe there is a strong case for viewing the 430 years as a reference from when Abram first entered Egypt (Gen 12:10–20). Jewish tradition, John Calvin, and some contemporary scholars like John Bimson and David Rohl propose the time from Jacob’s entry until the exodus was only 210 years, based on genealogical data and other specific statements from the biblical texts. In my own assessment, at least five observations support this view: (1) Kohath was born before the entry into Egypt (Gen 46:12, 26), and his son Amram (Exod 6:18) was the father of Moses and Aaron (6:20). Kohath lived 133 years (6:18), Amram lived 137 years (6:20), and Moses was 80 years old at the Exodus (7:7). This means that *at the very most* Israel was in Egypt for 350 years (133 + 137 + 80), and that assumes the unlikely possibility that each man had his son in the

world. This fulfilled his earlier promise to Abram in Genesis 15:13–14: “Then the LORD said to him, ‘Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and mistreated there. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions’” (NIV).

Scholars are not united on the dating of the exodus, partly because Scripture does not name the Pharaoh of the exodus. A straightforward reading of the biblical text, especially 1 Kings 6:1, would put the exodus in 1446 BC, probably during Egypt’s 18th Dynasty during the reign of Amenhotep II (ca. 1450–1425 BC). While there is much corroborative evidence for the Israelite exodus in 1446 BC,²⁸ there is no explicit evidence in Egypt’s materials that they, as the greatest empire on earth, were drastically humbled by the God of a massive band of foreign slaves. But this should not even be expected, for we know of no kings in the ancient world who were quick to retain for posterity stories of their own humiliation. What we do know is that the biblical details associated with Egyptian culture line up perfectly and that nothing in Egyptian history counteracts the Bible’s claims.²⁹ Finally, as for Amenhotep II, we know that he began his kingship during Egypt’s zenith of global power and influence. He was a successful military warrior and made several campaigns into Canaan. But then, for whatever reason, he abruptly stopped his military activity. While not

year of his death. More likely is the fact that the nation’s time in Egypt was much shorter. (2) The 400 years promised in Genesis 15:13 most likely refers *not* to the length of Egyptian oppression but to the time until the oppression will cease—about 400 years from the Abrahamic covenant. Indeed, we know the oppression was not 430 years, for Israel lived in solace under Joseph for many years. (3) Paul’s statement that the Law came 430 years after “the promises were made to Abraham” (Gal 3:16–17) implies a shorter Egyptian sojourn, for his point of departure is the promises to *Abraham* and not the patriarchs in general or the entrance of Jacob and his sons into Egypt. (4) In Acts 13:17–20 Paul states that “all this” from the choosing of the patriarchs through the period of the judges took “about 450” years. If the time reference indeed refers to everything mentioned in verses 17–20, the actual period from Jacob’s entrance into Egypt to the exodus was *not* 430 years but much, much shorter. (5) While less specific, Acts 7:17–19 states that already after Joseph’s death but before Egypt actually enslaved the Israelites “the time of the [Gen 15:13] promise [fulfillment] drew near.” This would be strange to say if there was still many centuries of enslavement ahead, but if the enslavement happened only toward the end of the Egyptian sojourn, Stephen’s stress on the “nearness” of the fulfillment makes more sense. How then do we reconcile the 430 year period in Exodus 12:40–41? I propose that Moses’s “430 years” could be counting from the time when the father of their nation (Abraham) first sojourned in Egypt, which happens as early as Genesis 12:10–20 around Abram’s seventy-fifth year, soon after his initial entrance into Canaan. The promise of 400 years in Genesis 15:13 is not associated with a specific age of Abram but came somewhere between his seventy-fifth and eighty-sixth years (Gen 12:4; 16:16).

28. See Charles F. Aling, *Egypt and Bible History: From Earliest Times to 1000 B.C.*, Baker Studies in Biblical Archaeology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981); John Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and Conquest*, 2nd ed. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 5 (Sheffield, UK: Almond Press, 1981); David Rohl, *Exodus: Myth or History?* (St. Louis Park, MN: Thinking Man Media, 2015); Timothy P. Mahoney with Steven Law, *Patterns of Evidence: Exodus* (St. Louis Park, MN: Thinking Man Media, 2015).

29. See especially Aling, *Egypt and Bible History*; James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 241–312.

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conclusive, the Dream Stele of Thutmose IV, son and successor of Amenhotep II, notes that Thutmose IV was not the firstborn son of Amenhotep II, which could be an allusion to the tenth plague on the firstborn of Egypt.

What is most significant with respect to this piece of historical context is that Exodus 19:4–6 assumes with much of the rest of Scripture that the exodus actually occurred in space and time. Israel’s God YHWH miraculously and with great power delivered them personally and visibly, making certain that all future deliverance was sure to come.

The Covenant

In his excellent co-authored work *Kingdom Through Covenant*, Peter Gentry has noted that Scripture applies the term כְּרִיתָה (“covenant”) to numerous oath-bound commitments: international treaties (Josh 9:6; 1 Kgs 15:19), clan alliances (Gen 14:13), personal agreements (Gen 31:44), national agreements (Jer 34:8–10), and loyalty agreements (1 Sam 20:14–17), including marriage.³⁰ In another exceptional study titled *Marriage as a Covenant*, Gordon Hugenberger helpfully defines “covenant” as “an elected, as opposed to natural, relationship of obligation under oath.”³¹ Or, as Thomas Schreiner notes, covenant the Bible’s term for “a chosen relationship in which two parties make binding promises to each other,” often with God as the witness.³² These definitions fit well the nature of covenantal relationships that we see throughout both the Bible and the ancient world. At the heart of a covenant is a relationship—one established by choice and not by birth, though it is modeled on family relationships. Thus suzerains tagged themselves “fathers,” vassals “sons,” and fellow vassals “brothers.” This covenant relationship bore obligations for both parties, who established this relationship in the context of promise, or oath, usually with the gods as witnesses for curse or blessing.

In Exodus 19:5, YHWH calls Israel to “keep my covenant.” Since his dealing with Noah, YHWH has tagged his various relationships with humans “covenants” (Gen 6:8; 9:9–17; 15:18; 17:2–22; Exod 2:24; 6:4–5). This implies both his fatherly and sovereign authority and his intention to relate with the people of his creation. When we arrive at Exodus 19:5, the only two divine-human relationships tagged “covenants” are the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants. Now in Exodus 19–20, God is establishing what he later calls a “covenant” (Exod 24:8; 34:10, 27–28) specifically associated with Horeb, or Mount Sinai (Deut 5:2; 29:1[28:69]). The question becomes, what historical covenant is God pointing to in Exodus 19:5? “If you keep *my covenant*....”

30. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 162–63.

31. Gordon P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as a Covenant: Biblical Law and Ethics as Developed from Malachi* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 11.

32. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God’s Purpose for the World*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 13.

In Exodus, the narrator opens the story of deliverance by saying, “God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob” (Exod 2:24). Then in Exodus 6:4–5, YHWH himself asserts, “I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant.” YHWH had promised Abram in Genesis 12:2 that he would make him into a renowned nation, and then in 17:7–8 he promised, “And I will establish *my covenant* between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.” These promises find their fulfillment in the Mosaic covenant established at Sinai.

