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A Study on the Influence of Philosophical Presuppositions Relating to the Notion of the God-human Relation Upon the Interpretation of Exodus

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ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A STUDY ON THE INFLUENCE OF PHILOSOPHICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS
RELATING TO THE NOTION OF THE GOD-HUMAN RELATION UPON
THE INTERPRETATION OF EXODUS

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Abstract

No exegesis or act of interpretation is presuppositionless. Accordingly, this study addresses the question of the influence of philosophical presuppositions upon the interpretation of the God-human relation in Exodus. Chapter 1 provides a brief introduction to why such analysis is necessary. The chapter explores the neglected issue of presuppositions in exegesis and why Exodus is an appropriate platform upon which to evaluate them. This introductory chapter also presents the purpose and methodological approach of this study, namely, the descriptive analysis of the text. Chapter 2 addresses the philosophical issues behind the conception of the God-human relation, namely the notion of ontology (God), the notion of epistemology (human), and the notion of history

(relationship). Chapter 3 identifies these philosophical conceptions in the foundation of two interpretative traditions: the historical-grammatical and historical-critical methods. Chapter 4 traces the influence of these presuppositions within the interpretation of Exodus in general, and in the context of the notion of the God-human relation in particular. The dissertation concludes by summarizing the findings and conclusions and exploring the academic and existential implications of the study.

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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PRESUPPOSITIONS RELATING TO THE NOTION
OF THE GOD-HUMAN RELATION UPON
THE INTERPRETATION OF EXODUS

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Tiago Arrais

2015

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PRESUPPOSITIONS RELATING TO THE NOTION
OF THE GOD-HUMAN RELATION UPON
THE INTERPRETATION OF EXODUS

A thesis
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of the requirements for the degree
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Tiago Arrais

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Date approved

To the God of the Exodus.

To my wife, Paula, and the son of my pain and virtue, Benjamin.

To my parents, Jonas and Raquel.

אִם־אֵין פְּנֵיהֶם הַלְכִים אֶל־תַּעֲלֹגוּ מִנָּה
Exodus 33:15

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“My charming reader, in this [study] you will find something that you perhaps should not know, something else from which you will presumably benefit by coming to know it. Read, then, the something in such a way that, having read it, you may be as one who has not read it; read the something else in such a way that, having read it, you may be as one who has not forgotten what has been read.”

Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, pp. 14-15

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Question¹

This study attempts to trace the influence of macro-hermeneutical² or philosophical presuppositions³ relating to the God-human relation⁴—found within

¹ This section introduces the reader to the issues that lead up to the research question this study will address. It provides a taste of what is to come throughout this study. At this stage, the reader is invited to exercise the virtue of patience.

² Fernando L. Canale, borrowing the language of Hans Hüng, emphasizes the significance and influence of philosophical presuppositions upon biblical interpretation and systematic theology in terms of “macro-hermeneutics.” Canale writes: “Macro hermeneutics is related to the study and clarification of philosophical issues directly or indirectly related to the criticism and formulation of concrete heuristic principles of interpretation. Meso hermeneutics deals with the interpretation of theological issues and, therefore, belongs properly to the area of systematic theology. Micro hermeneutics approaches the interpretation of texts and, consequently, proceeds within the realm of biblical exegesis.” In Fernando L. Canale, “Evangelical Theology and Open Theism: Toward a Biblical Understanding of the Macro Hermeneutical Principles of Theology,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 12, no. 2 (Autumn 2001): 21. This study is grounded on the macro-hermeneutical level. It aims to uncover, critique, and clarify the principles that function as presuppositions in the macro-hermeneutical framework of biblical scholars and theologians. A more familiar way of explaining these terms may be to understand macro-hermeneutical questions as philosophical questions, meso-hermeneutical questions as doctrinal/theological questions, and micro-hermeneutical questions as exegetical questions.

³ *Presuppositions* in this study is a term that will be used interchangeably with the terms *assumptions*, *conceptions*, *macro-hermeneutical principles*, *pre-understandings*, and

the presuppositional frameworks⁵ of biblical scholars and interpretative methods—

interpreted notions. As the expression already suggests, presuppositions are “previous suppositions.” The term *presupposition* may include a wide variety of intended (or interpreted notions) and unintended (feelings, experiences, memories) elements. Even so, the use of the term *presupposition* in this study will carry the connotation of “interpreted” or intended philosophical conceptions that include notions of God, humans, history, etc.

⁴ The God-human relationship in this study refers to how God relates to humanity through presence, revelation, speech, theophany; as for the human aspect, the conditions that allow humans to understand and interpret such dynamic in the context and flow of history. Thus the macro-hermeneutical (philosophical) notion of the God-human relationship carries basic philosophical categories to be interpreted, namely ontology (questions of Being, God, and the conditions of God’s actions), epistemology (questions of how humans can know and interpret reality), and history (questions concerning the locus or context where the interaction between God and humans takes place). This study will trace how extrabiblical conceptions of the God-human relation within the presuppositional frameworks of scholars and methods shape the interpretation of the God-human relation the text presents in itself.

⁵ By *presuppositional framework*, I mean the categories in the mind of an interpreter that carry intended and unintended conceptions. These categories include conceptions of God, humans, the world, history, etc. The reader could think of this in the following way: human beings carry, among many other things, “philosophical buckets” in their minds. These “buckets” relate to the general way in which humanity perceives broad philosophical notions such as the understanding of God (as a reality or non-reality), the world, humans, history, etc. These are basic, general notions, present within the worldview or philosophical framework of any human being. Biblical interpreters normally have an intentional interpretation of these categories even before biblical interpretation takes place. So, when interpretation begins, the categories or “buckets” of God, humans, the world, and history within the human mind are already filled with pre-established notions derived from different sources (philosophy, natural philosophy, science, tradition, the Bible, etc.). These notions are hypothetical in nature, that is, open to the choice of the individual interpreter. Perhaps a better term to describe this presuppositional framework would be *worldview*, or *historical point of view of the interpreter*. Even so, it is my hope that the reader becomes familiar with the expression *presuppositional framework*. Furthermore, the reader must be aware that presuppositional frameworks carry more than “interpreted” notions that fill the “philosophical buckets” of the mind. Presuppositional frameworks also carry personal experiences, feelings, memories, etc.: that is, elements that are beyond the awareness of the interpreter and might still be influential in interpretation. These unintended conceptions fall beyond the scope

upon the interpretation of Exodus. The notion of how God relates to humans may be the most basic macro-hermeneutical (philosophical) conception in the presuppositional frameworks of biblical scholars.⁶ This study will attempt to show how an extrabiblical⁷ interpretation of God's relationship to humans can determine the parameters of biblical interpretation in general, and the interpretation of Exodus in particular.

This introductory section raises two preliminary questions to demonstrate the value and necessity of this study, as well as the one question it will directly address.⁸ First, is an analysis of the presuppositions of biblical scholars and their effects upon biblical interpretation necessary? Second, is the book of Exodus the best text to

of this study, since the focus will be on the notions that are interpreted before biblical interpretation takes place. In sum, any interpreter has a presuppositional framework that carries intended and unintended presuppositions. This study will focus on the intended interpretation of how God relates to humanity that functions as a presupposition in the process of biblical interpretation.

⁶ The thesis of this study is that the broadest conceptions and assumptions that influence biblical interpretation follow the God-human relationship pattern. Certainly there are other assumptions that influence biblical interpretation, but I chose the God-human relationship framework because of its scope. Many assumptions not listed in this framework can still be traced back to these basic categories.

⁷ By *extrabiblical* I mean that the scholarly understanding of the God-human relation is not always based on conceptual pointers emerging from the biblical text. The first chapter will clarify these issues and how they are generally interpreted before the interpretation of the text begins.

⁸ Although there are many questions in this introductory section, they may not all find proper answers in this study. Sometimes the best answer to a question is a better question. To answer is to conclude; to answer with a question is to move forward, opening new paths of study. These two preliminary questions prepare the reader to understand the research question, in the hope that by the end of this study the reader finds not an answer, but an even better question.

engage, compare, and contrast the interpreted notion of how God relates to humans within the presuppositional framework of biblical scholars and methods? To the first question I now turn.

The Question of Presuppositions

Biblical exegetes and theologians have long recognized that the clarification of presuppositions is not only necessary but imperative.⁹ Gerhard Maier addresses the interpretative imperative of clarifying presuppositions: “It is precisely our presuppositions that the Bible wants to place in question, correct, and to some extent obliterate.”¹⁰ Yet in order for a possible “obliteration” of presuppositions to occur,

⁹ Virtually all contemporary books on hermeneutics deal at least briefly with the issue of presuppositions. Even so, a few examples of scholars who observe the influence of presuppositions upon biblical interpretation are in order: Rudolf Bultmann and Schubert M. Ogden, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 145–53; Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham, *Make the Old Testament Live: From Curriculum to Classroom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 72–73; Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 24; Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 407, 516–17; Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 16; Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 121–24; Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 13–16.

¹⁰ Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 25. One of the questions this study raises is: can the philosophical perspective of the authors of the biblical text shape in any way the philosophical presuppositions of the biblical interpreter? If so, how? It is important to, first, assess the assumptions brought into interpretation by biblical interpreters, and second, compare and contrast them to the perspective of the biblical authors concerning the same assumptions. This study focuses on the first step: assessing the philosophical assumptions that shape interpretation. Another example of this sensitivity toward the text and need to revise assumptions is found in Alister E. McGrath: “If the idea of revelation is taken seriously, however, we must be prepared

the interpreter must have a grasp of which presuppositions influence the interpretation of the text.¹¹

Scholars who see the need to allow the text to deconstruct the presuppositions within their presuppositional framework suggest that a conscious “bracketing out”¹² is necessary. For instance, Grant R. Osborne writes:

The problem is that our preunderstanding too easily becomes prejudice, a set of a prioris that place a grid over Scripture and make it conform to these preconceived conceptions. So we need to “bracket” these ideas to a degree and allow the text to deepen or at times challenge and even change those already established ideas.¹³

to revise, even to abandon, such prior ideas of God and to refashion them in the light of who and what Jesus of Nazareth is recognized to be.” See Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 175.

¹¹ The need for allowing the text to judge presuppositions has been recognized by several scholars. I strongly agree with Thiselton that “texts must translate us before we can translate them.” See Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 8. Furthermore, John Walton, commenting on the literary structure of Leviticus, writes: “Interpreters have found it difficult to identify a cohesive structure to the book. One possible explanation may be that we have been deterred by presuppositions.” See John H. Walton, “Equilibrium and the Sacred Compass: The Structure of Leviticus,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 11, no. 2 (2001): 293. The issue of presuppositions, although commonly recognized in biblical interpretation, is commonly set aside due to the philosophical nature of the discussion. In the study of Ancient Near Eastern (henceforth, ANE) texts, the natural tendency is to focus on the objective meaning of the text and its historical context. Yet, as Walton describes above, the issue of presuppositions cannot be ignored at the level of biblical interpretation, since they inevitably affect the interpretation of the text.

¹² The action of “bracketing out” presuppositions does not imply the possibility of arriving at the text with suspended presuppositions or biases, but it does imply that one is able to recognize and critique the presuppositions that influence one’s own interpretation of the biblical text. The value of such an approach is not in the naïve belief that presuppositions can be fully suspended, but in the interpreter’s awareness of that which influences his perspective of, and approach to, the biblical text.

¹³ Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 29.

Walter Brueggemann also speaks of “bracketing out” as he writes:

By using the word *history* I mean simply the concrete interactions among persons, communities, and states which partake of hurt and healing. Thus I mean to bracket out the issues evoked by modern understandings, e. g., the problematic of *Geschichte* and *Historie*.¹⁴

Yet the way scholars commonly “bracket out” assumptions lacks methodological clarity. Why are some assumptions bracketed out and not others? Failure to methodologically verify how intentional presuppositions are inserted or bracketed out in interpretation may lead to a lack of clarity between what the text says and what the presuppositions of the interpreter shape the text to say.¹⁵

Walter C. Kaiser observes that in the history of Old Testament theology, “the imposition of theological conceptuality and even theological categories derived from

¹⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Hope within History* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1987), 2.

¹⁵ Knowing the crucial role played by presuppositions within the interpreter’s presuppositional framework, for exegesis to be, to some extent, consistent methodologically, it cannot rely only on results. Brevard Childs writes, “Whether or not the exegesis is successful cannot be judged on its theory of interpretation, but on the actual interpretation itself.” Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), xiii. The question I would raise in return is: how and through which terms will the interpreter know that the “actual interpretation” is close to the meaning of the text? It seems to me that distancing methodological concerns from the actual praxis of exegesis does not solve the dilemma, but only strengthens it. Kevin J. Vanhoozer is right in seeing the interrelation between questions of God, Scripture, and hermeneutics in theological thinking and practice, and the need to treat them “as one problem.” See Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture, & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 9. This study only affirms the concern of treating these three questions as one.

systematic or philosophical theology became common.”¹⁶ These impositions, though sometimes elusive and unnoticed in scholarly writings, have become so common that no one is able to know “how or by which process”¹⁷ they are implemented, especially since they are established a priori.¹⁸

The postmodern context of biblical interpretation enhances the necessity of exposing and justifying the interpreted notions within one’s presuppositional framework. Dan R. Stiver writes: “In a time of transition in philosophy and in a time of flux in theology, being clear about one’s epistemological commitments and presuppositions continues to be desirable.”¹⁹

The present study is not only a response to this desire, but an expansion of it. Awareness of the interpretative biases present in biblical interpretation is important,

¹⁶ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 6. At least one initial example of this problem in Old Testament theology is in order. Samuel Terrien in *The Elusive Presence* uses anthropological and sociological insights to evaluate the biblical text. Inevitably, the outcome of his entire biblical theology is conditioned by the set of paradigms he chooses. Remarks such as “The theology of presence is the anthropology of communion” and “[The resurrection] does not evoke the thought of Jesus *redivivus*, a mortal brought back for a season of mortal existence, but it sings the *exaltatio* of authentic humanity” prove this to be true. See Samuel L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology*, Religious Perspectives 26 (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 462.

¹⁷ Kaiser, *Old Testament Theology*, 6.

¹⁸ *A priori* means an interpretative commitment established before interpretation itself. The challenge of this study is to trace the influence of these basic assumptions relating to the notion of the God-human relationship upon biblical interpretation.

¹⁹ Dan R. Stiver, “Theological Method,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 175.

and so is understanding their philosophical roots and their influence upon the interpretation of the biblical text. Moshe Greenberg writes:

A translation of and commentary on a biblical text should bridge the gap that separates the present-day reader—with his culture and tradition bound range of knowledge, assumptions, and conventions—from the ancient Israelite, who encountered the text with different knowledge, assumptions, and conventions conditioned by circumstances.²⁰

Concerning the book of Exodus itself, Brevard Childs understands that the “author does not share the same hermeneutical position of those who suggest that biblical exegesis is an objective, descriptive enterprise, controlled solely by scientific criticism.”²¹ This study is another attempt to help bridge the interpretative gap. And, as this study will attest, perhaps one of the most forgotten aspects of the interpretative gap is the relation of the philosophical assumptions within the presuppositional frameworks of interpreters to the philosophical assumptions of the authors and readers of the text themselves expressed in the text.