William Dumbrell has argued that, because Exodus has only mentioned the Abrahamic covenant to this point, God is calling Israel in 19:5 to keep the Abrahamic covenant.³³ Other scholars struggle with this because Exodus 19–20 are the very context in which God makes the Sinai covenant.³⁴ Indeed, the call to “listen unto his voice” in 19:5 appears to anticipate the introduction to the Ten Words in 20:1, where we read, “And God spoke all these words, saying....”

I suggest that we do not have to choose between the two, for Genesis anticipates that God’s relationship with Israel established at Sinai is actually the fulfillment of stage-one of his promises to Abraham—those promises directly related to Israel’s nationhood and tenure in the land. While the Mosaic covenant includes some typological anticipations of blessing overcoming curse, it is the new covenant in Christ that ultimately fulfills stage-two of the Abrahamic covenant, for through it alone does blessing reach the nations through a male deliver (Gen 12:3; 22:17b–18) and Abraham become the father of a multitude of nations (17:4–6) (see esp. Acts 3:25–26; Rom 4:13–18; Gal 3:7–29). In Exodus 19:5 God is calling Israel to fulfill stage-one of the Abrahamic covenant, which will mean the need to abide by the Ten Words and the other regulations, all in order to enjoy sustained access to God’s presence and to mediate and display his holiness to the world.

9. The Literary Context of Exodus 19:4–6³⁵

The last of the nine exegetical steps is to comprehend the role that the passage plays in the whole biblical book within which it is found. Three areas in particular

33. William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology*, 2nd ed. (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013), 110–11.

34. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 50.

35. For more on literary context, see part 2 of T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity and Diversity of Scripture* IVP

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are necessary to assess: (1) the text's literary placement or location, (2) the text's literary function or purpose, and (3) literary details that help identify the text's overall contribution.

Perhaps more than any other book in Scripture, Exodus is an extended narrative treatise on the nature of YHWH as God. The whole book is designed to highlight his rightful, necessary, and loving passion for his own glory above all things. It does this by focusing on two main areas: (1) his redemption of his people (chs. 1–18) and (2) his relationship with his people (chs. 19–40). Figure 16 contains my exegetical outline for Exodus. Note where 19:4–6 falls:

Fig. 16. Exegetical Outline of Exodus
I. YHWH's Self-Exalting, Gracious Redemption of His People (1:1–18:27)
A. Historical Background to Redemption (1:1–4:31)
1. Setting the stage for redemption (1:1–2:25)
2. Calling of God's messenger of redemption (3:1–4:31)
B. The Call for and Experience of Redemption (5:1–15:21)
1. Moses' challenge to Pharaoh and Israel (5:1–6:27)
2. 10 Plagues: proclaiming the power and presence of YHWH (6:28–11:10)
3. The memorialization of redemption: the Passover (12:1–36)
4. The experience of redemption (12:37–14:31)
5. The celebration of redemption (15:1–21)
C. The Ramifications of Redemption (15:22–18:27)
1. For Israel: the life of faith as trust for provision (15:22–17:16)
2. For Moses: the life of faith as trust for guidance (18:1–27)
II. YHWH's Self-Exalting, Gracious Relationship with His People (19:1–40:38)
A. The Covenant Embodying YHWH's Relationship with Israel (19:1–24:11)
1. The manifestation of and response to YHWH's presence and word (19:1–20:21)
2. The nature of the relationship expounded (20:22–23:33)
3. The ratification of the covenant (24:1–11)
B. Sacred Space as the Emanating Center of YHWH's Relationship with Israel (24:12–40:38)
1. The manifestation of God's glory and the description of sacred space (24:12–31:18)
2. YHWH's response to Israel's failure to reckon with his presence (32:1–34:5)
3. YHWH's gracious manifestation of his presence among his people (35:1–40:38)

Literary Placement and Function

Redemption and relationship through covenant and divine presence are the hallmarks of the way YHWH discloses himself in Exodus. Since each of these elements are present in Exodus 19:4–6, this passage has a foundational place in the book. Redemption and divine presence are manifest in 19:4, whereas the covenant and its purpose of mediating and magnifying God's presence is the focus of 19:5–6.

Chapters 19–40 address two things: (1) how the Mosaic covenant (19:1–24:11) set the boundaries and purpose of Israel's relationship with YHWH and (2) how

Reference Collection (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000); Jason S. DeRouchie, ed., *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About: A Survey of Jesus' Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013); Miles V. VanPelt, ed., *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 323–43.

the tabernacle (25:1–40:38) provided the context for this relationship. Within this framework, Exodus 19:4–6 introduces the section on covenant, describing its core. Exodus 19:4–6 is YHWH’s first speech in the main part of the book, which itself gives the text priority.

Chapters 19–40 stand as the heart of the book for at least three reasons: First, these chapters carry the most literary weight, standing twice as long as what comes before. Second, Exodus 19:4–6 is explicit that the redemption detailed in chapters 1–18 grounds and gives rise to the relationship and the calling that flows from it. Third, the narrative itself has been anticipating Israel’s arrival at Mount Sinai since 3:12, where God declared to Moses at the burning bush, “I will be with you, and this will be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve/worship God on this mountain.” Exodus 19:2 then tells us, “They ... came into the wilderness of Sinai.... There they encamped before *the* mountain.”

Literary Details

Background: Destruction and Deliverance

Using the translation I gave in §4, Exodus 19:4 reads, “You have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I lifted you on wings of eagles, and how I brought you to myself.” The task to which YHWH calls Israel in these verses is grounded in what he had just accomplished on their behalf. With their own eyes, they had witnessed the ten devastating plagues YHWH brought on Egypt, and they had experienced a remarkable salvation.

Pharaoh had asked, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go?” (Exod 5:1). The plagues provided YHWH’s systematic response to this query. It is intriguing that the text never names the Pharaoh of the exodus. Oh, how historians wish that he was! But there is a theological point being made. Pharaoh was god on earth for the Egyptians, yet he remains nameless. In contrast, the God over both heaven and earth and from whom everything derives bears the name YHWH (3:14–15). He is jealous to be known (34:14), and the whole book of Exodus works to unpack the significance of his name.

The battle in Egypt took place first in the heavenlies—it was a battle of the gods, wherein YHWH as the only uncaused one defeated Egypt’s powers. Nearly every one of the ten plagues is known to have confronted an Egyptian deity.³⁶ Furthermore, we have texts like this: “For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on *all the gods* of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD” (12:12). “On the day after the Passover, the people of Israel went out triumphantly in the sight of all the

36. See John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 85.

Egyptians, while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom the LORD had struck down among them. On *their gods* also the LORD executed judgments” (Num 33:3–4). “And who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name and doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before your people for yourself from Egypt, a nation and *its gods*?” (2 Sam 7:23).

YHWH declares in Exodus 19:4, “You have seen!” The destruction of Egypt and the people’s own deliverance happened before their very eyes. Faced with the amazing majesty and mercy of God, they had sung, “Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?” (Exod 15:11). The answer: No one! Thus, they declared, “The LORD will reign forever and ever!” (15:18). Others outside Israel also expressed similar awe. Thus Jethro, Moses’s father-in-law, declared, “Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods” (18:10).

This amazing display of majesty and mercy sets the literary backdrop to our passage. Just before the seventh plague, YHWH told Pharaoh through Moses, “For by now I could have put out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence, and you would have been cut off from the earth. But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed *in all the earth*” (9:15–16). God is intent to exalt his power in the sight of all—with every people, every power knowing that he alone is God. He had raised up Pharaoh for this ultimate end. He destroyed Egypt and delivered Israel for the fame of his name, and this God-exalting motivation is what grounds the God-honoring calling detailed in Exodus 19:5–6.