At least one introductory and representative example of how presuppositions affect the interpretation of the text can be found in the recent work of John W. Walton. Walton begins his treatise on the lost world of Genesis by affirming that his interpretation attempts to be “faithful to the context of the original audience and author, and one that preserves and enhances the theological vitality of the text.”²²

²⁰ Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 18.

²¹ Childs, *Book of Exodus*, xiii.

²² John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 7.

Yet macro-hermeneutical commitments established a priori lead Walton to write, later in the same volume, that “what science provides is the best explanation of the data at the time,”²³ and furthermore, that such a perspective is accepted within evangelical circles “by consensus, and often with few detractors.”²⁴ For Walton and others, science is the source and key to understanding the reality the biblical text is attempting to depict.²⁵ Consequently, the implicit philosophical conceptions of the biblical author within the biblical text are divested of their value by scientific philosophical presuppositions established a priori.

The starting point, then, for a proper interpretative approach that is sensitive to the issues above, is to identify the interpreted notions within the presuppositional frameworks of biblical interpreters and methods and to trace their influence upon the interpretation of the biblical text.

One question remains to clarify the background of this study: why choose the

²³ Ibid., 17.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ At least one simple implication of this position is that supernatural revelation, a common feature in the Hebrew Bible, is immediately dismissed by scientific methodology. Jack Bonsor writes: “Supernatural revelation is excluded a priori from scientific debate. The scientific method excludes revelation as data. This exclusion is intrinsic to the scientific method and, thereby, occurs prior to (a priori) any particular investigation.” See Jack Arthur Bonsor, *Athens and Jerusalem: The Role of Philosophy in Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 179. In other words, Walton’s reliance on scientific methodology in his depiction of Gen 1 eliminates, a priori, a basic feature of biblical theology—the possibility and reality of divine revelation. Can the biblical text challenge such an approach along with its conclusions? The challenge of this study is to allow the assumptions of the author/audience to shape the macro-hermeneutical or philosophical assumptions biblical interpreters impose upon the text without biblical or methodological justification.

book of Exodus to engage the assumptions within the presuppositional frameworks of biblical scholars? To this question I now turn.

The Question of Exodus

Langdon B. Gilkey understands that the clash between modern assumptions and the orthodox nature of the text itself—which includes supernatural activities and speeches—demands a threefold reinterpretation of the biblical narratives.²⁶ Gilkey describes this reinterpretation in the following way:

First, the divine activity called the “mighty deeds of God” is now restricted to one crucial event, the Exodus-covenant complex of occurrence. Whatever else God may not have done, we say, here he really acted in the history of the Hebrew people, and so here their faith was born and given its form. Second, the vast panoply of wonder and voice events that preceded the Exodus-covenant event, in effect the patriarchal narratives, are now taken to be Hebrew interpretations of their own historical past based on the faith gained at the Exodus. . . . Third, the biblical accounts of the post-Exodus life—for example, the proclamation and codification of the law, the conquest, and the prophetic movement—are understood as the covenant people’s interpretation through their Exodus faith of their continuing life and history.²⁷

Gilkey presents biblical interpreters with a sober reminder of the inherent paradoxes created by the intermix of modern assumptions and the biblical text, with the significance of the book of Exodus in the midst of the problem. According to Gilkey, the validity and significance of the Hebrew Bible hinge upon the reality depicted in the book of Exodus.²⁸ The way in which one understands the God-

²⁶ Langdon B. Gilkey, “Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language,” *Journal of Religion* 41, no. 3 (July 1961): 194–205.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 197.

²⁸ Even for Baruch Spinoza, the event at Sinai represents “the only instance of a real voice” recorded in the prophetic writings. See Baruch Spinoza, *Tractatus*

human relationship in the book of Exodus, to some extent, determines both the nature of the Hebrew Bible and how it should be interpreted. Because of this, Exodus seems like an appropriate and natural choice for this study.²⁹

Another question that might arise about the use of Exodus in this study relates to the possibility that the text lends itself to a possible evaluation of scholarly assumptions. In regards to this, some considerations are in order: (1) although the text is not explicitly laid out with the intent of providing a scientific or philosophical depiction of reality, and (2) reading the book of Exodus with the assumption that it is found in its final form,³⁰ the author of the book of Exodus has an implicit outlook on how God relates to humans in the context of history throughout the book. This philosophical outlook is in the background of the writing.³¹

Theologico-Politicus, trans. Samuel Shirley (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 61. Furthermore, he adds: “So it would be more in conformity with Scripture that God did really create a voice by which he revealed the Decalogue.” *Ibid.*, 62.

²⁹ There are other reasons for choosing the book of Exodus to engage the assumptions of biblical interpreters; among these is the idea of Exodus as a resource for methodological development. Some see that the “book of Exodus has been and continues to be a significant resource for the development of biblical methodologies in the Modern and Postmodern periods.” See Thomas B. Dozeman, *Methods for Exodus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 2.

³⁰ The question of authorship and unity will be properly dealt with in the subsequent chapters.

³¹ Recently, this new field of study—the uncovering of the philosophical outlook of the Hebrew Bible—has been developed with fruitful results. A few significant works that motivated the formulation of the present study are: Yoram Hazony, *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Jaco Gericke, *The Hebrew Bible and Philosophy of Religion* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012); Dru Johnson, *Biblical Knowing: A Scriptural Epistemology of Error* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013). Hazony, for example, also sees the problem of presuppositions influencing the interpretation of biblical texts and the only reason

In the first chapters of Exodus, this implicit perspective can be noticed in texts that express God's relation to humanity as well as humanity's ability to interact with and know God.³² Texts like Exod 1:21, "Because the midwives feared God, He established households for them,"³³ or Exod 2:25, "God saw the sons of Israel and God took notice of them," express the divine ability to see and react to human suffering within the flow of history. Texts like Exod 3:6, "Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God," attest to the possibility that humanity can hear and respond to God's revelation. In this sense, within the description of the narrative and its events, the biblical text gives some indications of how the author and readers at the time of its composition understood the dynamic of how God relates to humans.

In sum, the need for this study co-appears with: (1) the need for presuppositions to be understood and laid out in biblical interpretation; (2) the need for the interpretative gap between contemporary interpreter and author/audience to be bridged; and (3) the need for the biblical text to validate or critique assumptions

why theologians fail to assess this is because of "alien interpretative framework[s] that prevents us from seeing much of what is in these texts," and adds: "the Hebrew Scriptures can be read as works of philosophy, with an eye to discovering what they have to say as part of the broader discourse concerning the nature of the world and the just life of man." See Hazony, *Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, 3, 4. The present study is aimed at expanding this initiative to take the content of the Hebrew Scriptures seriously since its authors also develop in their writings a solid philosophical viewpoint, in the case of this study, of the manner in which God relates to humanity.

³² These are introductory examples given without any analysis, as they are, in the text. Later in this study I will provide an overview of how the book of Exodus expresses the dynamic of the God-human relationship.

³³All Bible quotations are taken from the New American Standard Version unless noted.

interpreters, including myself, bring into the process of interpretation. If a philosophical understanding of the God-human relation is founded on extrabiblical sources, this could create a problem in interpretation, especially if the text's conception of the God-human relation differs from the assumptions scholars and methods carry by default.

This study, then, addresses a problem hidden in one research question, a question that if ignored will create a multitude of interpretative problems to be resolved.

The Question

How do philosophical notions of the God-human relation within the presuppositional frameworks of biblical scholars and interpretative methods influence the interpretation of the God-human relation in the book of Exodus?³⁴

³⁴ Note that I will evaluate the assumptions of interpreters based on not the assumptions of the author/audience, but the assumptions within the text. This is because the only access I have to the author or audience is found in the written words of the text. Although archaeology provides many windows into the past, my task as a biblical scholar is to find the meaning of the text within the text. I side with John Sailhamer in the assumption that through “language, modern readers can understand the thoughts of biblical authors who lived thousands of years ago in a culture very different from our own” and the “goal is always to understand what the author has written.” See John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 68. In regard to archaeology, I also side with Sailhamer in his “supplemental” position, recognizing that our “knowledge of ancient history supplements what we know of the events from the biblical narratives.” *Ibid.*, 101. In this sense, the control of the meaning of the text is not outside the text (in archaeological findings), but within the text.

The Purpose

The present study has a threefold purpose: (1) to clarify presuppositions regarding the God-human relation and identify them within the presuppositional frameworks of biblical scholars and theologians; (2) to identify the presence of these same presuppositions within the most influential approaches to the book of Exodus,³⁵ that is, the historical-grammatical and historical-critical methods; (3) to trace how these presuppositions influence the interpretation of the textual depiction of how God relates to humanity within the book of Exodus.

The Approach to the Study

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of this dissertation, its methodological approach is varied. Below is a brief outline of the steps to be taken in order to reach the goals of this study.

³⁵ Some clarifications are in order concerning the methods to be analyzed. The third chapter of this study examines the philosophical underpinnings of the historical-grammatical and historical-critical methods. It seems appropriate to focus on these two methods, since they are used in the majority of commentaries on the book of Exodus. Although a reader-oriented approach is becoming more popular today, no major work has been produced using it exclusively. Thus, because the study of the book of Exodus so far has been guided by the historical-critical and historical-grammatical methods, this study will focus on the philosophical presuppositions inherent in them. Secondly, although both of these approaches have undergone significant changes over the years (the historical-critical method is no longer understood as a single approach, but is split into different critical tasks like form criticism, tradition criticism, “new” literary criticism, discourse analysis, etc.), the choice of these two approaches remains. The analysis here is not intended to deconstruct modern methods that influence the interpretation of Exodus in order to present a better interpretation: it is intended to show how interpretative methods are not exempt from the influence of philosophical presuppositions. Examining the roots of the historical-grammatical and historical-critical methods (at the turn of the eighteenth century) seems like a fruitful place to start.

The second chapter is aimed at clarifying and identifying the interpreted notion of how God relates to humans within the presuppositional frameworks of biblical scholars.³⁶ The first task, then, is to focus on the interpreter: that is, on humanity's ability to reason and know in the context of the God-human relation, and on the epistemological (how humans arrive at knowledge) context of interpretation. The second task is to introduce how scholars understand the notion of God in the God-human relation. The assumption of God touches on the issue of ontology, of Being, and on the possibility of God acting in the world. The third task relates to the locus or context of the relation between God and humanity: that is, the notion of history. Thus, the chapter clarifies three basic components of the God-human relationship within the presuppositional frameworks of biblical scholars and theologians: the notion of human knowledge (epistemology); the notion of God (ontology); and the notion of relationship (history).

The third chapter is aimed at identifying the presence of philosophical notions relating to God (ontology), humanity (epistemology), and relationship (history) within two interpretative approaches to the text of Exodus: the historical-grammatical method and the historical-critical method. Since each interpretative tradition inherently carries an interpretation of these categories, this chapter will show how each method assumes an interpretation of the God-human relationship.

³⁶ For an introductory attempt to evaluate the influence of philosophy upon interpretation, see Craig G. Bartholomew, "Uncharted Waters: Philosophy, Theology and the Crisis in Biblical Interpretation," in *Renewing Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Möller, Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 1–39.

These two chapters, then, will not deal with the book of Exodus in particular, but with the presuppositions that influence both interpreters and interpretive traditions.³⁷

The fourth chapter traces the influence of these assumptions on the interpretation of the book of Exodus, in the context of how the book itself presents its understanding of the God-human relation. The textual approach to the book of Exodus in this study is a matter that deserves separate attention, and is covered in the section below.

The Approach to the Text

The fourth chapter of this study takes a phenomenological, or descriptive, approach to the text that I will simply call descriptive analysis.³⁸ Even though the

³⁷ Paying attention to these presuppositional and philosophical questions seems like an appropriate first step before one can provide a common-sense evaluation of the text. Ludwig Wittgenstein shares this same vision, since for him a “philosopher is a man who has to cure many intellectual diseases in himself before he can arrive at the notions of common sense.” Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, ed. G. H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 44e. In this sense, Chapters 2 and 3 are aimed at identifying the disease (which can be considered a first step toward the cure), and Chapter 4 attempts to discover if the disease has spread out into the interpretation of the text itself.

³⁸ Phenomenology as a philosophical approach can be traced back to Husserl, Kant, and Hegel, yet the approach is not unified, since it is “neither a school nor a trend in contemporary philosophy” but “rather a movement whose proponents, for various reasons, have propelled it in many distinct directions, with the result that today it means different things to different people.” See Joseph J. Kockelmans, “Phenomenology,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 664. The perspective of phenomenology will be no different in this study. I can think of at least two works that use phenomenology as an approach to the text with fruitful results: Fernando L. Canale, *A Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1987), 321; and

study focuses on the influence of philosophical presuppositions upon the interpretation of Exodus, I will still deal indirectly with how the text itself describes the God-human dynamic.

The descriptive analysis of the text in this study understands the text as a phenomenon comprising different constituents: language, meaning, author, context, external referentiality, readers, *telos*, reception and transmission, discourse, etc.³⁹ Yet since the object of the descriptive analysis is the authorial understanding of philosophical notions that include the God-human relationship depicted in the text,⁴⁰ the way in which the descriptive analysis will be used here differs from traditional exegetical approaches.⁴¹

Oliver Glanz, *Understanding Participant-Reference Shifts in the Book of Jeremiah: A Study of Exegetical Method and Its Consequences for the Interpretation of Referential Incoherence* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 57–75.

³⁹ For a detailed analysis of these constituents see Glanz, *Understanding Participant-Reference Shifts*, 57–75.

⁴⁰ The God-human relation structure is also open to criticism and obliteration by descriptive analysis. Does the text explain this dynamic in these terms? If not, how does it depict the relation between the divine and humans? These questions will be addressed in Chapter 4 of this study.

⁴¹ Umberto Cassuto's *Commentary on the Book of Exodus* is an example of one "descriptive" approach to the text. Cassuto opens his commentary by affirming that his commentary is concerned with "the plain meaning of the text." See Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Skokie, IL: Varda, 2005), 2. Even so, because Cassuto maintains a "scientific" orientation toward the text, his descriptive approach is guided by "all the resources that modern scholarship" sets before him. *Ibid.*, 1. In other words, his descriptive analysis is guided by the inherent presuppositions within these modern approaches. The difference, then, between the descriptive analysis in this study and others is that it begins with an evaluation of the philosophical presuppositions that might influence a proper reading of the text. The primary focus is on how the reality being depicted in the text is interpreted by the subject even before the interpretation of the text itself takes place.

Traditional exegetical approaches involve the actions the interpreter makes to interpret the biblical text following a set of principles of interpretation (philosophical notions that include conceptions of God, humans, and history) that are normally established, as noted earlier, a priori.⁴² This is the default mode of biblical interpretation, and it can be found in most—if not all—exegetical works in Old Testament studies.

Descriptive analysis of the text, on the other hand, attempts: (1) to identify the philosophical notions that might influence one's understanding of the biblical text;⁴³ (2) to suspend these philosophical notions in order for them to be validated or obliterated by the biblical text itself; and (3) to approach the text in a descriptive manner so that the philosophical outlook within the biblical text might be understood as it appears to the reader. In these senses, the approach is both descriptive and analytical.

At this stage, I will expand on each of these three levels to further explain the

⁴² For example, Anthony C. Thiselton comments on Wycliffe's pre-understandings of Scripture: "Wycliffe argued that the interpretation of Scripture must follow the intention of its Divine author." See Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 125. The common understanding that Scripture has a divine author inherently carries an interpretation of Scripture: it assumes that there is a divine author. Thus, the presuppositions an interpreter brings into the act of biblical interpretation inevitably carry a pre-understanding of the text. Yet this is not to be seen as negative. An interpretation that claims to be strictly objective is, to say the least, suspicious. The task at hand, as outlined previously, is to allow the biblical text itself to determine or judge which of these pre-understandings are in harmony with the text and which are not, especially the broad pre-understandings that interpret macro-hermeneutical notions such as the God-human relationship. This movement is an attempt to allow the biblical text to be the arbiter of that which interpreters bring into interpretation.

⁴³ In this sense the approach moves beyond the descriptive to the analytical.

textual approach this study proposes.

Identify and Suspend

In relation to the identification of interpreted philosophical notions and their suspension: how can one identify that which influences an interpreter in interpretation and suspend it? Here one finds oneself beyond conventional methods, because, as mentioned earlier, the presuppositional framework of a particular interpreter includes not only chosen philosophical concepts, but experiences and emotions that are as influential as they are unnoticed. Because of this, the interpreter must exercise self-criticism before biblical criticism, identifying presuppositions that might shape the application and results of interpretation, with the intent to align these assumptions with that which the text might be presenting regarding the content of the same presuppositions.⁴⁴ In other words, descriptive analysis of the text begins with descriptive analysis of the self.

Yet how are the interpreted philosophical notions the interpreter is aware of in his/her own presuppositional framework to be suspended? In order for this to take

⁴⁴ Although it seems impossible for all interpreters to be aware of all philosophical elements that might influence interpretation, here the biblical text might be of help. When reading a particular text, along with the common exegetical questions, one must ask questions about reality. To which reality is this text pointing? The reality of God, of man, of world, etc.? Once the implicit textual reality is identified, interpreters should ask what in their presuppositional framework might impede a proper understanding of how the text portrays that particular reality. In this sense, the descriptive analysis begins as a posture before the text, an interpretative awareness, rather than a method proper.

place, this study will apply *epoché*,⁴⁵ or what I will call in this study *suspension*. On the concept of suspension or *epoché*, Canale writes that there is a “need to place all previous scientific interpretations of the God principle under Husserlian *epoché*, that is, in methodological brackets.”⁴⁶ Fundamentally, the concept of suspension removes the usage of the scientific or philosophical principle of doubt from the control of the subject (interpreter),⁴⁷ and instead, places it under the control of the object (biblical text), which now investigates the validity of the philosophical assumptions of the interpreter. Canale adds, “The phenomenological approach aims to grasp what is

⁴⁵ On the concept of phenomenological *epoché*, Søren Overgaard writes that the “problem for Husserl is how to ensure that no natural knowledge, whether scientific, common sense, or otherwise, enters into our constitutive phenomenological investigation . . . the general name that Husserl gives this procedure of ‘bracketing’ (*Einklammerung*) is *epoché* (Greek: restraint, holding back; *Zurückhaltung*).” See Søren Overgaard, *Husserl and Heidegger on Being in the World* (Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic, 2004), 42. If the reader is tempted to see such a category being applied to biblical interpretation as another modernistic attempt to approach the text, I invite the reader to think again. Phenomenological *epoché* in this study is applied as a remedy against critical, scientific, and philosophical preconceived notions that interpreters have inherited from the rise of modernity onward. One must suspend that which is understood as “common sense” in order to see what the text presents as “common sense.”

⁴⁶ Fernando L. Canale, “Philosophical Foundations and the Biblical Sanctuary,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 36 (1998): 185. For further insight into the origins and first usages of *epoché*, see Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, Muirhead Library of Philosophy (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969).

⁴⁷ The principle of doubt is commonly attributed to Descartes, since he “had declared that universal doubt should purge his mind of all opinions held merely on trust and open it to knowledge firmly grounded in reason.” See Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997), 283.

being thought in the text.”⁴⁸

This, to me, is as close as one can arrive to articulating a biblical approach to dealing with subjective elements that might impede a balance between the assumptions of the interpreter and the assumptions of the biblical text. The first two steps of the descriptive approach to the text are, then, (1) identifying philosophical assumptions that might influence interpretation and (2) suspending them through phenomenological *epoché*.

Look and See

Much can be said about the need to approach the text in a common-sense or descriptive manner. On this last and important point in the descriptive analysis of the text, I begin with what could be conceived as Calvin’s original intention for biblical interpretation. Gilkey writes:

If we had asked an orthodox theologian like Calvin this confessional and systematic question: “What do you believe God did at the Exodus?” he would have given us a clear answer. “Look at the book of Exodus,” he would have answered, “and see what it says God did.”⁴⁹

Although Gilkey’s portrayal of Calvin’s answer is speculative, it leads interpreter and interpretation on a fruitful path—one of looking at the text and seeing what it says about the actions of God. This same idea is found in the philosophical work of

⁴⁸ Canale, *Criticism of Theological Reason*, 321.

⁴⁹ Gilkey, “Cosmology, Ontology,” 198.

Ludwig Wittgenstein concerning language: “Look at it! That’s how it is!”⁵⁰

While biblical interpretation is grounded on the action of looking and seeing, it often looks at and sees what interpreters project into the text via philosophical presuppositions. Even Calvin was not able to free himself from the temptation of seeing in the text what his implicit philosophical presuppositions conditioned him to see. The descriptive analysis applied in this study, then, will follow the action of looking and seeing the notion of how God relates to humanity in text and interpreter. The descriptive analysis proposes not the construction of a new model of how God relates to humans,⁵¹ but a description of how God relates to humans according to the biblical text of Exodus, beginning with how this dynamic is interpreted a priori. This description will provide the ground for an analysis of the same interpreted philosophical notion of the God-human relation within the presuppositional frameworks of biblical scholars.

Descriptive analysis of the text differs from traditional approaches to biblical interpretation not as an alternative proper, but as a starting point. Traditional approaches to the biblical text operate with an inherent conception of the God-human relationship that may or may not have the Bible as a source of its formation. Thus, a traditional approach to the text at this philosophical level could lead to some

⁵⁰ Tim Labron, *Wittgenstein’s Religious Point of View* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 51.

⁵¹ Labron's depiction of Wittgenstein’s rejection of constructing new models to understand concepts serves as an appropriate basis for what I am attempting to do here: “Someone who is not familiar with the landscape is not helped by constructing theories, but by becoming familiar with their concrete surroundings.” *Ibid.*, 36.

confusion. To look and see the God-human relation in the text with an approach that already assumes a God-human relation leads to looking and seeing what one projects into the text. Starting with descriptive analysis does not eliminate this confusion, but it does reduce it. The approach accomplishes this by identifying philosophical notions, suspending these philosophical notions, and providing a textual description that either critiques or validates these philosophical notions.

Presuppositions and Text

In Chapter 4, the philosophical presuppositions within the interpretative frameworks of biblical scholars will be evaluated in a unique way. In order to trace the influence of philosophical presuppositions upon the interpretation of Exodus, I will need two platforms: first, a textual basis that points to possibilities regarding how the text understands the God-human relation; and second, an interpretative basis that points to how scholars interpret issues relating to the God-human relation. I will attempt to accomplish this via the literary structure of Exodus. From the literary structure of Exodus, the reader can derive an idea of how the author/redactor of the book articulated—or not—the notion of the God-human relation. From these textual pointers, I will move into how biblical interpreters understood and interpreted these same texts under extrabiblical philosophical categories. In this way, the issues concerning the God-human relation are not dictated beforehand; rather, they emerge from the text. Once these issues are identified in the text via the literary structure of the book, I will move into how scholars interpret them as I attempt to trace the philosophical presuppositions at work in such interpretation.

In short, this study's descriptive approach to the text does not imply a method

proper,⁵² nor does it lead to a presuppositionless hermeneutic; rather, it must be seen as an interpretative awareness, a posture before the text.⁵³ The phenomenological approach allows interpreters to ascertain the philosophical conceptions they bring into interpretation via their own assumptions and interpretative methods, and harmonize them with what the biblical text implicitly depicts regarding the same issues. The approach begins with a description of the self, before describing the text and its interpretation.

I hope that this introduction has sufficiently explained the question this study addresses and the approach it will take to arrive at either answers or better questions.

⁵² I am not implying here that these steps are not methodological; I am only assuming their limitation. Terence J. Keegan is correct in observing that “scholars fail to recognize the limitations of their methodologies. There are some who proceed almost as if one given method could solve everything. What is really dangerous about this approach is not so much that the method will fail but that the scholars using the method will be satisfied with inadequate results.” See Terence J. Keegan, *Interpreting the Bible: A Popular Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 7.

⁵³ This interpretative awareness also implies the critical nature of this study. It is a study on the necessary contexts the interpreter of any text must consider. While general criticism is aimed at the biblical text, this attempts to bring the text to a higher standing as it criticizes the philosophical standpoint of the interpreter.

CHAPTER 2

THE GOD-HUMAN RELATION IN PRESUPPOSITIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Introduction

This section begins the process of evaluating the presence, influence, and roots of the philosophical notion of how God relates to humans in the presuppositional frameworks of biblical interpreters.⁵⁴ I will begin by addressing the principle of epistemology:⁵⁵ that is, humanity's ability to know and reason,⁵⁶ and the

⁵⁴ This chapter does not intend to provide a chronological analysis of the philosophical influences that shape biblical interpretation, nor will it attempt to place them in theological (liberal, conservative, progressive) or religious (Christian, Jewish, etc.) categories. Rather, it attempts to present presuppositions relating to epistemology, ontology, and history as they emerge in their particular historical contexts. Among the many chronological treatments of Old Testament interpretation, see Magne Saebø, ed., *Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008); Mark S. Gignilliat, *A Brief History of Old Testament Criticism: From Benedict Spinoza to Brevard Childs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012); and the four-volume series by Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010).

⁵⁵ In this study I will follow the basic definition of epistemology given by Paul K. Moser, that is, epistemology as the explanation of knowledge or the study of the nature of knowledge, "from Greek *episteme*, 'knowledge,' and *logos*, 'explanation.'" See Paul K. Moser, "Epistemology," in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 273.

⁵⁶ Several theories of how the mind functions in the process of knowledge have been proposed over the history of philosophy. Labron writes that "knowledge is

notion of “human” in the God-human relation structure. Second, I will address the principle of ontology: that is, conceptions of Being and the divine ability to communicate or act within history, and the notion of “God” in the God-human relation structure. Third, I will address the principle of history: that is, the locus where the dynamic between God and humans takes place, and the notion of “relation” in the God-human relation structure.

The Principle of Epistemology

Introduction

This section will begin by highlighting the relation between subject and object,⁵⁷ the epistemological component, in theological reasoning. This analysis will

typically thought to be derived from at least one of two paths, we can gain knowledge through our innate ideas or we can gain knowledge through our senses. The former is rationalism and the latter empiricism.” See Tim Labron, *Wittgenstein and Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 25.

⁵⁷ It is important to note that I am not endorsing a distinction between subjects and objects (also known as the “Cartesian theater”), an idea that can be traced back to the philosophy of René Descartes (1596–1650), the father of modern foundationalist epistemology. See Nancey Murphy and Brad J. Kallenberg, “Anglo-American Postmodernity: A Theology of Communal Practice,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 27. Wittgenstein was also critical of the Cartesian theater, since for him the idea of “thinking as a process in the head, in a completely enclosed space, makes thinking something occult.” See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, ed. Rush Rhees, trans. Anthony Kenny (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), section 64. Although the subject-object distinction is questioned by some scholars due to its limitation in embracing the complexity of human cognition, I will maintain the inevitable relation between subject and object, that is, in “order to create meaning, Reason needs a subject and an object.” See Oliver Glanz, “Investigating the Presuppositional Realm of Biblical Theological Methodology, Part II: Canale on Reason,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 47, no. 2 (2009): 220. The

provide a basis to evaluate the context in which biblical interpretation takes place.

To generate meaning, reason requires three main philosophical presuppositions: the ontological (the concept of reality), the epistemological (the concept of knowing), and the theological framework (the particular system that provides unity and guarantees coherence).⁵⁸ The epistemological framework—that assumes to some extent a subject and an object—is present in any scientific or theological quest for knowledge and meaning. The necessity of a subject and an object provides the context in which reason occurs and defines the conditions for interpretation to take place. Oliver Glanz writes:

In any philosophical endeavor, the interpreted subject-object relation is a necessary fundamental of a detailed construction of a philosophical system. Thus the basic framework of Reason is the subject-object relationship, and it is this relationship that is the center of meaning.⁵⁹

Concerning the subject-object relationship, Fernando L. Canale writes, “All cognitive activities spring from the subject-object relationship which functions as the

question is how this relation takes place. The subject-object distinction as a way of conceptualizing human knowledge must also be critiqued by the parameters set forth by the text, that is, through the possibility that human cognition is not isolated from life. A similar articulation of this idea is found in the work of Wittgenstein, who understood that “clarity begins with an acknowledgement of the irreducibly social character of human experience and the intrinsic relation of human experience to the real world.” See Murphy and Kallenberg, “Anglo-American Postmodernity,” 35. Or, in Wittgenstein’s own words: “What has to be accepted, the given, is—so one could say—*forms of life*.” See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 226e.

⁵⁸ See Glanz, “Investigating the Presuppositional,” 221.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

foundational cognitive unit.”⁶⁰

Throughout time, philosophers and theologians have argued over how the subject-object relation functions in Reason and in the search for meaning.⁶¹ As philosophy developed, the emphasis in epistemology shifted from object to subject. This historical development was also related to general understanding of the concept of Being.⁶²

Any understanding of the subject-object relationship contains a conceptualization of Being. At this stage, it is imperative to understand that thinkers throughout history understood this essential concept as it relates to epistemology as a hermeneutical choice. On this, Glanz writes:

⁶⁰ Fernando L. Canale, *Creation, Evolution, and Theology: The Role of Method in Theological Accommodation* (Berrien Springs, MI: LithoTech, 2005), 17.

⁶¹ When I write of Reason, I mean the framework through which one arrives at meaning, as mentioned earlier: the ontological, epistemological, and theological frameworks.

⁶² I do not imply Being as a broad conceptualization of the localization within which reality takes place; rather, I side with Fernando Canale in understanding Being as an overall quality shared by everything real. Also, Being in this study will be conceived as a reality in human minds, while the concept of “being” will be conceived as entities outside the human mind. Furthermore, Being is that which “co-appears with all things as a basic characteristic of their being.” See Fernando L. Canale, *Basic Elements of Christian Theology: Scripture Replacing Tradition* (Berrien Springs, MI: LithoTech, 2005), 38. According to Canale, an evaluation of how Being is interpreted in history reveals two possible interpretations of Being: temporal/historical Being and timeless Being. The concept of temporality and timelessness will be recurrent in this study, since it is a philosophical principle that influences all other frameworks that constitute Reason and consequently interpretation. For a historical analysis of how Being is interpreted, see Canale, *Criticism of Theological Reason*. For more details on Being, how it is interpreted, and its influence on interpretation, see the following section dealing with the principle of ontology.