Foreground: Covenant and Calling

Exodus 19:5–6 reads, “And now, if you will indeed listen unto my voice and keep my covenant and be to me a treasured possession from all the peoples, for all the earth is mine, then you will be to me a royal priesthood and holy nation” (author’s translation). When YHWH asserted that Israel should indeed “listen unto his voice,” this implied his authority over his people. YHWH speaks as a sovereign, and therefore, his words are by nature authoritative and, when written, canonical.³⁷ The call to “listen unto his voice” in 19:5 appears to anticipate the introduction to the Ten Words in 20:1, which reads, “And God spoke all these words, saying....” The voice that the people are to obey is, at the very least, disclosed in the words that YHWH is about to proclaim.

God calls Israel specifically to keep his “covenant,” which I noted in my discussion of Historical Context refers to the Sinai covenant as the fulfillment of the

37. On this link, see Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 21–44.

first stage of the Abrahamic covenant. YHWH had promised Abraham that he would become a nation in the land, and the Mosaic covenant revealed initially in Exodus 19–24 is the working out of this promise.

Exodus 20 highlights the way in which the encounter with God's presence mentioned in Exodus 19:4 grounds and gives rise to the calling of 19:5–6. At the mountain YHWH had disclosed both his person and word in power through the giving of the Ten Words. The crashing and piercing sounds and the visible display of fire and smoke had caused the people to tremble and to back away from the mountain (Exod 20:18). YHWH is not safe, but he is good. At this Moses came to them and declared in Exodus 20:20: "Do not fear, for God has come in order to test you and in order that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin" (author's translation). The logic of this text is important. God came to test Israel and to generate holy fear in them in order that they might not rebel. Sin implies a lack of godward fear, and a lack of godward fear implies that we are not encountering God.

In Exodus 19:5–6, the means for fulfilling the calling to mediate his greatness as a royal priesthood and to magnify this greatness as a holy people was through their heeding his voice, keeping his covenant, and being a treasured possession. Israel needed to obey God's law to show the world the value of God, but they would not do so apart from his merciful disclosure of himself. This is Moses's point at the end of the book when, after the golden calf episode, he pleads for the Lord's presence to remain in their midst. "For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?" (33:16). In Exodus 19:5–6 what will make Israel a light in the world will be their radical surrender to God and his ways. In Exodus 33:16 what will make Israel a light to the world will be the presence of God. Exodus 20:20 clarifies that God's presence generates fear that in turn leads to obedience.

As I conclude this section, I offer a challenge. Examine your life. Where are your biggest struggles with sin? We only rebel against God when we don't fear him enough, and fear is generated with a personal encounter with his presence. Plead to God to make his presence known to you. I love the promise in Jeremiah 32:40 regarding the new covenant: "I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me." Pray that God will work within you the fear that leads to holiness, for the glory of his name.

D. Meaning
“What does the passage mean?”

10. Biblical Theology in Exodus 19:4–6³⁸

As we move into biblical theology, we shift from the formal category of exegesis into the area of theology and now truly begin to synthesize the lasting message of the passage. We also move from “Context” to “Meaning.” At this step we consider how our passage connects to the Bible’s overall story line or message and points to Christ. Biblical theology is a way of analyzing and synthesizing what the Bible reveals about God and his relations with the world that makes organic salvation-historical and literary-canonical connections with the whole of Scripture on its own terms, especially with respect to how the Old and New Testaments progress, integrate, and climax in Christ.

We will now look more intently at God’s call that Israel be a “royal priesthood” in Exodus 19:6. This instruction builds upon revelation already disclosed in Genesis and sets a theological trajectory for what will come in the rest of Scripture.

The meaning of “a royal priesthood”

Before engaging in a scriptural journey, we must consider the proper meaning of the construct phrase מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים, which most translations render “kingdom of priests.” The noun מְמַלְכָה derives from the verb מָלַךְ (“to rule, reign”). Because nouns with preformative *mem* are usually (1) abstract nouns, (2) nouns of place, or (3) nouns of instrument, and because nouns of instrument usually bear an *a-e* vowel pattern whereas the others regularly follow either *a-a* or *i-a*, מְמַלְכָה (*a-a*) is likely either an abstract noun expressing the sphere/state/act of ruling (i.e., sovereignty) (e.g., 1 Sam 28:17; Isa 17:3; Jer 27:1) or a noun of place pointing to a realm of ruling (i.e., a kingdom—e.g., Gen 10:10; 1 Kgs 18:10; Isa 19:2).³⁹ In this light, the best possible meanings of the noun-relationship within the construct phrase מְמַלְכֵת כֹּהֲנִים are (1) a subjective genitive meaning priests who exercise sovereignty (i.e., royal priests) or (2) a genitive of specification meaning a royal realm embodying priests (i.e., kingdom

38. For more on biblical theology, see part 1 of Alexander and Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*; G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008); G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012); James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 347–93; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*; Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020).

39. Joüon and Muraoka, *Joüon*, 236 (§88.L.d); compare with Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 357n37.

of priests).⁴⁰ The LXX interprets with the first option, rendering the parallel phrases with two nouns, each modified by adjectives: βασιλείον ιεράτευμα καὶ ἕθνος ἅγιον (“a royal priesthood and a holy nation”).

In the immediate context of Exod 19:6, YHWH is the sovereign who speaks, covenants, and possesses (Exod 19:5), which means that he is either calling the Israelites as his covenant partner to display his ultimate sovereignty through their priesthood (option 1: “royal priesthood”) or to operate as priests within his sovereign realm (option 2: “kingdom of priests”). The conjoined parallel phrase “holy nation” (גוי קדוש) simply includes a noun with modifying adjective, so it is difficult to know whether “nation” (גוי) stands parallel to מַמְלָכָה (“kingdom”) (thus supporting option 2) or כֹּהֲנִים (“priests”) (thus supporting option 1).

YHWH’s claim that “all the earth is mine” in 19:5d works well in relation to a focus on a particular “kingdom,” as does the possibility that the preposition in God’s assertion in 19:6a that the people will be “for me” (לי) is in fact a ל of possession. However, if, as I have argued, the 19:6 לִּי is one of advantage (i.e., “for my benefit”; see §5 above), and if the charge that Israel is to be a treasured possession among all the peoples” is indeed identifying a missional calling (see §5), then the assertion that Israel as a nation were to be “royal priests” would point to a calling to mediate and display YHWH’s greatness among the nations.

Davies rightly notes how the immediate literary context identifies how Israel’s own priests were those consecrated to God in order to draw near his presence (e.g., 19:22; 28:35). As such, Davies downplays any thought that the nation as a priesthood relates in any way to a functional/missional calling.⁴¹ However, along approaching the Lord, Israel’s priests were also to represent YHWH’s beauty and glory before the people (Exod 28:2), to clarify for the people his definition of what is holy and common, unclean and clean (Lev 10:10), and to instruct the people in God’s ways (10:11). Could these elements not also be a part of what it would mean for the whole nation of Israel to serve as a priesthood for God in the sight of the nations? This seems all the more likely in a book that has already declared that the Lord intends to work through Israel in a way that will proclaim his name “in all the earth” (Exod 9:14–15; cf. Isa 63:11–14; Ps 106:8), thus providing initial though incomplete fulfillment of God’s promise to the patriarchs that through Abraham the earth’s families/nations would be blessed (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14).⁴² With this, Moses will later

40. See Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jacobus A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 227 (§25.4.2.3 and §25.4.3.3). Gentry similarly sees the options either as a domain of priests that God rules (that is, “kingdom of priests”) or the exercise of a royal office by those who are priests (that is, “royal priesthood”). Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 357.

41. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 98. He writes, “We ought not to be looking then for a functional definition of priesthood, but for ontological one” (97–98).

42. See William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenant Theology*, 2nd ed. (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013), 119–21.

identify how only with YHWH's help will Israel actually be distinct from the nations (Exod 33:16), which shows that this was part of their responsibility.

Elsewhere, Moses highlights how Israel's keeping the law would impact the nations in a way that would bring glory to God (Deut 4:5–8), and this is at least one way to interpret what it means that they were to be a “treasured possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine” (Exod 19:5). Furthermore, numerous texts that allude to Exodus 19:5–6 appear to interpret the responsibility to be a treasured possession in order to be priests as pointing to Israel's calling to mediate in some way YHWH's greatness to their neighbors—in a “come and see” rather than “go and tell” sense.⁴³ We already noted how Deuteronomy 26:18–19 identified that when Israel operated as the Lord's treasured possession, he would set them “in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations” and they would be “a people holy to the LORD.” Similarly, with an apparent allusion to Exodus 19:6 but without conjoining the phrases, 1 Peter 2:9 reads, “But you are a chosen race, *a royal priesthood* [βασιλειον ιεράτευμα], *a holy nation* [ἔθνος ἅγιον], a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” And with minor differences, Revelation 5:10 retains two nominal forms, followed by a verbal: “And you have made them *a kingdom and priests* [βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς] to our God, and *they shall reign* [βασιλεύσουσιν] on the earth” (cf. 20:6). While we will return to the NT texts at the end of this unit, what is apparent is that the biblical authors saw Exodus 19:6 relating both to state and function—a kingdom embodying priests and a royal priesthood called to proclaim God's excellencies and to reign on the earth. As we will now see, this aligns them with the Lord's original intention for humanity.

Adam as God's son, a royal priest

Exodus 19:5–6 builds upon the messianic and missiological plan set forth in Genesis, recalling the commission of Adam to image his heavenly father for the global display of God's glory. In Genesis 2:15 the Lord places the first man in the garden to “work” and “guard” the land (cf. 3:23–24), terms used together outside Genesis 2–3 only in relation to the function of the Levites as servants and guardians of sacred space (Num 3:4, 7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6). Adam was a *priest* of YHWH.

But God also charged the first man and woman to “subdue” the earth and to “have dominion” over its creatures (Gen 1:28), royal language directly associated with Adam and Eve's role as imagers of God (1:26). Adam was also, then, a *king* under YHWH, commissioned to reflect, resemble, and represent his father-creator (cf. Ps 8:5–8[6–9]).

Genesis 5:1–3 identifies the close association of imageness/likeness and sonship when it writes: “When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male

43. For more on this distinction, see §11 below.

and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them Man when they were created. When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.” In a way comparable to how human sons image their fathers, Adam imaged his God, and as God’s son he was to operate as a royal priest, warding off evil and working to see God’s sanctuary and presence extended through the world.

Israel as a new Adam, God’s son, a royal priest

In contrast to God’s purposes for him, Adam sinned, failing to reflect, resemble, and represent his Father rightly. So, the sovereign of all things initiated his kingdom plan of salvation that would include a corporate royal priest-son who would in turn both give birth to and typologically anticipate an individual royal priest-son. The Lord anticipated the individual son first when he announced in Genesis 3:15 that a male seed of the woman would ultimately render a deathblow to the serpent and his God-hostile ways. Following the flood, we learn that he would be a descendant of Shem (Gen 9:26–27). Then, after having announced in Genesis 12:3 that Abraham would be the agent through whom the world would be blessed, 22:17b–18 detailed that the promised male deliverer would be in Abraham’s line and that he would ultimately control enemy gates and bring worldwide blessing (cf. 24:60; 26:3–4). We also learn in 49:8–10 that he would be a king in the line of Judah.

Into this context, YHWH announced in Exodus 4:22 that Israel is his “firstborn son,” and then in 19:6 he called this son to be “royal priesthood” in the midst of the whole world. 19:22, 24 tell us that, at the time Israel had arrived at the mountain, the congregation already had priests who served as mediators between God and the people. These priests would serve as the primary teachers of God’s word (Lev 10:10–11) and the primary ones to offer sacrifices, by which right order would be reestablished and God’s wrath against the people appeased (Lev 4:1–6:7; 16:1–19; 1 Chr 23:13). What is most amazing here is that Exodus 19:6 says not that Israel would have priests but that the entire nation was to be a royal priesthood, not only engaging YHWH’s presence but also mediating God’s word to the world through radical lives of surrender that would display the value and worth of the Lord. As Moses declares in Deuteronomy 4:6, “Keep and do [the statutes and the rules], for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’” Just as Moses would consecrate the Israelite priests by placing the blood of a sacrifice on them (Lev 8:24), so also “Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words’” (Exod 24:8). Thus, God set the nation apart as his royal priest-son, called to magnify his majesty in the world.

Israel's failure as God's priest and God's promise of future fulfillment

Like Adam, God's corporate son Israel rebelled, going his own way. Rather than praising and proclaiming God's name, the people profaned it. Moses had anticipated this in his prophetic prediction when he announced in Deuteronomy 32:5, "They have dealt corruptly with him; they are no longer his children, because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation" (cf. 31:16–17, 27, 29).

But in the midst of a sea of debauchery in the days of the Judges, God announced through Hannah, "The LORD will judge the ends of the earth; he will give strength to his king and exalt the power of his anointed" (1 Sam 2:10). God still intended to raise up his king, whom he here called his "anointed." Then, later in the chapter a man of God announced, "I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build a sure house, and it shall go in and out before my anointed forever" (2:35, author's translation; cf. 2:30).⁴⁴ Now the anointed royal deliverer from Hannah's prediction is identified to also be a priest (cf. Zech 6:13). At this point we expect that this royal priest will also be God's son, and this is exactly what we are told when God asserts that the throne of David will never end: "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Sam 7:14, 16). In Hebrews 1:5, the author explicitly identifies God's royal son from this text to be Jesus.

In alignment with these promises, Psalm 110 reasserts that the royal, anointed, divine Son of Psalm 2 is also YHWH's priest. God declares to him, "Rule in the midst of your enemies" (Ps 110:2), and then he announces, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (110:4). This is the one whom Psalm 72 declares will "have dominion from sea to sea" (72:8; cf. Zech 9:9–10), whose name will "endure forever," and through whom the peoples of the nations will be blessed (Ps 72:17; cf. 2:8). Building off Isaiah's vision of the suffering royal servant, Zechariah 3:8–9 treats the high-priest Joshua as a type for the royal priest to come through whom God "will remove the iniquity of the land in a single day." Then, in fulfillment of the hopes of 1 Samuel 2:35, the prophet also envisioned that this same messianic figure would bear "royal honor," be a "priest," and "sit and rule" on God's throne, with "the counsel of peace" being between them (Zech 6:13). He would "build the [new] temple of the LORD" (6:13), and he would be aided by "those who are far off" (6:15). Thus, "many nations will join themselves to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people" (2:11).