Because the concept of Being functions as the first and all-embracing concept by which everything else is conditioned, it reveals the primordial, unconditional, or hypothetical character of Reason. The concept of Being, functioning as Logos, is not conditioned by any logic, since it is the ground for logic itself, but by choice of the subject.⁶³

The conceptualization of Being is a hermeneutical choice interpreters make due to the hypothetical character of Reason, and this choice influences not only the epistemological standpoint from which interpretation takes place, but the interpretation of the God-human relation itself.

The interpretation of Being will be evaluated in the following section dealing with the principle of ontology, but at this stage, some introductory notes must be given to the reader. In the history of thought, Being, as noted earlier, has been interpreted in two ways: temporal/historical and timeless. The subjective choice between the two directly affects what the human subject perceives in its relationship to a particular object. Because of this, attention will be paid to how the subject and the object are understood from both the objectivist and subjectivist epistemological standpoints.

The following evaluation of the epistemological principle, then, is double-pronged. It attempts to understand not only how significant philosophical shifts in history grasped the relation between subject and object, but also how they chose the concept of Being,⁶⁴ the ground upon which Reason and interpretation take place.

⁶³ Glanz, "Investigating the Presuppositional," 229.

⁶⁴ Glanz understands that the conceptualization of Being in Reason is that which "the subject brings to the subject-object relationship and that predominantly determines the means and end of the process of creating an image of the object."

The two major philosophical shifts in the interpretation of the subject-object relation, along with its inevitable choice of the understanding of Being, will be classified in this study as objectivist epistemology (encompassing the classical and modern periods) and subjectivist epistemology (encompassing the modern and postmodern periods).⁶⁵ At the end of this analysis, I will draw out the possibility of a hermeneutical epistemology as another shift in the understanding of epistemology.

Ibid. In other words, the subjective understanding and choice of Being is inevitably carried into the interpretation of the dynamic between subject and object. Again, the issue of Being will only be evaluated in this section as it relates to the principle of epistemology. For a proper evaluation of the concept of Being and how it is interpreted in history, see the next section on the principle of ontology.

⁶⁵ This study will not follow the classical Hegelian structure of historical developments. On the Hegelian arrangement of the history of thought, John Goldingay writes: “G. W. F. Hegel suggested a three-stage model for understanding the history of thought. . . . Current conventional wisdom implies a Hegelian understanding of biblical interpretation. In the first millennium there was premodern interpretation, the second millennium saw the development of modern interpretation, and in the third there is postmodern interpretation.” See John A. Goldingay, “Premodern, Modern, and Postmodern in Old Testament Study,” in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D. G. Dunn and J. W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 13. For the objectives of this study, the Hegelian classification, though present in biblical interpretation today, represents a modernistic outlook on history that fails to embrace the complexity and continuation of systems of thought throughout the historical periods. Although it may help in identifying the macro-hermeneutical patterns present in the different periods, I will resort to objectivist and subjectivist epistemology as the pattern through which to understand the complexity of epistemological developments throughout history. This is not an attempt to exhaust the epistemological issues within the different periods, but allows for the continuation of perspectives without resorting to clear breaks in thinking in the transitions from period to period.

Objectivist Epistemology

The Subject in Objectivist Epistemology

The objectivist understanding of the subject-object relation has ancient historical roots. From the birth of philosophy through the time of the classical thinkers until the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the emphasis in the subject-object relation was on the *object*. An evaluation of the interpretation of the subject-object relation from its earliest to its later stages falls outside the scope of this study; I will begin this assessment with the transition between classical and modern thinking, since it best applies to the influential period where biblical interpretation took the form it carries today. Also, some key features of the objectivist interpretation of the subject-object relation emerged during this transition.

Heavily influenced by the Renaissance, the Enlightenment,⁶⁶ and the initial effects of rationalism, eighteenth-century thinkers left behind the pre-critical phase of biblical interpretation to embrace a more critical approach to reality and consequently to biblical interpretation. The epistemological significance of this emphasis on human reason and rationality is that it presented a particular understanding of the human mind that uncovers how the subject-object relation was understood.

⁶⁶ Gerhard F. Hasel observes that “the Enlightenment was characterized by a new philosophical norm—rationalism. This meant that human reason was set up as the final criterion and chief source and arbiter of what is to be accepted as true and factual.” See Gerhard F. Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today: An Analysis of Modern Methods of Biblical Interpretation and Proposals for the Interpretation of the Bible as the Word of God*, Biblical Research Institute (Lincoln, NE: College View Printers, 1985), 9.

The assumption in the seventeenth century was that “the subject passively receives input from its objects,”⁶⁷ and the mind of the subject was depicted, via the work of John Locke,⁶⁸ as a *tabula rasa*,⁶⁹ that is, empty and awaiting the influence of the object to reach a possible immaculate subjective reception of its communicated content. In this epistemological conception, besides the clear distinction between subject and object,⁷⁰ the lines of intelligibility⁷¹ communicated by the *object* are immersed into the mind of a passive *subject*. The epistemological movement that characterizes this period interprets the subject-object relation in its distinction as the content is communicated from the *object* to the *subject*. This basic premise led to the

⁶⁷ Canale, *Creation, Evolution, and Theology*, 19.

⁶⁸ See R. S. Woolhouse, “Tabula Rasa,” in *A Companion to Epistemology*, ed. Jonathan Dancy, Ernest Sosa, and Matthias Steup, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 763.

⁶⁹ Tabula rasa is “the theory that the mind at birth is a tabula rasa (blank writing tablet) awaiting ideas from experience.” *Ibid.*, 763.

⁷⁰ As in the beginning of this section, the distinction of subject from object and its effects in modernity can be traced to Descartes, who understood that “the body is always a hindrance to the mind in its thinking.” J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch, trans., *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 3:336. This anthropological perspective leads some to see that the “core Judaeo-Christian view of the soul is quite at odds with the views of Plato and Descartes.” See Rebecca D. Pentz, “Veatch and Brain Death: A Plea for the Soul,” *Journal of Clinical Ethics* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 132. In other words, the distinction of subject from object is marked by a Platonic understanding of the body-soul distinction.

⁷¹ The role of the object does not bypass the communication of intelligible content to the subject, something that can also be called transobjectivity. On this Glanz writes, “Transobjectivity means two things: on the one hand, that the object exists in ontic independence from the subject, and, on the other hand, that the object is open in the sense that it does not hide, but communicates its properties within the structure of Reason.” See Glanz, “Investigating the Presuppositional,” 221.

birth of the “notion of scientific objectivity as excluding all contributions from the cognitive subject.”⁷²

Theologians in the seventeenth and especially the eighteenth century reflected the epistemological paradigm outlined above in their hermeneutic. Gerhard Maier puts together the general mindset of the time in the following manner: “F. C. Baur wanted to ‘apprehend’ the state of affairs given to us in the Bible in its ‘pure objectiveness.’ Similarly W. Wrede wished to work ‘as objectively... as possible.’”⁷³ This mindset, again, follows the tenets set forth by Descartes’ philosophical reflection on the “lone individual as ‘thinking subject,’ abstracted from the world.”⁷⁴

The idea of an abstracted thinking subject created several problems for interpretation that will be seen in subsequent sections of this study. Among these problems is a limited perspective of the self in interpretation, since “the classical mind was paramountly concerned with the interpretation of reality and not with the patterns of its own functioning.”⁷⁵ Objectivist epistemology, then, was shaped by an

⁷² Canale, *Creation, Evolution, and Theology*, 19. Also, as a foretaste of the influence of such principles upon biblical interpretation, a theme that will be developed in the next chapter, the passive role of the subject seen in classical and modern interpretations of the subject-object relation has “never been entirely overcome among practitioners of historical-critical methods.” See Ben F. Meyer, “The Challenges of Text and Reader to the Historical-Critical Method,” in *The Bible and Its Readers*, ed. Wim Beuken, Sean Freyne, and Anton Weiler (London: SCM, 1991), 4.

⁷³ Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), 334.

⁷⁴ Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 17.

⁷⁵ Fernando L. Canale, *Back to Revelation-Inspiration: Searching for the Cognitive Foundation of Christian Theology in a Postmodern World* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2001), 17.

overemphasis on the active object in the formation of Reason and consequently in interpretation. This resulted in the heightening of the mental capacities of the individual in interpretation and a mindset that asserted that any interpretative activity must be accomplished through pure objectivity. This distancing of the individual from the object in interpretation, prevalent throughout modernity, is perhaps one of the most destructive epistemological features when applied to biblical interpretation—due not only to its Platonic dependence, but more importantly, to its incoherence with the apparent biblical movement of proximity to the word for understanding to take place rather than distancing.

In the mid- to late eighteenth century, the epistemological mindset began to show signs of a transition from empiricism to idealism, from object to subject. This conception can be seen to some extent in the work of Immanuel Kant.⁷⁶ Ronald H. Nash summarizes Kant's contribution to epistemology in the following way:

Philosophers prior to Kant (or so Kant claimed) had assumed that human knowledge is possible only as the mind is adapted to the world. Kant reversed this order. Instead of the mind adapting to the supposed objects of its knowledge, all objects are instead adapted to the knowing mind.⁷⁷

Glanz adds: "The Cartesian paradigm and the influence of Kant changed the direction of the flow of meaning by grounding the interpretation of the

⁷⁶ For more on Kant's contribution to epistemology see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1990); Paul Guyer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Julián Marias, *History of Philosophy* (New York: Dover, 1967), 189–223.

⁷⁷ Ronald H. Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992), 26.

dimensionality of Reason in the epistemological framework.”⁷⁸ In late modernity, then, more attention was given to the *subject* in interpretation. This emphasis provided the context for the appearance of the next epistemological emphasis in history: subjectivist epistemology.

Yet, before turning to this second stage in the historical development of epistemology, it is important to turn to how the *object*, or conception of Being, was interpreted during the objectivist period.

The Object in Objectivist Epistemology

So far, the role of the *subject* in the objectivist understanding of the subject-object relationship has been uncovered. Now I turn to how thinkers in the objectivist period interpreted the function of the *object* in the subject-object relationship: that is, how thinkers chose to interpret Being.

From classical times through the Enlightenment, the overall interpretation of Being was through a timeless conception. The definition of this timeless conception and its implications for biblical interpretation will be fully given in the next section, so for now I introduce this concept only tentatively. It suffices to point out that the “impetus for defining eternity as timelessness is not found in any dynamic of scripture’s logic,”⁷⁹ but, rather, seems to have “been stirred by a concern to articulate

⁷⁸ See Glanz, “Investigating the Presuppositional,” 231.

⁷⁹ Richard C. Prust, *Wholeness: The Character Logic of Christian Belief* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 89.

in terms classically schooled converts would find congenial.”⁸⁰ In sum, “Christianity took root in an intellectual world in which Plato’s belief in the unchangeable nature of truth and Aristotle’s in an unmovable mover provided the terms of systematic understanding.”⁸¹

Although, as seen above, the conception of Being as timeless is criticized by contemporary thinkers, it prevailed during the classical and modern periods alike, demonstrating how scholarly thought was heavily dependent on a Platonic understanding of reality.⁸² This macro-hermeneutical or philosophical choice of Being as timeless affected the epistemological structure of the objectivist perspective, since the “absolute truth” that the rational *subject* arrives at in interpretation “stands on the belief that our knowledge springs from timeless, changeless realities.”⁸³ Even though the late modern period brought about the beginning of a change in the approach to knowledge, the timeless understanding of Being, or of the object in the

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Stanley J. Grenz writes on the development of Greek thinking during the Renaissance: “Renaissance thinkers were humanists in that they adhered to the human values presented in the classical writings. In addition, the return to the classics included a rejection of the Aristotelianism of the Middle Ages in favor of Platonism and even mysticism.” In Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 58.

⁸³ Fernando L. Canale, “Absolute Truth in Postmodern Times,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 45, no. 1 (2007): 92. Such a dependence on Platonic conceptions of Being, as mentioned earlier, is also seen in the work of Descartes.

subject-object relationship, was still shaped by Platonic conceptions.⁸⁴

Glanz correctly points out that even though much changed in the transition between pre-modern times and modernity, “Being was still interpreted as timeless.”⁸⁵ Such a conception did not allow modernistic thinkers to depart from a foundationalist perspective of knowledge; truth was still determined by verifiable universal propositions, while Being was still interpreted as a timeless reality.

Both classical and modern perspectives of epistemology, or objectivist epistemology, assumed “the existence of an ‘absolute universal truth’ independent from the subject’s contribution.”⁸⁶ This conception, at the ontological level, would radically change in the next epistemological shift.

Subjectivist Epistemology

The Subject in Subjectivist Epistemology

A major shift in the historical development of the interpretation of the subject-object dynamic came in late modernity, or what other scholars prefer to call postmodernity.⁸⁷ Knowing that a “precise understanding of postmodernity is

⁸⁴ Canale writes: “Plato devised the timeless ontology on which absolute truth of classical and modern times was constructed.” Ibid. Although a proper analysis of timeless Being will be given in the next section, one can already notice the influential character of such a conception upon the foundation of knowledge. In both classical and modern times, Being was interpreted through such a timeless conception.

⁸⁵ See Glanz, “Investigating the Presuppositional,” 232.

⁸⁶ Canale, *Creation, Evolution, and Theology*, 10.

⁸⁷ For more on the influence of postmodernity in interpretation and theology, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*

notoriously difficult to pin down”⁸⁸ and “those who attempt to define or analyze the concept of postmodernity do so at their own peril,”⁸⁹ at this stage, and for the purposes of this study, I will focus on how contemporary thinkers in this postmodern condition understand the role of the *subject* and *object* in the subject-object relationship.⁹⁰

The historical and philosophical understanding of the subject-object relationship in the subjectivist period is marked by an attempt to overcome the classical-modern objectivist framework. Although it is difficult to draw out every

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Terrence W. Tilley, *Postmodern Theologies: The Challenge of Religious Diversity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995); Lawrence Cahoon, ed., *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003); Roman T. Ciapalo, ed., *Postmodernism and Christian Philosophy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997); Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Michael W. Nicholson, *A Theological Analysis and Critique of the Postmodern Debate: Mapping the Labyrinth* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1997); Hugo Anthony Meynell, *Postmodernism and the New Enlightenment* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn* (New York: Guilford, 1997).

⁸⁸ Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 18.

⁸⁹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Theology and the Condition of Postmodernity: A Report on Knowledge (of God),” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 4.

⁹⁰ I will not present an exhaustive account of the historical and philosophical developments that led to what is today termed *postmodernity*. Even so, I do not see postmodernity as a rupture from modernity, but as the natural result of the modern project: in other words, it is impossible to see postmodernity divorced from modernity, especially since it still carries the term *modern*.

single element that led up to this subjectivist mindset, it is imperative to focus yet again on the late modern period. Here I briefly turn to the influence of German Idealism on the epistemological developments that led to the subjectivist turn.⁹¹

The nineteenth century “marked one of the richest and most exciting explosions of philosophical energy and talent, perhaps even comparable to the generation that gave birth to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.”⁹² Whereas classical epistemology in the pre-modern and modern periods emphasized the active *object*, German Idealism emphasized the influence of the active *subject*, who “in turn is supposed to create its own object of thought.”⁹³ The objectivism present in classical thinking began to be overcome by the subjective emphasis in the epistemological developments in German Idealism. The mind of the subject was no longer passive in

⁹¹ For more on what is known as the “classical period” of philosophical thought in Germany, see Karl Ameriks, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism 1781–1801* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Nektarios G. Limnatis, *German Idealism and the Problem of Knowledge: Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel* (Dordrecht, Germany: Springer, 2008); Robert C. Solomon, *Continental Philosophy Since 1750: The Rise and Fall of the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). The “ideal” in German Idealism, of course, carries a positive and a negative intention in its application, and its implications are well articulated by Karl Ameriks, who writes: “The negative meaning of ‘idealism’ implies that most things that are commonly taken to be real are not so in fact The positive interpretation of ‘idealism,’ in contrast, involves seeing the term as adding rather than subtracting significance.” See Ameriks, *Companion to German Idealism*, 8. The negative and positive sides of the “ideal” in German Idealism mark the active influence of the subject in interpretation.