Significantly, other prophets announced that the restored, new covenant people of God would effectively serve as YHWH's royal priest-sons, imaging YHWH's greatness to the world. For example, through Isaiah God declared,

44. For this reading, see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 76. For an alternative possible reading, see Karl Deenick, "Priest and King or Priest-King in 1 Samuel 2:35," *Westminster Theological Journal* 73, no. 2 (2011): 325–39.

And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. (Isa 56:6–7).

And then again, “And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the LORD ... to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their grain offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD” (66:20–21; cf. 61:5–7). Then, later, Zephaniah predicted, “For at that time I will change the speech of the peoples to a pure speech, that all of them may call upon the name of the LORD and serve him with one accord. From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering” (Zeph 3:9–10). In each of these passages, an international community engages in priestly service before the Lord.

Jesus the royal priest and all in him as royal priest-sons and daughters forever

The angel Gabriel announced to Mary regarding Jesus, “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32–33). The wise men sought the “king of the Jews” (Matt 2:2) and found Jesus (2:11), who later affirmed this as his identity (27:11). Through his ministry he proclaimed the nearness and good news of God’s kingdom (4:17, 23; Mark 1:14–15), and the crowds recognized him to be the royal deliverer that the OT promised (Matt 21:5). He establishes and upholds the throne of David with justice and with righteousness (Isa 9:7). He lived in perfect accord with the Deuteronomic ideal for kingship (Deut 17:14–20) both in his teaching and actions (John 8:28; 15:10), and he brought justice to the broken and outcast (Matt 12:18–21; Luke 4:18–19).

Along with being the king, he is the high priest in the line of Melchizedek who mediates the new covenant (Heb 9:15; 12:24; 1 Tim 2:5), leading us into the very presence of the Lord (Heb 5:6, 10; 6:20; 10:19–22). Christ “had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17). He offered himself as a sacrifice in order to cleanse us from our sins and to secure us eternal salvation (Eph 5:2; Heb 9:11–12, 26; 10:12; 1 John 1:7). Now we can “with confidence draw near the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16).

Jesus is “Israel,” YHWH’s servant-person (Isa 49:3), who God sets apart to save some from both Israel the people and other nations (49:6). Significantly, we who are in Christ have become royal priest-sons and daughters of the living God, empowered to offer up sacrifices of praise (Rom 12:1; Heb 13:15–16; 1 Pet 2:5). As “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession,” we now “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). The task of being a royal priesthood and a holy nation is no longer just a hope, for it is already being fulfilled in the church. The individual royal priest-son Christ has gone before us, doing what Adam and the nation of Israel were called to do. He represents us, and through him we are enabled to fulfill the calling of magnifying God’s greatness among the nations.

Revelation 5 provides an apt stopping point for this biblical-theological survey. There, before the one called “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” (Rev 5:5), and “the Lamb” (5:8), this song is sung: “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (5:9–10). Old covenant Israel’s calling is being fully realized through the new covenant church.

11. Systematic Theology in Exodus 19:4–6⁴⁵

The second step in theology is to discern how our passage theologically coheres with the whole Bible by assessing key doctrines especially in relation to the gospel. Systematic theology is the study of Bible doctrine designed to help us shape a proper worldview, and it traditionally divides into at least ten categories: (1) *theology proper* (God), (2) *bibliology* (Scripture), (3) *angelology* (angels and demons), (4) *anthropology* (humanity), (5) *hamartiology* (sin), (6) *Christology* (Christ), (7) *soteriology* (salvation), (8) *pneumatology* (the Holy Spirit), (9) *ecclesiology* (the church), (10) *eschatology* (the end times or last things).

We have already seen how a lot of later Scriptures build on Exodus 19:4–6 and how this passage supplies a helpful synthesis of the revealed purpose of the old covenant. Now I want to consider how this passage contributes to our understanding of soteriology and missiology, the latter of which is a subset of ecclesiology.

45. For more on systematic theology, see Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 394–411; Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

Soteriology

None can miss that Exodus 19:4 addresses the most foundational redemptive act of the old covenant period. Advocates of the new perspective on Paul have ever been quick to note that YHWH saved Israel *before* he ever gave them the law at Sinai. Thus, the law was never about getting into relationship; it was about staying in. God ransomed before he required; he freed before he called them to follow. The indicative of redemption-accomplished precedes the imperative of redemption-enjoyed, and this is the same pattern in the new covenant. God converts and then calls us to follow. From the new covenant perspective, justification gives rise to sanctification. Faith is the root; obedience is the fruit. To put works first makes us legalists that trust in our own merits rather than in the merits of Christ. There is, therefore, a similar *structure of grace* in both the old and new covenants: gracious redemption precedes gracious law giving. Christ's saving work secures pardon and purchases power so that we can respond with his help in obedience.

While this is true, we must not miss what most advocates of the new perspective on Paul seem to miss. Namely, while the structure of grace between the old and new covenants may be the same, the nature *of grace* is entirely different. Old covenant grace was external; new covenant grace is internal. In the old covenant, YHWH delivers Israel from physical slavery in Egypt, but for the majority their bondage to sin remained. As Moses asserted forty years after the exodus: "Know, therefore, that the LORD your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stubborn people. Remember and do not forget how you provoked the LORD your God to wrath in the wilderness. From the day you came out of the land of Egypt until you came to this place, you have been rebellious against the LORD" (Deut 9:6–7). The rest of Deuteronomy and redemptive history note how this rebellion would persist until the prophet greater than Moses would arise and establish a new covenant based on better promises and God-wrought inward transformation. There was *nothing* in the old covenant itself that secured eternal life for all its members.

Along with saving only externally, YHWH revealed his will at Sinai in a way that did not reach the hearts of the majority. They saw but didn't really see; they heard but didn't really hear. As Moses would later assert, "You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders. But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear" (Deut 29:2–4[1–3]). Rather than having God's law written on their hearts, Jeremiah tells us that "the sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart" (Jer 17:1).

In contrast, whereas most of those in the old covenant were rebels, all in the new covenant would be remnant. With circumcised hearts, those in the transformed

community would, in Moses's words, "turn and listen unto the voice of the LORD and do all his commandments that I am commanding you today" (Deut 30:8, author's translation). The prophet also asserted that in that day, "the word will be very near you; it will be in your mouth and in your heart so that you can do it" (30:14, author's translation).⁴⁶ Paul says in Romans 10:8 that this is fulfilled in Christ. Through Jeremiah YHWH also predicted "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.... And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer 31:33–34).

Even though external salvation preceded external law-giving in the old covenant, because Israel's sin remained undealt with, all their outward alignment with the law was unacceptable to God and equivalent to seeking salvation by works. Because the nation lost sight of their inability and need for repentance and a substitute, their outward pursuits of righteousness did not allow them to attain the life that the law promised. "What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone" (Rom 9:30–32).⁴⁷

In Exodus 19:4–6 we read that the revealed purpose of the old covenant was that the nation would, through a surrendered pursuit of God and his ways, stand as a royal priesthood and a holy nation amidst the world. But the revealed purposes of God for the old covenant was not his sovereign purposes. "Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom 5:20). Paul says that the old covenant bore "a ministry of condemnation"; only the new covenant would bear "a ministry of righteousness" (2 Cor 3:9). In the old covenant, God commanded but did not enable. He changed Israel's outward status but did not alter their souls. He disclosed to them his law but did not give them the desire to keep it. And he did so in order to highlight the beauty and centrality of Christ. "What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared

46. For more on reading Deuteronomy 30:11–14 as *future*, see Steven R. Coxhead, "Deuteronomy 30:11–14 as a Prophecy of the New Covenant in Christ," *Westminster Theological Journal* 68 (2006): 305–20; Colin James Smothers, "In Your Mouth and in Your Heart: A Study of Deuteronomy 30:12–14 in Paul's Letter to the Romans in Canonical Context" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2018).

47. For more on this understanding, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "From Condemnation to Righteousness: A Christian Reading of Deuteronomy," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 18, no. 3 (2014): 87–118; Jason S. DeRouchie, "The Use of Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12: A Redemptive-Historical Reassessment," *Themelios* 45, no. 2 (2020): 240–59.

beforehand for glory—even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?” (Rom 9:22–24).

To Israel God gave the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, the promises, the patriarchs, and the Messiah (9:4–5). But if, after receiving so much, the nation was unable to live for God, how much more would the rest of humanity stand culpable before God and in need of a savior, having never received the law.

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. (3:19–22)

When we read that salvation grounded Israel’s calling, we must not automatically equate it with the salvation we enjoy today. The first exodus was an external deliverance that typified the second exodus, internalized salvation that Christ accomplished. The first exodus was but a picture, a predictive pointer, to the more ultimate deliverance that Jesus secures on behalf of his elect. Some who experienced the first exodus were truly hoping in this by faith, whereas the majority who left Egypt neither knew God’s pleasure (1 Cor 10:5) nor were allowed to enter his rest (Heb 3:18–19).

Missiology—a subset of Ecclesiology

Back in §6, I summarized the main idea of Exodus 19:4–6: “In response to God’s gracious redemption, the Lord calls his people to a God-exalting task of mediating and displaying his greatness and worth to the world through radical God-centered living.” Israel’s God-honoring calling is the central thrust of the passage. We must ask, however, how this task relates to the church’s great commission that Jesus gave after his resurrection (Matt 28:18–20). Did old covenant Israel bear a mission to cross-culturally evangelize the lost like Christians do in the new covenant?

There is very little potential support from the OT that within the old covenant period Israel bore a normative responsibility to be a “go and tell” people, seeking the conversion of the nations. Certainly Exodus 12 clarified how a resident alien or “sojourner” (גֵּר) could become like a native-born Israelite and thus be freed to partake in the nation’s various holy days (Exod 12:43–49). This “mixed multitude” (12:38), however, was still counted as the single nation of Israel. Similarly, within the framework of Israel’s history, people like Rahab the Canaanite, Ruth the Moabite, and Uriah the Hittite could, by their own choosing, become Israelites. Yet in doing so, Abraham was still considered the father of a single nation. The shift to his being “the father of a multitude of nations” (Gen 17:4–5) would only come when the single, male

deliverer would rise, overcoming enemy powers and reversing the Adamic curse: “And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (22:17b–18; cf. 3:15; 24:60). It was in Jesus’s day alone “that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” (Luke 25:47; cf. Acts 3:25–26; Gal 3:8, 14, 16, 29).

Not even in the book of Jonah do we find evidence of a normative mandate for global missions in the old covenant period. Jonah’s prophetic role was first not to covert the Ninevites but to “call out against” them, declaring to them that they had sinned against YHWH and warning them of punishment (Jon 1:2). Many prophets wrote oracles against the nations (e.g., Isa 13–23; Jer 46–51; Ezek 25–32; Obadiah; Zeph 2:5–3:7), but we know of very few prophets beyond Jonah who actually engaged foreign powers directly (e.g., 2 Kgs 8:7–15; Jer 27:3; 51:61–64; cf. Zeph 2:5, 12). YHWH would later declare through Jeremiah, “If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it” (Jer 18:7–8). Jonah says that the reason he fled to Tarshish was because “I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster” (Jon 4:2). The prophet of YHWH did not like the character of YHWH. Certainly the book of Jonah reminds the reader that Israel’s long-range mission through its Messiah would be to see the curse against all the families of the earth overcome by divine blessing (Gen 22:18; cf. 12:3 with 10:39, where the ESV’s “clans” is the same word for “families”). However, the book focuses not on the need to evangelize our neighbors but on the proper disposition that God’s people were to maintain toward YHWH and his world. Jonah delighted in God’s mercy so long as he was its recipient, but he did not celebrate seeing this mercy extended to those outside Israel.

YHWH is both right and committed to bestow mercy on whomever he wills, and he calls his people to celebrate that he is this kind of God. He also promised that his anointed king would proclaim his glories to the nations. As Paul notes, citing Psalm 18:49, “Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order ... that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, ‘Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name’” (Rom 15:8–9). Nevertheless, within the old covenant itself, I am not aware of texts that called Israel to urge the nations to respond to the news of global salvation.

Instead, the Israelites were to live in their land as mediators of God’s tabernacling greatness. By encountering his presence at the temple/tabernacle (Exod 33:16), reverent fear would be generated that would lead to holiness (20:20). And by heeding his voice, keeping his covenant, and existing as his treasured possession, Israel would serve as a God-exalting witness in the midst of the world (19:5–6). Their righteous lives would attract the nations to YHWH’s uniqueness, as those

outside would see their righteous deeds and be directed to YHWH's wonders. Thus Deuteronomy 4:6–8 asserted,

Keep and do [the statutes and rules], for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

There was expectation within the old covenant that foreigners from faraway lands would hear of YHWH's fame, come to the temple and pray toward to the God of heaven, and receive their requests "in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you" (1 Kgs 8:41–43). Evidence that this pattern actually happened is minimal, but we do see it when the Queen of Sheba journeys to Jerusalem and YHWH's temple because she "heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD" (1 Kgs 10:1).

What is important to see is that YHWH's call for Israel to be a God-honoring witness was *not* a direct call to evangelize their neighbors. Indeed, the gospel of the kingdom was still only a *future* hope and not a present reality in the days of the OT (see Rom 1:1–3). Isaiah 40–66 highlights the salvation-historical shift from a hope for good news to the intrusion of good news through the messianic servant. YHWH gives comfort to his despondent Jerusalem (Isa 40:1–2) through the news of the herald who proclaims, "Behold your God!" (40:9). Only in this future day, now realized in Christ, does the messenger "publish peace" and "salvation," declaring the "good news" that "your God reigns" (52:7). And the one leading the global testimony is the royal deliverer himself, who declares, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God" (61:1–2; cf. 11:2–5; Luke 4:18–19).

Within the old covenant, YHWH called his servant-people Israel to live in a way that pointed to the Lord's greatness in the midst of the world. By God-dependent obedience they would serve as a royal priesthood and a holy nation (Exod 19:5–6), attracting other nations to "come and see" the display of YHWH's glory in and through his people. But the old covenant law could only clarify what Israel *ought* to do; it could not empower them to do it (Rom 8:3; Gal 3:21). As such, Israel failed miserably at representing YHWH's worth, and this sin ultimately resulted in their misrepresenting God's name among the nations (Ezek 16:20). But stage one of the Abrahamic covenant (i.e., the Mosaic covenant) was never portrayed as the end of God's kingdom-building purposes. Indeed, YHWH predicted that an obedient son

would rise who would “be a blessing” perfectly, and through this open the door for “all the families of the ground” to be blessed (Gen 12:2–3; cf. 22:17b–18).