⁹² Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, eds., *The Age of German Idealism* (London: Routledge, 2003), 1.

⁹³ Canale, *Creation, Evolution, and Theology*, 19.

interpretation, but was understood to create the necessary conditions for meaning to take place: a notion that can be traced to where this study left off in the previous section—Immanuel Kant.

This emphasis on the subject is one of the significant characteristics that mark the shift from the objectivist to the subjectivist interpretation of the subject-object relation. Naturally, this conception brought about an array of issues that had been overlooked by its predecessors.

As seen above, the roots for a paradigmatic shift in the interpretation of Reason formed in the late eighteenth century and nineteenth century. The twentieth century saw significant criticism of the idealistic emphasis on the *subject* in interpretation, as well as the classical emphasis on the object. Stanley Grenz focuses on the active participation of the German philosopher Martin Heidegger in this period, affirming that it was Heidegger who argued that “Descartes and Kant directed all modern philosophy down an illegitimate and destructive path.”⁹⁴

This destructive path was characterized by a misconception in regard to the active subject in interpretation, since, for Heidegger, “the human being is not primarily a thinking self, a subject that engages in cognitive acts; rather, we are above all else beings-in-the-world, enmeshed in social networks.”⁹⁵

Some of the epistemological implications of understanding the *subject* not as “thinking self” but as “being-in-the-world” are outlined by Canale as he writes that

⁹⁴ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 86.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

in “postmodern times, knowledge and truth have become relative to the historical and cultural conditions of the cognitive subject,”⁹⁶ replacing the “‘epistemological foundationalism’ of classical and modern times”⁹⁷ with the relativeness of truth in “historically and culturally conditioned lives.”⁹⁸

While the Enlightenment project and the work of Kant attempted to bring the absoluteness of truth to the epistemological dimension of the thinking *subject* while maintaining a timeless conception of Being, postmodern thinkers understood that this project was bound for failure, since a thinking *subject* is part of an interpretative community that is conditioned by history, time, and language. At the same time, the idea that the active *subject* in his/her historically, culturally conditioned life determines the content of reason lays the groundwork for the possibility of cognitive relativism. The epistemological shift from object to subject, in postmodern times, allows for meaning to be communicated from *subject* (within a historical and cultural context) to *object*.

As mentioned in passing before, another level that marks this shift is a sensitive attention to language. Vanhoozer not only sees this linguistic turn as one of the most important shifts from modernity to postmodernity, but affirms that the postmodern mind understands that “not only do we have a nonlinguistic access to the way things are, but the way we speak and think is conditioned by the particular

⁹⁶ Canale, “Absolute Truth in Postmodern Times,” 87.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

language in which we dwell.”⁹⁹ Thus the conception of the active subject in interpretation undergoes a major shift within the postmodern condition: modern objectivity is not only overcome, but replaced by an emphasis on the subject’s historical, temporal, and linguistic context.

Finally, by “the end of the twentieth century, philosophy finally came to realize the failure of the Kantian transcendentalism and scientific methodology as sources of absolute truth.”¹⁰⁰ Yet the postmodern understanding of the thinking *subject* in the subject-object relationship as part of a hermeneutical, historical, linguistic, and changing context also stems from a foundational change in the philosophical understanding of the *object*, or Being. To this issue I now turn.

The Object in Subjectivist Epistemology

As mentioned earlier, the epistemological conception of the dynamic between subject and object carries an a priori choice of how Being is interpreted. Such a hermeneutical choice directly affects not only one’s elaboration of the functionality of the subject-object relationship, but more importantly, how a particular person can arrive at knowledge and meaning. The question to be answered at this stage is, how does the subjectivist period that encompasses the postmodern condition or turn interpret Being? As pointed out earlier, the interpretation of Being as timeless during the objectivist period was left unchanged.

⁹⁹ Vanhoozer, “Theology and the Condition,” 12.

¹⁰⁰ Canale, “Absolute Truth in Postmodern Times,” 91.

It is at this ontological level that the postmodern condition creates the possibility of a different epistemological direction, though it is still not fully arrived at. The postmodern turn, or modernity reaching its full consequences, marks the possibility of a reinterpretation of Being from a timeless and changeless understanding to a historical and temporal one. The realization that the *subject* was now conceived as a historical or social individual in history opened the path for the same conclusion to be reached at the level of Being. Canale writes:

Postmodernity replaced absolute reason with historical hermeneutical reason in epistemology; and timeless, changeless reality with temporal, changing reality in ontology. . . . The epistemological postmodern shift from classical absolute reason to hermeneutical reason springs from the ontological shift from a timeless to a temporal ontology.¹⁰¹

Although a change to temporal ontology took place at the level of the historical *subject*, the same change on the level of the *object*, or Being, has not yet been arrived at. Even so, this change does create the possibility that the *subject* is no longer able to apprehend timeless truths, only historical truths situated in time.

This initial paradigm shift—from the object to the hermeneutical/historical subject—created the necessary conditions for some theologians to depart from the modern project in essential elements that relate to theology and consequently to interpretation. Vanhoozer outlines three of the main postulates in modernity that were rejected in the transition to late modernity or postmodernity: “(1) that reason is absolute and universal (2) that individuals are autonomous, able to transcend their place in history, class, and culture (3) that universal principles and procedures are

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

objective whereas preferences are subjective.”¹⁰²

The last point is significant to the concerns of this section, since it shows what remains to be overcome: the idea that there is still some timeless objective truth to be arrived at subjectively apart from “preferences.” So, while the postmodern turn brought a temporal ontological change to the level of the subject, it has not made the same conclusion reach the level of Being.

It is here that Canale anticipates the possibility of the full conclusion of the modern project or the postmodern turn:

When the subject-object relationship is understood as working in the temporal dimensionality of knowledge, the interpretation of what essence and objectivity mean in themselves is bound to differ from the classical timeless interpretation of them.¹⁰³

While the postmodern turn made significant changes in the realm of the thinking *subject*, the full implications of these changes are yet to be implemented in the sciences and theology.¹⁰⁴ Postmodernity opened the possibility that both *subject* and *object* could be seen on the same ontological platform, that is, historical or temporal Being. While objectivist epistemology created a clear break between *subject* and *object* through a timeless conception of Being, postmodernity opens the way to understanding *subject* and *object* in relation to each other, interacting in the same

¹⁰² Vanhoozer, “Theology and the Condition,” 8.

¹⁰³ Canale, *Criticism of Theological Reason*, 131.

¹⁰⁴ For one of the few works that attempt this, see Fernando L. Canale, “Interdisciplinary Method in Christian Theology?: In Search of a Working Proposal,” *Neue Zeitschrift Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 43 (2001): 366–89.

historical and temporal flow. However, this has not yet been accomplished.

Summary

This section outlined the context in which interpretation takes place: namely, the question of how humanity arrives at knowledge, meaning, and that which is real. In focus was the epistemological dynamic of the subject-object relationship as a way to see the historical developments in answer to this question.

The first period addressed was objectivist epistemology and its emphasis on the role of the *object* in interpretation as the *subject* took on a passive role. During this period, Being was interpreted as timeless and dependent upon a Platonic ontology.

The second period addressed was subjectivist epistemology, characterized by a change of emphasis from the *object* to the *subject*. While the *subject* was active in interpretation, this change brought a significant passivity to the *object*. By understanding the *subject* differently and breaking from the timeless categories that reigned throughout history, postmodernity introduced the temporal and historical dimension of reality to the level of the subject. However, postmodernity has not as yet integrated this discovery into the understanding of Being.

Now that the notion of “human” in the God-human relationship has been examined via epistemology, I turn to the second part of that relationship: the notion of “God.”

The Principle of Ontology

Introduction

This section will assess the second component in the God-human relationship

structure, namely, the principle of ontology.¹⁰⁵ First, I will introduce how the ontological principle, operating in the presuppositional frameworks of biblical scholars and theologians as a presupposition, influences the general flow of biblical interpretation along with its results. Second, I will move into the issue of how these assumptions shape the scholarly understanding of God and how God acts in the biblical text in particular,¹⁰⁶ since this issue is aligned with the interests of this study: the actions of God in relation to humanity, and humanity's ability to know and grasp revelation in the context of history. Throughout this analysis, I will also provide preliminary examples that reflect the influence of the principle of ontology at the level of scholarly assumptions and their effect on biblical interpretation.

¹⁰⁵ The question of Being is at the foundation of theological thinking. Apart from Canale's foundational *Criticism of Theological Reason*, already cited in this study, the following works can also attest to this point: Stanley J. Grenz, *The Named God and the Question of Being: A Trinitarian Theo-Ontology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 4–5; George Pattison, *God and Being: An Enquiry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 103–48. Even in Old Testament studies and biblical interpretation, the relation between Being and theology has not been ignored; see, for instance, Neil B. MacDonald, *Metaphysics and the God of Israel: Systematic Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006); Francesca Aran Murphy, *God Is Not a Story: Realism Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁶ In referring to assumptions about God and how God acts, I do not imply that which God does through the biblical text in relation to the reader, but rather the textual descriptions of who God is and what he does in the context of the biblical stories themselves.

The Conception of Being: Timelessness and Temporality in Interpretation

Introduction

In the analysis of the principle of epistemology, I pointed out that Being was interpreted as timeless in philosophical and theological thought even during the development from classical to late modern or postmodern thinking. Because the concept of Being as timeless is foundational for the development of theological thinking in general and biblical interpretation in particular, it is necessary to dedicate space to address it properly.

The notion of Being as timeless was first articulated in philosophical circles,¹⁰⁷ yet “this view has affected theology throughout history and is still pervasive today.”¹⁰⁸ Although Christian tradition maintains a timeless view of God, several thinkers have seen the problematic effect of this view on biblical interpretation.

Among them is Oscar Culmann, who writes:

How much the thinking of our days roots in Hellenism, and how little Biblical Christianity, becomes clear to us when we confirm the fact that far and wide the Christian Church and Christian theology distinguish time and eternity in the Platonic-Greek manner.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Norman Gulley correctly points out that “the view that God is timeless does not come from Scripture, but from philosophy.” In Norman R. Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*, Vol. 1 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), 4.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰⁹ Oscar Culmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History*, trans. Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 61.

Culmann not only recognizes the Greek origin of the timeless conception of Being, but also the mixture of Greek and biblical ideas within Christian tradition and theology. Culmann adds that “to primitive Christianity, as to Judaism, the Greek manner of distinguishing between time and eternity is quite foreign.”¹¹⁰ Grenz¹¹¹ also reacts to the proximity between theology and philosophy as he writes that “the wedding of philosophy and theology in what has become the traditional and accepted manner is no longer possible (if it ever was).”¹¹² He calls for “the demise of onto-theology.”¹¹³

At this stage, I will focus on the question of Being itself in order for the reader to understand “what it is” before I can explore the question of “what it does.” After this clarification, I will continue to trace the issue of the relation between theology and philosophy, especially as it relates to biblical interpretation, and the issue of onto-theology itself. To the issue of Being I now turn.

Being as Timeless in Interpretation

Scholars acknowledge Parmenides (540–470 BC) as the “first philosopher to

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 62.

¹¹¹ Even though I cite Grenz here, in his own work, Grenz attempts to resolve the problem of the proximity between philosophy and theology without breaking from the classical ontological structures. I cite him here as a representative scholar who sees the problem, but not as one who attempts to break from the classical ontological grounds that assume timeless Being.

¹¹² Grenz, *Named God*, 6. In short, onto-theology implies the preeminence and epistemological priority given to the ontological element.

¹¹³ Ibid.

view all reality under the common aspect of Being.”¹¹⁴ In Plato’s evaluation of Parmenides,¹¹⁵ beyond the understanding that Being is immutable, there are two basic characteristics of Being that shape its conception and that remain a significant part of philosophical and theological discussions throughout the centuries. First, in accordance with other philosophers of the pre-Socratic era, he drew a clear distinction between the appearance of things and the reality of things. That is, what is “perceived by the senses is not actually the case.”¹¹⁶ Secondly, Being had no birth or beginning, it has no end, and it is not subject to change.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 20. By Being I mean the element that “co-appears with all things as a basic characteristic of their Being.” See Glanz, “Investigating the Presuppositional,” 228. See also Canale, *Basic Elements*, 67–68. In other words, Being is that element of reality that co-appears with everything real, that is, “beings.” Hence the distinction between Being and beings. Parmenides, then, was the first to consider the question of Being, an idea that would be discussed for centuries of philosophical thinking. For more on Parmenides, see Francis Macdonald Cornford, *Plato and Parmenides: Parmenides’ Way of Truth and Plato’s Parmenides Translated with an Introduction and a Running Commentary* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964); Marias, *History of Philosophy*, 19–25; Richard G. Geldard, *Parmenides and the Way of Truth* (Rhinebeck, NY: Monkfish, 2007); David Sedley, “Parmenides and Melissus,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy*, ed. A. A. Long (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 113–33.

¹¹⁵ What remains of the writings of Parmenides are about one hundred and fifty lines of “didactic poem.” See Alexander P. D. Mourelatos, “Parmenides,” in *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Robert Audi, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 646.

¹¹⁶ Grenz, *Named God*, 20. Plato sets forth this Parmenidean notion with a distinction between forms and things: “Forms are what they are of themselves and in relation to themselves, and things that belong to us are, in the same way, what they are in relation to themselves. . . . So none of the forms is known by us, because we don’t partake of knowledge itself.” In Plato, *Parmenides*, trans. Mary Louise Gill and Paul Ryan (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 136–37.

¹¹⁷ Grenz, *Named God*, 22. In the philosopher’s words: “changeless within the limits of great bonds it exists without beginning or ceasing.” See G. S. Kirk, J. E.

Parmenides arrived at this second characteristic of Being in his logical conclusion regarding the concept of time. Grenz, for instance, understands that the logic in the argument of Parmenides led him to reject “any temporal or spatial distinction in ‘what is,’ and consequently, replaced the concept of time with the ‘eternal now.’”¹¹⁸ By stating that Being (the concept of what “is”) is changeless, Parmenides discarded any temporal elements to its interpretation. That is, anything that represented sequence, time, etc., was incompatible with changeless Being.

Since that time, different philosophers have advanced the discussion of Being as timeless through history. Among these was Plato (427–347 BC),¹¹⁹ one of the foundational proponents of timeless Being in philosophical history. As seen previously, Plato developed the two basic characteristics of how Being is understood timelessly. On the first characteristic, the distinction between what is and what appears, Plato wrote that “the world as perceived by the senses is changing

Raven, and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 251.