The old covenant remnant longed for the day when God’s individual servant—the royal representative king—would succeed through his priestly obedience unto death (Isa 52:13–53:12; 55:3). Not only this, he would go beyond what Israel themselves were ever called to but to which they and the world hoped—through him the nations would enjoy God’s blessing (cf. Ps 72:17). The servant’s atoning work would open the door for the salvation of all who believe from both Jews and Gentiles, and he would establish a new covenant that would include light, law, and justice for the nations (Isa 42:1, 6; 49:6, 8; 51:4–5). The individual servant’s work would birth multiple servants who would carry out his redemptive purposes. Ultimately, fulfilling the promise of Isaiah 49:6, the individual royal servant “[Christ] would proclaim light” and salvation to both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 26:23) *through* his commissioned servants (13:47), as the gospel message of the beautiful one (Isa 42:7) would become the gospel message of the beautiful ones (Rom 10:15).

In summary, the nation of Israel’s old covenant call to be a royal priesthood addressed only the immediate witness of their lives and not an intentional outward evangelistic proclamation of the gospel. The old covenant community was simply to urge others to “come and see” by the testimony of their surrendered lives, as they enjoyed the sustained presence of God at the temple.

Christ’s coming marks a salvation-historical shift from a “come and see” to a “come and see *and* go and tell” community.⁴⁸ As for the “come and see” element, the church is now empowered to stand as a royal priesthood and a holy nation, faithfully (though imperfectly) proclaiming “the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). With God’s help, we heed the call, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16; cf. 1 Pet 2:11–12). Furthermore, enjoying Christ’s tabernacling presence (John 1:14; cf. 2:21) by his Spirit (Acts 1:8), the church as God’s temple (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16) has now expanded to fill the whole earth (Acts 13:47; Col 1:23), and much of this is happening because we can now reach out and proclaim the good news that the reigning God eternally saves and satisfies believing sinners by Christ Jesus’s life, death and resurrection. This *gospel* is of first importance (1 Cor 15:3–5), and its proclamation marks the “go and tell” element that is new to the new covenant. The divine presence of the heavenly Jerusalem (Gal 4:26; Heb 12:22) is more accessible to the world than ever before, for it is not localized in a building but embodied in the lives of a new covenant community that has spread out to every corner of the globe (Isa 2:1–4; Jer 3:16–18). As the gospel

48. For more on this distinction, see especially Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Israel, the People of God, and the Nations,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 45 (2002): 35–57; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); Kevin Paul Oberlin, “The Ministry of Israel to the Nations: A Biblical Theology of Missions in the Era of the Old Testament Canon” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2006).

advances, the church grows, with peoples from every tribe and language and people and nation being gathered into the one people of God, who together have become “a kingdom and priests to our God” and who together “shall reign on the earth” (Rev 5:9–10; cf. 22:5). Because Christ now enjoys all authority in heaven and on earth, we are commissioned to make new covenant disciples not only within our own families and neighborhoods but also across cultures among the nations. Others will not know unless they are told (Rom 10:13–15), so we live and we evangelize to see realized the obedience that grows from faith for the sake of Christ’s name among the nations (1:5).

E. Application **“Why does the passage matter?”**

12. Practical Theology in Exodus 19:4–6⁴⁹

The last step in interpreting the OT is to apply the text to ourselves, the church, and the world while stressing the centrality of Christ and the hope of the gospel. It is at this step that we most clearly identify that the seers, sovereigns, sages, and song writers of old “were serving not themselves but you” (1 Pet 1:12) and that “whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction” (Rom 15:4). It is here we recognize that the OT is indeed Christian Scripture.

In his book *Old Testament Exegesis*, Douglas Stuart offers some helpful guidelines for applying biblical texts.⁵⁰ I am going to summarize and somewhat adapt them here, using Exodus 19:4–6 to illustrate the process. I will cite my translation of the text to begin, but you may want to have your Bible open to help you track the discussion.

Establish the original revealed application.

Identify the audience of the application.

Fig. 17. DeRouchie’s Translation of Exodus 19:4–6

4 You [mp] have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I lifted you [mp] on eagles’ wings and brought you [mp] to myself. 5 And now, if you [mp] will indeed listen unto my voice and keep my covenant and be to me a treasured possession from all the peoples, for all the earth is mine, 6 then you [mp] will be to me a royal priesthood and a holy nation.

*mp = masculine plural

The second masculine plural “you” throughout Exodus 19:4–6 suggests that the target is every individual within the entire community. It was the nation as a whole

49. For more on practical theology, see Daniel M. Doriani, *Putting the Truth to Work: The Theory and Practice of Biblical Application* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001); Thomas R. Schreiner, *40 Questions about Biblical Law*, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010); Dennis E. Johnson, *Walking with Jesus through His Word: Discovering Christ in All the Scriptures* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015); DeRouchie, *How to Understand*, 415–95; DeRouchie, Martin, Naselli, Chapters 3, 21, 25, 37 in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*.

50. Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 4th ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 25–29.

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that was considered God’s “son” (Exod 4:22–23), and it was the nation as a whole that he redeemed. The plural requires individuals to act, but it also highlights that the task will only be accomplished in the context of corporate solidarity.

List the external life issues of application.

In Exodus 19:4–6, we see the personal experience of communal deliverance in 19:4, the daily pursuit of God in community in 19:5, a political context where Israel is distinct from surrounding nations in 19:5, and a sense of life’s purpose in 19:6. The church too has experienced a communal deliverance, but ours is from bondage to sin and salvation from God’s wrath. Unlike Israel, the church has no geo-political affiliation; the church is not a theocracy but is rather omni-ethnic, trans-national people united in Christ with a similar call to daily pursue God in community for the display of his glory.

Furthermore, Exodus 19:4–6 is calling for daily witness of YHWH’s greatness by every member of the community. This text covers the foundation, makeup, and ultimate goal of Israel’s relationship with God. Sadly, for most, Israel’s redemption was only external and their law keeping only skin deep, so the people never had the impact on the nations that God promised would come through whole-life surrender. Nevertheless, a lasting point of the texts is that the Lord’s gracious redemption requires living exclusively for him in every area, whether in our social engagements, our work, our personal and corporate worship, our family life, or our finances. The freedom we experience must lead to radical following, which will overflow in lives testifying to God’s majesty.

Clarify the nature of the application.

On the surface, Exodus 19:4–6 recalls God’s gracious past redemption and informs Israel of their future responsibility and calling. Implicitly, the text says more, for it calls the people to godward allegiance for the sake of mediating and displaying God’s glory to the nations. That Israel recognizes the necessity for response is clear from their elders’ reply to Moses: “All that the LORD has spoken we will *do*” (19:8). Nevertheless, the rest of the narrative also reveals that Israel’s commitment meant little, as their stubborn hearts resulted in lack of faith and rebellion (Deut 9:6–7; 29:4[3]).

Exodus 19:4–6 also most explicitly addresses action and state of being, calling Israel to “hear” and “keep” and “be” (v. 5). Nevertheless, because these charges are couched as the means for seeing their God-exalting, world-influencing calling accomplished, faith in God’s promises is the generator for the nation’s obedience. Only to the level at which the people *desire* the promise of being a royal priesthood and a holy nation and *believe* the promise-maker can act will they be motivated to heed his voice, keep his covenant, and intentionally seek to live as his treasured possession.