¹¹⁸ Grenz, *Named God*, 22. Such conception is developed throughout Parmenidean philosophy, especially in such conclusions: “‘But the one had nothing with such affections.’ ‘No, it had not.’ ‘It has nothing to do with time, and does not exist in time.’ ‘No, that is the result of the argument.’ . . . ‘Then if the one has no participation in time whatsoever, it neither has become nor is it becoming nor is it in the present, and it will never become nor be made to become nor will it be in the future?’ ‘Very true.’” In Plato, *Parmenides*, 249–51.

¹¹⁹ For more on the philosophy of Plato, see Mariás, *History of Philosophy*, 42–58; Richard Kraut, *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Norman R. Gulley, *Plato’s Theory of Knowledge* (London: Methuen, 1962).

constantly.”¹²⁰ The appearance of things to the senses is inherently tied to change, and thus must be distinguished from the changeless nature of Being. This idea leads to the second characteristic: the timeless character of Being. In short, “Plato ascribed logical priority to the forms and elevated the realm of being above the world of becoming.”¹²¹ What results is the theological idea that “God is eternal and His creation is temporal.”¹²²

Even though these Greek philosophical accounts of Being were greatly influential in the development of philosophical thinking, it was the Christian church that inherited and expanded their insights. Grenz writes that “insofar as Christian theologians carried forward the trajectory of ontological reflection bequeathed to them by their Greek philosophical forebears, the fortunes of Being came to be tied to their speculations.”¹²³ It is because of this fusion of Greek thinking with Christian theology in its earliest stages that the issue becomes relevant to biblical interpretation.

Yet what is the influence of a timeless conception of Being upon one’s outlook on reality, and consequently, upon biblical interpretation? To address this

¹²⁰ Grenz, *Named God*, 25.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹²² Gulley, *Systematic Theology: Prolegomena*, 6. Gulley goes on to add Plato’s own words on the difference between divine eternity and human time: for Plato, the world is the divine initiative to make a “moveable image of Eternity.” See Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. R. G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 75–77.

¹²³ Grenz, *Named God*, 34.

question, one must keep in mind the two main characteristics of a timeless conception of Being: the issue of appearance versus reality and the elevation of Being to a timeless realm above a world marked by change.

Much can be said about the impact of the issue of appearance versus reality, seen in the Platonic developments of Being, in hermeneutics. Bridging the Platonic understanding of Being to hermeneutics, Manfred Oeming understands that “in accordance with the Platonic teaching that things are something other than what they appear to be, the undignified actions of the god as well as contradictions within the text are re-interpreted as ethical truths and natural laws.”¹²⁴ In other words, what Oeming attempts to convey here is an idea that flows from this Platonic interpretation of Being and directly affects biblical interpretation—that a timeless understanding of Being allows the interpreter to bypass the literal meaning of the historical biblical text. The idea that the appearance of things is to be distinguished from the reality of things effectively lays the foundation for the following attitude: “Good exegetes must never limit themselves to the vague and superficial literal meaning of the text; the exegete must free herself from such lowly errors and ascend to the true spiritual meaning of the work.”¹²⁵

This conception provided the context for the appearance and lifespan of allegorical interpretations of Scripture, and consequently, to the modern disregard for, or suspicion of, a literal reading of the biblical text. These characteristics

¹²⁴ Manfred Oeming, *Contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2006), 10.

commonly seen even in contemporary hermeneutics, then, have roots in a Platonic conception of Being that creates a dichotomy between appearance and reality.¹²⁶ The Platonic timeless interpretation of Being leads to this hermeneutical principle: things as they appear in history are not things as they are.

This principle—that things as they appear in history are not things as they are—has appeared in many forms throughout the history of philosophy and theology. As noted earlier, even though the location of truth and knowledge shifted from the *object* in objectivist epistemology to the *subject* in subjectivist epistemology, the timeless conception of Being as a macro-hermeneutical presupposition remained intact.

The assumption of Being as timeless at the level of ontology naturally influenced the level of epistemology, of humanity being able to grasp reality altogether. David Hume (1711–1776), for instance, understood that interpreters “cannot have *knowledge* about the transcendent.”¹²⁷ Ronald H. Nash traces the influence of a timeless conception of Being upon biblical interpretation. Nash correctly observes that while Hume had an epistemological gap preventing human subjects from knowing transcendent, timeless things, Kant had his own epistemic barrier to reality: “Kant’s system had the effect of erecting a wall between the world

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹²⁶ *Reality* here implies that which is: in other words, one’s interpretation of Being. In this sense, the senses cannot grasp reality as it is, only as it appears.

¹²⁷ Nash, *Word of God*, 20.

as it appears to us and the world as it really is.”¹²⁸

Every philosophical and theological system has attempted to come to terms with the problem of appearance and reality, or what Kant called the phenomenal world (that which “appears”) and the noumenal world (that which “is”).¹²⁹ This problem affects not only the readers of the biblical text (as to what they can comprehend about the divine through the text), but also the parameters of what is real or possible in the depictions of the biblical text (how the biblical characters comprehended the divine). Because of the ontological assumption of a timeless Being, the resolution to this problem became increasingly complex.¹³⁰

Now I turn to the second Parmenidean-Platonic characteristic of timeless

¹²⁸ Ibid., 27.

¹²⁹ Ibid. In the words of Kant: “We ordinarily distinguish quite well between that which is essentially attached to the intuition of appearances, and is valid for every human in general, and that which pertains to them only contingently because it is not valid for the relation to sensibility in general but only for a particular situation or organization of this or that sense. And thus one calls the first cognition one that represents the object in itself, but the second one only its appearance.” In Immanuel Kant, Paul Guyer, and Allen W. Wood, *Critique of Pure Reason*, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 169.

¹³⁰ Such conceptions of appearance and reality directly influence the objectives of this study, namely, the God-human relationship. Scholars debate the implications of Kant’s division of phenomenal and noumenal realities. For some, Kant “posited the knowledge of God and eternal life for the sake of morality, denying the possibility of any sensual experience of God’s presence.” See Rosemary Radford Ruether, “The Postmodern as Premodern: The Theology of D. Stephen Long,” in *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to Radical Orthodoxy*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marion Grau (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 78. Naturally, the complexity of the problem is not confined to philosophical and theological circles, but extends to the interpretation of religion. See, for instance, Nathan S. Hilberg,

Being: the elevation of what is real above the temporal world marked by change.

Oliver Glanz writes on its implications in the realm of epistemology:

When Being is defined as timeless, the ontological framework consequently conceives ultimate reality as timeless. Timelessness further implies that Being exists independently from the cognitive subject. This means that the interpretation of Being as timeless automatically creates a gap between being and Being, as they do not share the same time frame. This gap, albeit in different ways, exists both in the Platonic and Kantian line of thinking.¹³¹

In order for the reader to have a better grasp of what is presented here, I will review the basic understanding of Being.

The concept of Being is the broadest concept or idea that human minds can reach.¹³² Being is the broadest conception of what is real. The ontology of something is, in short, the description of how that something “is” or “exists.” This difference between Being (as the broadest conception of reality human minds can fathom) and all things real (beings) is crucial for the subsequent analysis of how theologians and exegetes approach the text.

From the time of Plato through the time of Hume and Kant, the same conception of Being as timeless remains. Following the insight of Glanz, what happens when Being is interpreted as timeless is a break between that which is, or reality (Being), and the entities immersed in it (beings). The first consequence of

Religious Truth and Religious Diversity, American University Studies Series VII, 288 (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 22–38.

¹³¹ Glanz, “Investigating the Presuppositional,” 232.

¹³² On the relation of Being to thinking, Canale understands that “the ontological framework stands on the fact that ‘thinking’ and ‘Being’ belong together.” Canale, *Criticism of Theological Reason*, 35.

upholding a timeless view of Being in interpretation is, therefore, that everything in the physical world of change and time will naturally be understood as an analogy to a timeless reality determined a priori. It is this break between the *subject* and the *object* in the structure of reason, maintained in the work of both Plato and Kant by a timeless interpretation of Being, that leads some biblical interpreters knowingly or unknowingly to see the objective realities of the biblical text as analogies of that which is ultimately real in a timeless sense.

In sum, as it pertains to biblical interpretation, the choice of a timeless conception of Being implies that what is depicted in the text is analogical speech in time about a timeless reality beyond time, history, or the world. I will revisit this crucial issue below when I address how a timeless conception of Being influences the understanding of God and God-acts in the interpretation of the text. However, before I continue to examine the implications of a timeless conception of Being upon biblical interpretation, I will briefly turn to an alternative conception of Being: namely, Being as a temporal reality.

Being as Temporal in Interpretation

So far, I have attempted to outline the scope and influence of the conception of Being as timeless throughout the history of philosophy and theology. As I turn to the alternate interpretation of Being as temporal,¹³³ I will focus on two main

¹³³ Richard Rice, when speaking of the traditional, classical view of God, writes, “For most of Christian history, one idea of God and his relation to the world has dominated the church’s perspective, among thinkers and general believers alike, and it prevails in the attitudes of most Christians today.” Richard Rice, “Biblical

representatives of this position: first, the proponents of what is known as open theism, or the open view of God,¹³⁴ and second, Fernando Canale.

In the words of Richard Rice, the open view of God is a “striking alternative”¹³⁵ to the traditional, classical, timeless view of God. Breaking the Platonic conception of a dualistic world split into a sphere of God/ideas and a sphere of space and time, the open view of God claims that “God interacts with His creatures”¹³⁶ in history—that is, in the changeable historical flow of events, and not

Support for a New Perspective,” in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, ed. Clark Pinnock et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 11. This is how Rice introduces his alternate conception of Being and consequently his position on God and how God relates to the world and humanity. He concludes by saying that the traditional view of God leads his relationship to the world to be characterized as “one of mastery and control.” Ibid.

¹³⁴ For an introduction to the open view of God, see Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001); Clark H. Pinnock, ed., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994); John E. Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998); Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000); William Hasker, Thomas Jay Oord, and Dean W. Zimmerman, *God in an Open Universe: Science, Metaphysics, and Open Theism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011). Since traditional evangelical theology is grounded in classical theism, that is, in classical timeless ontology, it is only natural to observe several evangelical thinkers writing in opposition to the open theistic conception: Bruce A. Ware, *Their God Is Too Small: Open Theism and the Undermining of Confidence in God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003); John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth, *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003); John M. Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001). This controversy indicates that the new perspective of God is a formal alternative to classical ontology, although only developed theologically, and not so much philosophically.

¹³⁵ Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” 15.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 15.

from beyond the world. In classical and modern times, God, ideas, and truth were considered inaccessible to humanity. Open theists break from their predecessors at an ontological level as they deal with the doctrine of God, but not as they deal with the conception of Being itself.

William Hasker, outlining the philosophical and theological foundations of the open view, understands that “the doctrine of divine timelessness is not taught in the Bible and does not reflect the way biblical writers understood God.”¹³⁷ In addition, Hasker writes that “there is simply no trace in Scripture of the elaborate metaphysical and conceptual apparatus that is required to make sense of divine timelessness.”¹³⁸ In this sense, proponents of the open view depart from the conception of Being as timeless theologically as they attempt to ground its alternative within the lines of Scripture.

At the outset, then, the open view of God questions the central tenets of the traditional, classical view of God. Its proponents ask the logical questions any thinker would ask in attempting to merge a classical timeless ontology with the biblical text. For instance, “If God is truly timeless, so that temporal determinations of ‘before’ and ‘after’ do not apply to him, then how can God act in time, as the Scriptures say that he does?”¹³⁹ In other words, the proponents of the open view of

¹³⁷ William Hasker, “A Philosophical Perspective,” in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, ed. Clark Pinnock et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 128.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

God ask proper questions as they attempt to relate the biblical material to the ontological assumptions with which it was interpreted for over two millennia.

Yet the critique given by the open view project does not relate to the macro-hermeneutical principle of ontology they seem to overcome via the meso-hermeneutical level of doctrine (from God as timeless to God as temporal). In reality, the criticism is toward the doctrinal implications of such macro-hermeneutical changes, especially as they relate to the doctrine of God's foreknowledge, providence, and human freedom.¹⁴⁰

God's knowledge is a crucial doctrinal issue for open-view thinkers. Clark Pinnock, for instance, believes that the rejection of Being as timeless implies that "God's close engagement with time implies that God does not yet know all that will eventually happen,"¹⁴¹ and "if the future does not yet exist, God may not yet know all of it."¹⁴² The conception of a God who does not know the future is an example of a doctrinal position presented by open-view theologians as part of the temporal view of God. In this sense, God's time is univocal to human time: that is, God experiences the sequence and limitations of time just as humanity does. Both God and humanity

¹⁴⁰ Because this study focuses on the macro-hermeneutical or philosophical issues that influence interpretation, doctrinal issues are out of its scope. But, since there is an overlap between how such macro-hermeneutical conceptions affect biblical interpretation and these doctrinal standpoints, I will provide a preliminary evaluation of the issue.

¹⁴¹ Clark H. Pinnock, "Reconstructing Evangelical Theology: Is The Open View of God a Good Idea?," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 41, no. 2 (2003): 218–19.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 219.

stand equally in the flow of time and history, and because the future is not an object to be known (since it does not exist yet), neither God nor humans can foresee it.

Among the critics of open theism is Fernando Canale, who questions open theists' understanding of what they are discovering through biblical analysis of God's time while sustaining the conception of Being as temporal.¹⁴³ Canale writes:

On the surface the controversy that the open view of God has generated revolves around a small issue within the doctrine of divine providence. Yet, at the deeper hermeneutical level, most open-view theologians have not yet perceived their horizon shift from classical philosophical timelessness to biblical temporality.¹⁴⁴

In short, Canale assesses that the work of open-view theologians revolves around what they believe to be the doctrinal implications of the temporality of God, and not around the importance of uncovering the full potential and philosophical implications of the ontological shift from Being as timeless to Being as temporal.

At this stage, I will review some key characteristics of the open view as an alternate ontological standpoint to the interpretation of Being. First, open-view thinkers believe that a timeless ontology is incompatible with the biblical text, since the Bible itself proposes a temporal conception of God. Second, open-view thinkers draw the implications of this macro-hermeneutical shift at the level of doctrine, with attention to the doctrine of God (foreknowledge, providence, etc.). And finally, open-view thinkers interpret divine time univocally as it relates to human time: that

¹⁴³ Canale attempts to overcome the traditional timeless ontology present in Christian theology through a temporal view of God and reality without resorting to the open view of God. For more on his work as it relates to open theism, see Canale, "Evangelical Theology and Open Theism," 16–34.

is, they see divine and human time as one and the same. The point here is that although open-view thinkers focus on the doctrinal outcome of a possible change at the macro-hermeneutical level of the interpretation of Being, they make no attempt to develop the philosophical underpinnings of such an outcome.

A second alternate position that embraces the possibility of divine temporality grounded on a conception of Being as temporal is found in the work of Fernando Canale. Canale agrees with open-view thinkers that “the timeless horizon has its origin in philosophical speculation and the temporal-historical horizon has its origin in biblical revelation.”¹⁴⁵ Yet, for Canale, the biblical portrayal of Being as temporal should lead evangelical theology deeper than the doctrinal stances present in open-view theology related to the doctrine of God and human freedom. Canale understands that a change at the macro-hermeneutical level of the interpretation of Being should affect “the entire range of Christian theology.”¹⁴⁶

This assertion implies that Canale assesses the problem of timeless Being and God’s time from a different angle than do open-view theologians. For Canale, the uncovering of Being as temporal stems from a macro-hermeneutical (philosophical) level rather than a meso-hermeneutical (theological/doctrinal) or micro-

¹⁴⁴ Fernando L. Canale, “Deconstructing Evangelical Theology?,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 44, no. 1 (2006): 121.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* Even though classical theists, open theists, and Fernando Canale all appeal to Scripture to justify their approaches to the question of Being, they all seem aware that “it is not difficult to surround an idea with biblical quotations.” See Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” 15.

¹⁴⁶ Canale, “Deconstructing Evangelical Theology?,” 122.

hermeneutical (exegetical) one. His focus is on the philosophical macro-hermeneutical structure that inherently influences doctrinal and textual issues. In fact, according to Canale, it is the focus on meso- and micro-hermeneutical issues that brings inevitable disagreements between classical theists and open theists. For Canale, “the micro and meso hermeneutical level where the controversy between classical and open theism takes place is conditioned by the deeper and foundational macro-hermeneutical level.”¹⁴⁷

So far, one could say that Canale agrees with open-view thinkers that the Bible does not endorse a timeless conception of God. Yet, in regard to the philosophical background of this doctrinal standpoint, Canale breaks with them and asserts that the development of such a shift should begin at the macro-hermeneutical level, and only then influence meso- and micro-hermeneutical issues. But how does Canale sustain a temporal conception of Being while avoiding the meso-hermeneutical commitments of open theism that are widely criticized—namely, issues concerning the limitation of God’s knowledge, power, and human freedom?

Canale’s assessment of the biblical text on the question of divine time takes on a broader scope. Canale writes, “We should exercise care not to conceive that God is limited by time as his creatures are. . . . God’s time is not to be conceived as being identical to created time (univocal), or as totally different from it (equivocal), but as analogical to our time.”¹⁴⁸ According to Canale, Scripture does not view God as

¹⁴⁷ Canale, “Evangelical Theology and Open Theism,” 24.

¹⁴⁸ Canale, “Deconstructing Evangelical Theology?,” 123.

experiencing timelessness: rather, it presents a God who “experiences the fullness of time, while we experience it only partially.”¹⁴⁹ In other words, God is not bound to a timeless reality, but “can experience the temporal succession of future-present-past both in the deepness of his divinity and at the limited level of his creation.”¹⁵⁰

In sum, both open-view theologians and Fernando Canale provide an alternate interpretation of Being. While open-view thinkers do not focus on the philosophical underpinnings of their doctrinal position, especially as it relates to the significance of Being as temporal, Canale’s *A Criticism of Theological Reason* provides the philosophical basis for his doctrinal positions. The difference between these approaches, apart from attention to the philosophical interpretation of Being as a basis for doctrinal construction, is the understanding of divine time. While open-view thinkers understand divine time as univocal to human time, Canale views divine time as analogical to human time while carrying univocal and equivocal components.¹⁵¹

These perspectives directly affect thinkers’ approach to the biblical text as well as their interpretations of the dynamic between God and humanity. The edifice of Christian theology has been built on the concept of a timeless God separate from the created world. At the same time, scholars from different backgrounds observe that

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Univocal in the sense that both God and man experience past, present, and future, and equivocal in the sense that God experiences the fullness of time while humans experience it partially, or conditionally, due to sin and mortality.

this perspective is incompatible with biblical depictions of God’s relationship to humanity.

This brief diversion from analysis of the influence of Being as timeless upon interpretation brings the analysis back to where it left off—the relationship of philosophy and theology and its implications for biblical interpretation.

Onto-Theology in Interpretation

Now that some preliminary implications of how timeless and temporal conceptions of Being influence interpretation have been laid out, I will turn briefly to the concept of onto-theology and how some scholars, because of the issues raised above, attempt to depart from the proximity between classical philosophy and Christian theology.¹⁵²

On the origin and implications of onto-theology for the theological method, Canale writes:

Dependence on Greek ontology brought about two paradigmatic changes at the macro-hermeneutical level. The conviction that neo-Platonism properly described the nature of reality led Christian theologians to adopt its views on God’s being and human nature for theological use. Thus the “onto-theo-logical” movement as the basis of the constitution of Christian tradition began. The notions that God’s being and the human soul are not temporal but timeless realities became hermeneutical guides in the construction of Christian theology. They played a decisive macro-hermeneutical role in the interpretation of Scripture (micro hermeneutics) and the construction of Christian doctrines ([meso] hermeneutics).

¹⁵² For more on onto-theology and its implications for philosophy and theology, see Merold Westphal, *Overcoming Onto-Theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001); Jeffrey W. Robbins, *Between Faith and Thought: An Essay on the Ontotheological Condition* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2003); and, as mentioned earlier, Grenz, *Named God*.

They also led in the interpretation, formulation, and application of the theological method.¹⁵³

In short, reliance upon an a priori conception of timeless Being leads to an “ontological” or even “onto-theo-logical” development in interpretation, where the “theological” element is interpreted by the “ontological” conceptions that precede it. That is, the biblical portrayal of God and His acts, the “theological component,” is interpreted and understood in light of a timeless conception of Being, the “ontological component.”

A few biblical scholars have noticed these problems and added insight to the discussion from a biblical point of view. Among them is Jacques B. Doukhan. Doukhan asserts that for the Hebrew mindset, Western conditions of thought are not primary, and it is the theological component, the knowledge of God and His acts, that precedes the ontological component. Doukhan writes: “Hebrew thought does not construct the truth as a philosophical system; rather it is essentially the response to an event. The fact that the Hebrew Bible starts with the event of Creation points to that movement.”¹⁵⁴

For Doukhan and others,¹⁵⁵ then, biblical interpretation should be founded on

¹⁵³ Canale, “Deconstructing Evangelical Theology?,” 109.

¹⁵⁴ Jacques B. Doukhan, *Hebrew for Theologians: A Textbook for the Study of Biblical Hebrew in Relation to Hebrew Thinking* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), 192–93.

¹⁵⁵ Apart from the examples already given in the introduction to this study is G. Ernest Wright, who observes the effects of the systematic control of propositional theology over the text, and concludes that such control is “more Hellenic than

the parameters set forth by the text. It is not onto-logical or even onto-theo-logical, since for both of those approaches the conception of timeless Being is established prior to the interpretation of God and His acts in the biblical text. If the manifestation of God through His acts as recorded in Scripture is primary in the structure of reason, then what is implied in the structure of reason is a possible theo-onto-logical orientation.¹⁵⁷ In other words, theo-ontology implies the precedence and ground of everything in the revelation of God within Scripture. Divine revelation in Scripture provides the foundation and the content to interpret Being, influencing the framework of reason.

Thus far, the evaluation of ontology in biblical interpretation has pointed out the influential character of a timeless conception of Being. Being as timeless creates a dichotomy between Being or things as they are (essence/reality) and beings or things as they appear (matter/appearance), a conception that for some is incompatible with the depictions of God and His acts in the biblical text.

Now, I turn to the problem of how a timeless conception of Being can directly affect the conception of God and God's actions as recorded in the biblical text.

Hebraic." See G. Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts*, Studies in Biblical Theology 8 (London: SCM, 1964), 11.

¹⁵⁷ Yet even the theo-onto-logical designation can carry unverified assumptions that have the potential to be irreconcilable to the biblical text. Again, this is the complexity of the task at hand. Perhaps new terminology must be developed in order to express the biblical correspondent to these designations. Even so, the movement from onto-theology to theo-ontology was heralded by Fernando Canale years ago. See, for instance, Canale, *Critique of Theological Reason*, 388–409. Others such as Stanley Grenz have also used the term "theo-ontology," but used tradition to define the theological component. See Grenz, *Named God*.

God/God-Acts in Interpretation

Introduction

So far, I have outlined the influence of timeless and temporal conceptions of Being upon interpretation at the level of assumptions. This section will concentrate on the influence of the timeless conception of Being upon the interpretation of the biblical text, with a special focus on God and God's actions as depicted by the biblical text.¹⁵⁸ At this stage, I will address only the timeless conception of Being, since it is the one that permeates the majority of contemporary theological and exegetical interpretation.

At the outset, it is important to review the characteristics of a timeless conception of Being delineated previously. First, a timeless conception of Being creates a dichotomy between "beings," that is, things as they appear (phenomenal world), and Being, that is, things as they are (noumenal world). Second, and consequently, a timeless conception of Being raises ultimate reality above the phenomenal world marked by change and time.

The dichotomy of appearance versus reality is made visible in interpretation through an approach to the text that assumes a break between "being" including

¹⁵⁸The idea of a God who acts is not limited to the Hebrew Bible. James A. Wiseman correctly observes that "in all of the major theistic traditions, God is firmly believed to be a God who acts." In James A. Wiseman, *Theology and Modern Science: Quest for Coherence* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 113. Further study would be necessary to outline possible parallels between how God acts in each religious community or theistic tradition and how the biblical text presents the dynamic; such analysis is out of the scope of this study.

texts and “Being” implying reality. In other words, the philosophical dichotomy between being and Being is appropriated in interpretation by an analogical approach. While reality is timeless, the text is temporal. When timeless reality becomes one side of the analogy, the relation between the *subject* in the world and the *object* as timeless inevitably renders the analogy unintelligible, since *subject* and *object* are not on the same platform of intelligibility. The attempt of those who sustain Being as timeless is to interpret things in the world and in texts (beings) through ultimate, timeless reality (Being).

For example, the text of Exod 3 presents God speaking from a burning bush. While the majority of scholars would not contest that this is what the text says, their ontological macro-hermeneutical assumptions prevent them from concluding that the reality depicted in the text occurred as it is narrated within the flow of historical reality. Once the conception of Being is interpreted as timeless, all entities in the world (things as they appear) will be understood analogically in relation to reality (things as they are). And when one assumes a timeless conception of Being, things as they are in the world are not as they are in reality.

This analogical relation between a temporal being (*subject*) and timeless Being (*object*) I will call in this study *unintelligible analogy*. Unintelligible analogy implies (1) that the broadest conception of reality in human minds, Being, determines the flow of interpretation by describing what is real, and (2) that ultimately, with a timeless interpretation of Being, one cannot know “what is” in the text through the text alone, but must resort to external ontological inferences. Thus, a timeless interpretation of Being can distort what the text attempts to say in regard to the God-

human relation, especially if the macro-hermeneutical standpoint of the biblical author is incompatible with an interpretation of Being as timeless. Within the text, Being as timeless creates a possible unintelligible analogy between things as they are and things as they appear, since the text is written within the flow of time and history.

At this stage, it is necessary to further articulate the analogical relation between text (being) and reality (Being), and the possibility that an unintelligible analogy may influence interpretation through a timeless conception of Being.

Langdon Gilkey and the travail of Biblical interpretation

In order to uncover the overall significance of a timeless understanding of Being as it applies to the text through the interpretation of God and God's acts as recorded in the biblical text, I will revisit a criticism of the state of biblical theology heretofore mentioned in passing: Langdon B. Gilkey's renowned article "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language."¹⁵⁹

Gilkey begins his essay by positing what he believes to be not only the

¹⁵⁹ Much of this section will be devoted to Gilkey's evaluation of biblical theology. I give his analysis a central role in this section, in this chapter, and behind the rhetoric of this study as a whole, since, in my understanding, biblical scholars have not overcome the problem Gilkey outlines in this essay. Dan O. Via is at least one other scholar who sees Gilkey's problem as unanswered: "If the act of God is a theological interpretation of history . . . Where does revelation occur? Langdon Gilkey raised this issue in 1961, and we are still dealing with it." In Dan O. Via, *The Revelation of God and/as Human Reception: In the New Testament* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), 28. For more on the effects of Gilkey's criticism in Old Testament theology, see Kaiser, *Old Testament Theology*, 1–4. This study builds upon Gilkey's criticism in attempting to harmonize text and assumptions, since it is at their intersection that the interpretation of the biblical text is greatly affected.

problem, but also “the source of the difficulties and ambiguities which exist in current biblical theology.”¹⁶⁰ As mentioned in the introduction to this study, the problem Gilkey notices in contemporary theology is that it “is half liberal and modern, on the one hand, and half biblical and orthodox, on the other, i.e., its worldview or cosmology is modern, while its theological language is biblical and orthodox.”¹⁶¹ According to Gilkey, what triggers this dichotomy is what he calls the “scientific interpretation of observable events,”¹⁶² an outlook that leads to the notion of a “causal continuum of space-time experience”¹⁶³ that inherently negates the possibility of supernatural events (like those depicted in the biblical text).

The criticism that Gilkey sets forth here is directly tied to the issue at hand—the influence of the principle of ontology upon interpretation. One way of looking at his criticism of the bipolar approach to the text—liberal/modern in cosmology, and biblical/orthodox in language—can be based on the dichotomy between phenomenal and noumenal, between things as they appear and things as they are. The scientific-modernistic mindset that inevitably operates within a timeless interpretation of Being cannot endorse supernatural elements in the world, or, consequently, in the biblical text.

Gilkey correctly outlines the results of holding to such assumptions in

¹⁶⁰ Gilkey, “Cosmology, Ontology,” 194.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

interpretation and to the “validity one assigns to biblical narratives and so to the way one understands their meaning”¹⁶⁴ as he writes:

Suddenly a vast panoply of divine deeds and events recorded in Scripture are no longer regarded as having actually happened. Not only, for example, do the six days of creation, the historical fall in Eden, and the flood seem to us historically untrue, but even more the majority of divine deeds in the biblical history of the Hebrew people become what we choose to call symbols rather than plain old historical facts. To mention only a few: Abraham’s unexpected child; the many divine visitations; the words and directions to the patriarchs; the plagues visited on the Egyptians; the pillar of fire; the parting of the seas; the verbal deliverance of covenantal law on Sinai; the strategic and logistic help in the conquest; the audible voice heard by the prophets; and so on—all these “acts” vanish from the plane of historical reality and enter the neverland of “religious interpretation” by the Hebrew people.¹⁶⁵

According to Gilkey, this denial of the factual historicity of the divine acts recorded in the biblical text shifted the theological language from univocal (literal) to analogical (proportional meaning).¹⁶⁶ The choice of approaching the text with a scientific mindset implicitly carries the interpretation of Being as timeless, and in this way, the analogical meaning in theological language was established upon the ontological break between *subject* and *object*. In other words, assuming a timeless conception of Being and a dichotomy between beings and Being results in unintelligible analogy.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 195.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 195–96.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 196.