Determine the time focus of the application.

We can see that Exodus 19:4–6 called Israel to make an immediate response. And for every future generation in the old covenant, God’s revelation would remain the same. He had set Israel apart to express his worth in the world. Through this single nation the world would be blessed, and Israel’s lives of surrender would parade God’s upright character until the time when the promised deliverer would overcome the world’s curse with blessing.

Fix the limits of the application.

Exodus 19:4–6 is perhaps the most foundational synthesis of the revealed purpose of the old covenant that we have in Scripture. It looks back to the Abrahamic covenant promises and anticipates directly God’s revelation of his person and word at Sinai. It expresses God’s revealed will for Israel, but it does not address the implications of failure.

Synthesis

In summary, when it comes to establishing the original revealed application of Exodus 19:4–6, we can say that the text supplies a synthesis of the old covenant by addressing the nation of Israel’s redemption and life-calling in relation to the world. It explicitly informs but also implicitly directs, calling for action and motivating this call by the promise of global impact. The words target the entire community and address a surrender to YHWH that impacts every facet of life in every present and future generation.

Determine the theological significance of the passage.⁵¹

Clarify what the passage tells us about God and his ways.

Exodus 19:4–6 portrays YHWH as one who delivers in order to create people who can in turn display his excellencies. With respect to his character and actions, he is an able warrior God who redeemed Israel from the grip of an imperial power (v. 4). He is also a God who commands, establishes covenants, and treasures some more than others (v. 5). Finally, he is a God who motivates through promises and who desires his people to mediate and display his greatness to the world (v. 6). All of these are features from which solid application could be made, for his work in the new covenant is very analogous.

51. Douglas Stuart, whose general process of application I am following here, does not explicitly stress the need to recall what we have learned about the theological significance of the passage when making application. However, I believe that considering both what the passage tells us about God and his ways and how Christ’s fulfillment of the Old Testament impacts our passage are both vital for accurately establishing the lasting significance of an OT text.

As for his desires, he intends that his people hear his voice, heed his covenant, and be his treasured possession (v. 5). All these activities will supply the means for them serving as a royal priesthood and a holy nation (v. 6).

*Assess how Christ's fulfillment of the OT impacts our application of this passage.*⁵²

Christ's work fulfills Exodus 19:4–6 in at least three ways: First, the initial exodus typologically anticipated a greater, more universal second exodus that Jesus himself embodies. In Exodus 19:4, YHWH highlights his defeat of Egypt and his deliverance of Israel from the bonds of slavery. Moving ahead in redemptive history, Christ's death and resurrection initiates for all believers the antitypical exodus, the ultimate redemption to which Israel's liberation from Egypt's clutches only pointed. The OT prophets foresaw this second exodus (e.g., Isa 11:16–12:6; Jer 16:14–15; 23:7–8; Hos 11:10–11), which Jesus accomplished in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31).⁵³

Second, Christ fulfilled the charge of this text as the perfect royal priest, bringing us to God and empowering us to serve him. Israel's fleshly, rebellious hearts were hostile to God, making it impossible for them to submit to God's law or to please him (Deut 29:4[3]; Rom 8:7–8; 11:7–8). They, therefore, never operated as the royal priesthood and the holy nation for which Exodus 19:4–6 called. But where God's corporate "son" failed, his individual Son Jesus, as Israel's royal and priestly representative, succeeded. Christ's perfect life embodied the ideals of righteousness the law requires (Rom 5:18–19; 8:4), and by this he was able to serve as the perfect royal priest (Heb 4:15), satisfying the Lord's wrath against sinners through his substitutionary death and proving through his resurrection that every believer incorporated into him can enjoy right standing with God. The Lord imputes our sins to Christ and Christ's righteousness to us, thus securing both our pardon (Rom 5:18–19; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9) and amazing promises (2 Cor 1:20), which together become power for our salvation—past (Eph 2:8), present (1 Cor 1:18), and future (Rom 5:9). Thus by Christ fulfilling the law, we as the new covenant community of

52. For a more developed discussion of how Christ fulfills the Mosaic law, see "The Christian and Old Testament Law," in chapter 12 of *How to Understand*, 427–59; Jason S. DeRouchie, "What Is a Biblical Theology of the Law?" in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, by Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 243–54. For a more developed discussion of how Christ fulfills OT promises, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "Is Every Promise 'Yes'? Old Testament Promises and the Christian," *Themelios* 42 (2017): 16–45; Jason S. DeRouchie, "How Should a Christian Relate to Old Testament Promises?" in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, 355–64.

53. See Rikki E. Watts, "Exodus," *NDBT*, 478–87; Stephen G. Dempster, "Exodus and Biblical Theology: On Moving into the Neighborhood with a New Name," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 3 (2008): 4–23; Rikki E. Watts, "Exodus Imagery," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, 205–14; Jason S. DeRouchie, "How Does Isaiah 12:2 Use Exodus 15:2?," in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, by Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 301–10.

faith are not only charged but also empowered to fulfill the law of Christ (Rom 2:26, 29; 13:8–10; 1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2), which includes applying the OT laws in light of Christ's fulfillment (Matt 5:17–19).

Third, Christ represented the nation of Israel, succeeding where they failed and by this magnifying God (see esp. Isa 49:1–6). Jesus said, "Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father" (John 14:9). As the holy king-priest, Jesus perfectly represented Israel and reflected God's holiness. As Hebrews 1:3 says, "[God's Son] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature." And now, for those of us in him, "we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Cor 3:18). That is, in Christ God has, as Peter asserts, made us "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that [we] may proclaim the excellencies of him who called [us] out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet 2:9).

Summarize the lasting significance of the passage for today.

The simplest synthesis of what Exodus 19:4–6 calls for through Jesus is that the church is to live as a royal priesthood and holy people, proclaiming through our life-witness the worth and majesty of God (1 Pet 2:9). In §6, I summarized the main idea of Exodus 19:4–6 as this: "In response to God's gracious redemption, the Lord calls his people to a God-exalting task of mediating and displaying his greatness and worth to the world through radical God-centered living." Our unchanging Lord is consistent in what he requires, in what he intends, and in the way he uses promises to motivate obedience. Like the nation of Israel, the church is called to follow the instruction of our chief, new covenant mediator: "Make disciples of all nations, ... teaching them to obey all that I have commanded" (Matt 28:20). Also, God uses promises to motivate holiness and to keep us from evil: "He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire" (2 Pet 1:4). Finally, God's purpose ever remains that others "may see [our] good works and give glory to [our] Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:16; cf. 1 Pet 2:11–12).

Conclusion

By attempting to understand and apply Exodus 19:4–6, I have sought in this case study to illustrate for the student of Scripture the journey from exegesis to theology. In this passage, in response to God's gracious redemption, the Lord calls his people to a God-exalting task of mediating and displaying his greatness and worth to the world through radical God-centered living. And what YHWH called Israel to in the old covenant is now being realized through Christ's new covenant church: "You are

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a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). My book *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament* develops each of the twelve steps that together contribute to a biblically faithful, Christ-treasuring interpretation of Jesus’s Bible—the Old Testament. May the Lord increasingly enable Christians from all the nations to magnify his supremacy and worth through lives of surrender and devotion, all for the glory of Christ.