¹⁶⁷ Such a conclusion is also seen in more scientific approaches to biblical interpretation, such as the views of scientist-theologian Arthur Peacocke. He writes: “God’s own Being is distinct from anything we can possibly know in the world, then God’s nature is ineffable and will always be inaccessible to us, so that we have only the resources of analogy to depict how God might influence events.” See Arthur

A. Berkeley Mickelsen correctly assesses the implications of an unintelligible analogical approach to the biblical text when he comments on Gilkey's conclusions:

Those who use biblical language analogically rather than univocally are often not very clear about what they are doing. If they do not know what one term of the analogy means, what God really did or say, then the analogy is unintelligible. It is not analogical language but rather equivocal language (different unrelated meanings)!¹⁶⁸

A timeless conception of Being leads into a dichotomy in one's outlook on reality, between things as they appear and things as they are, and this presupposition leads interpreters of Scripture to understand the text in analogy to an ultimate timeless reality that by definition they cannot know. Mickelsen correctly points out that such an approach runs the risk of being not only unclear, but unintelligible when one does not grasp at least one side of the analogy.¹⁶⁹

Peacocke, "The Sound of Sheer Silence: How Does God Communicate with Humanity?" in *Neuroscience and the Person: Scientific Perspectives on Divine Action*, ed. Robert John Russel (Vatican City State: Vatican Observatory Publications, 1999), 235. The inconsistency in logic here is seen in Peacocke's move from correctly describing the unknowable nature of God to applying the principles mentioned above to God's influence upon events. He equates nature (timeless) with the issue of divine action in the world.

¹⁶⁸ A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963), 60.

¹⁶⁹ Alan J. Torrance summarizes the theological situation of the past and present as he writes: "Theology has traditionally rejected univocal predication (which leads to anthropomorphism) and equivocal predication (which implies agnosticism) in favor of analogy as a means of referring to God." See Alan J. Torrance, "Analogy," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al. (London: SPCK, 2005), 39. So, the risk here seems to be a failed analogical understanding of the text that leads to an equivocal approach to its content and anthropomorphism. Torrance adds: "If we assume that the word 'love' is used univocally of humans and also God, we seem to risk the charge of anthropomorphic projection—treating God as if 'he' were simply another human

What results, then, from a timeless conception of Being is actually an equivocal understanding of the text: one in which timeless content or truth that cannot be understood due to its timeless nature is deposited within the historical wrapping of the text. In other words, holding to a timeless conception of Being leads to an analogical approach to the text that renders the reality of the text, with its supernatural events and divine speeches, unintelligible. In the end, what remains is an equivocal reading of the text as it pertains to supernatural events and anything that contradicts timeless ontology or scientific reasoning.

I agree with Mickelsen's assessment that what Gilkey does in his article is put

creature." Ibid., 39. The analogical understanding espoused by Torrance and the minds behind the theological interpretation of Scripture has its roots in the thinking of Thomas Aquinas. Torrance himself traces the analogical approach to Scripture to him: "In Western thought, this theory has been associated primarily with the thought of Thomas Aquinas as interpreted by Cardinal Cajetan." Ibid. This, of course, supports the understanding that the analogical approach to Scripture is grounded on classical ontology, and consequently, on a timeless conception of Being. Furthermore, it is crucial to point out that neither Aquinas nor Augustine "knew Hebrew." See John C. Collins, *The God of Miracles: An Exegetical Examination of God's Action in the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 65. Thus far the term *analogy* has been treated in two different spheres: the first ontological, in Canale's assessment of divine temporality, and the second epistemological, in relation to the influence of timeless Being upon the formation and interpretation of the text. These are not to be merged together. Canale does not hold a timeless view of Being, so he understands that the "text itself" can provide a window into reality, since it is not in distinction to the historical dimension of the *subject*. In this manner, he sees that when one interprets Being as historical, the natural analogical relationship between God, world, and man can be understood by uncovering the point of view of the biblical author concerning what God has revealed (this would be an "intelligible" analogy, contrasting with the "unintelligible" analogy of modernity and postmodernity). Even so, one of the problems in reaching a clear biblical understanding of Being is developing terminology that encompasses the biblical reality without the preconceptions that the common philosophical terms carry.

“forth a fervent plea for clear thinking,”¹⁷⁰ since ambiguity in theological language “is a credit to no one.”¹⁷¹ Yet there is a deeper conclusion in Gilkey’s essay still to be addressed. Gilkey ends his article by stating that “biblical theology must take cosmology and ontology more seriously,”¹⁷² and adds: “A contemporary understanding of ancient Scriptures depends as much on a careful analysis of our present presuppositions as it does on being learned in the religion and faith of the past.”¹⁷³

These points summarize the intention of this study to focus on both the ontological assumptions within the presuppositional framework of interpreters and the necessity to expose those assumptions as they relate to the biblical text. Yet the question at this stage is, how do interpreters deal with such ontological standpoints in biblical interpretation? How do they harmonize timeless Being with the dichotomy of things as they appear and things as they are?

To address these questions, I will analyze the work of two representative scholars from different time periods who attempted to bridge the gap between appearance and reality.

Demythologizing, remythologizing, and God-acts

Throughout history, biblical interpretation has been directly affected by a

¹⁷⁰ Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, 60.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² Gilkey, “Cosmology, Ontology,” 203.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 205.

timeless conception of Being that leads to the possibility of unintelligible analogy. Among the thinkers who have attempted to bring intelligibility between things as they are and things as they appear in the biblical text is Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976).¹⁷⁴

Bultmann correctly pointed out that “no exegesis is without presuppositions,”¹⁷⁵ yet he was not known for harmonizing the biblical portrayal of reality with the assumptions of the interpreter. Bultmann’s late work operated from an existentialist perspective because “from this perspective he sees what is relevant to the needs of modern man.”¹⁷⁶ This reliance upon existential philosophy led Bultmann to the project for which he became primarily known—the demythologizing of Scripture.

For Bultmann, mythology in its broadest sense was “anything in the Bible which is contradictory to a modern scientific world-view.”¹⁷⁷ This perspective led

¹⁷⁴ For more on Rudolf Bultmann’s work, see Bultmann and Ogden, *New Testament and Mythology*; Roger Johnson, *The Origins of Demythologizing: Philosophy and Historiography in the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (Leiden: Brill, 1974); Paul Ricoeur, “Preface to Bultmann,” in Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (London: Continuum, 2004), 377–96; Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 166–84.

¹⁷⁵ Bultmann and Ogden, *New Testament and Mythology*, 145.

¹⁷⁶ Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, 66.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 68. This premise is still prevalent today within biblical interpretation. Some see Ernst Troeltsch as one of the key players in this regard, since Troeltsch “proposed three principles, and these became axiomatic in the New Quest. First, he insisted on the principle of doubt—that is, that all statements of an historical nature are open to doubt and require corroborative evidence if they are to be accepted. The second was the principle of analogy—that courses of events in the ancient world followed the same internal logic as events in the modern world. . . . Third, Troeltsch

Bultmann to conclude that “the world-picture of the New Testament is a mythical world picture.”¹⁷⁸ Operating from a dichotomized view of appearance and reality—a perspective resulting from a timeless conception of Being—Bultmann considered the things of this world (appearances) to be appropriately interpreted by the scientific method. For Bultmann, the scientific method was how one arrived at some intelligibility within the unintelligible analogy between an interpreter in the flow of history and time and an object that is conceived as timeless. In other words, Bultmann assumed the Platonic cosmological dichotomy, and dealt with its paradox by resorting to science and existentialism¹⁷⁹ in order to arrive at the meaning of the biblical text.

In his project of demythologizing Scripture, Bultmann was faced with the question of whether “the New Testament proclamation has truth that is independent

(following the physical laws devised by Isaac Newton) posited the principle of correlation, by which he understood that every event in the natural world is the result of a natural cause.” In Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 59.

¹⁷⁸ Bultmann and Ogden, *New Testament and Mythology*, 1.

¹⁷⁹ Along with scientific methodology, as mentioned previously, Bultmann was influenced by existential philosophy. Notice how Mickelsen comments on the presuppositions that Bultmann brought to his demythologizing project: “Bultmann saw clearly that the interpreter must surrender any pretense of neutrality and come to the text fully recognizing his own attitude and the framework of thought in which he operates. The earlier Bultmann had as his own framework the tradition of the Church and the Church’s faith. But the Bultmann of twenty-five or thirty years later talks about ‘pre-understanding.’ The current framework for his ‘pre-understanding’ is existentialist philosophy. . . . Because he thinks that from this perspective he sees what is relevant to the needs of modern man.” Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, 66.

of the mythical world picture.”¹⁸⁰ If the biblical text had truth beyond the historical-mythical “wrapping,” the task of theology would be to “demythologize the Christian proclamation.”¹⁸¹ Denying the reality of the mythical world-picture of the New Testament (and the Old Testament), including heaven, hell, angels, and divine speech and acts, was the object of this demythologizing effort. For Bultmann, if the world-picture of the Bible was maintained, this would lead to the sacrifice of one’s own intellect.¹⁸² In Bultmann’s words:

Any satisfaction of the demand [of maintaining the biblical world picture without criticism] would be a forced *sacrificium intellectus*, and any of us who would make it would be peculiarly split and untruthful. For we would affirm for our faith or religion a world picture that our life otherwise denied. Criticism of the New Testament is simply a given with modern thinking as it has come to us through our history.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 3.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² The tendency within biblical scholarship was to assume a scientific perspective that, following Troetsch’s influence, understood the world in causal terms. Concerning this presupposition, Mickelsen writes that such “assumption is only a presupposition that [the interpreter’s] experience is the only possible experience and represents the only experience of any other person or groups of persons who lived on this planet. The scholar who assumes this has made his empirical experience and that of his contemporaries the sole criterion of what is possible.” In Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, 67. Gilkey understands that this tendency is still prevalent; he writes that the “causal nexus in space and time which Enlightenment science and philosophy introduced into the Western mind . . . is also assumed by modern theologians and scholars; since they participate in the modern world of science both intellectually and existentially, they can scarcely do anything else.” In Gilkey, “Cosmology, Ontology,” 195.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 3–4. This suspicion toward the depictions of the biblical text, also known as methodological doubt, is another indication of a reliance on scientific methodology to determine the epistemological and ontological framework of Reason. While the scholar who does not submit to it sacrifices his intellect, the implementation of the principle in biblical interpretation causes another death—the death of God. Ted Peters writes that the “principle of doubt has become the cutting

Here one is confronted with the same problem that Gilkey encountered in his evaluation of the “travail” in biblical theology.

In the background of Bultmann’s project is the dichotomy between things as they appear and things as they are. Bultmann’s interest is arriving at the truthful aspects of the Gospel proclamation, and it is science and existential philosophy that sift truth from myth in the biblical text, bringing the demythologizing project to its full completion—a biblical text and faith devoid of divine actions or speeches.¹⁸⁴ The

edge of modern critical thinking The hermeneuts of suspicion, in short, accuse religious people of having a false consciousness, of projecting their own quite mundane self-interests onto God and heaven, where they do not belong. This critical consciousness accounts for the so-called death of God.” Ted Peters, *God—The World’s Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 14. This Cartesian principle is still quite influential in biblical interpretation today. Along with a conception of timeless Being that leads to unintelligibility in interpretation, some observe that the implementation of the principle of doubt in biblical interpretation leads to “a mind emptied of rationality and order.” Leon O. Hyson, *Through Faith to Understanding: Wesleyan Essays on Vital Christianity* (Lexington, KY: Emeth, 2005), 32. Apart from the scientific use of the principle of doubt that leads to suspicion toward the text, I cannot ignore that “Husserl’s call to return ‘to the things themselves’ amounts to a bracketing of the real, to a return to the things as they appear to consciousness, the things as phenomena, as they are perceived by consciousness” and that “such a view is bound up with a principle of doubt towards the reality of things.” See Carole Bourne-Taylor and Ariene Mildenberg, eds., *Phenomenology, Modernism, and Beyond* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), 25. In this sense, apart from its scientific implementation in interpretation, the principle of doubt might still be useful when applied to the human subject, as this study proposes.

¹⁸⁴ The influence of science upon the interpretation of Scripture is not first observed in the works of Bultmann, of course. Mark. C. Gignilliat correctly notes that the work of Benedict Spinoza (1632–1677) is where this assumption was first openly implemented. Spinoza assumed that “the Bible is a product of human history and evolution and is to be read in the light of its natural history.” In Gignilliat, *Brief History*, 15.

possibility of the biblical text itself presenting the content in which to interpret Being on a historical-temporal basis in order to render the analogy intelligible is inconceivable to Bultmann.

A second scholar who has attempted to deal with the gap between things as they are and appear, sustained by a timeless conception of Being, is Kevin J. Vanhoozer. Vanhoozer's *Remythologizing Theology*¹⁸⁵ can be seen as a contemporary attempt to overcome Bultmann's project; it deals with the same ontological and interpretative issues.¹⁸⁶

Vanhoozer begins his book by introducing the text of 2 Pet 1:16 to establish a clear distinction between the gospel and myth.¹⁸⁷ Vanhoozer departs from the notion of the gospel as "myth" (seen in the work of Bultmann) and tries to rescue the idea that the biblical content is "mythos," via Paul Ricoeur's work.¹⁸⁸ For Vanhoozer,

¹⁸⁵ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁸⁶ In the beginning of his book, Vanhoozer wrestles with the implications of a timeless ontology and its effect upon biblical interpretation as he writes that from "the standpoint of remythologizing theology, the danger in affirming God's timelessness is that it tends to dedramatize or demythosize the biblical accounts of God's dialogical action." Thus, Vanhoozer attempts to "suggest a possible way forward through the conceptual thickets pertaining to the acts of the eternal God in human time." *Ibid.*, 75. This is exactly the issue at hand: how to bring intelligibility into unintelligible analogy? How does an interpreter in the flow of history and time grasp the "eternal truth" within a text that is also conditioned by history and time—not to mention the textual depictions of how God acts and speaks themselves?

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁸⁸ Vanhoozer writes: "The present work develops Ricoeur's suggestion in a communicative direction: the mythos of Jesus Christ renders intelligible the field of triune communicative praxis." *Ibid.*, 5.

“Mythos is Aristotle’s term for dramatic plot: a unified course of action that includes a beginning, middle, and end.”¹⁸⁹ Vanhoozer appropriates Aristotle’s term *mythos* to refer to the intelligible dramatic framework of the gospel (and God’s actions through Jesus), in place of Bultmann’s notion of myth.

Vanhoozer addresses similar issues to Bultmann, relating to two distinct points that readers by now will recognize. First, he understands that in a post-Kantian philosophical environment, it is natural for Bultmann to understand that “God is neither an object that can be known nor a being that can be experienced in space-time.”¹⁹⁰ Second, Vanhoozer understands that the project of demythologizing “is best viewed as a strategy for translating biblical statements about God into existential statements about human beings.”¹⁹¹

In this, Vanhoozer has identified some of the ontological elements presented thus far: the influence of a timeless interpretation of Being upon epistemology, what is knowable about God, and its inevitable effect upon the biblical text and interpretation. Yet what is the solution to the problem, according to Vanhoozer? How can one understand biblical language that includes supernatural divine acts and speeches while assuming the contemporary scientific mindset? Here, Vanhoozer departs from Bultmann’s project and proposes his “re-mythologizing” project.

Vanhoozer writes:

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 15.

Remythologizing conceives the God-world relation in primarily communicative rather than causal terms. Better: it scrutinizes language about causality in order to bring out a communicative sense to which the church has not sufficiently attended. The category of communication applies analogically to God's relation to the natural world but comes into its own in God's relation to humanity whose paradigm is the God-man, Jesus Christ.¹⁹²

Here, for the first time, Vanhoozer outlines his understanding of the framework within which God relates to the world and consequently to humanity. According to Vanhoozer, this framework is conceived not in causal terms, but in communicative terms. So, even though Vanhoozer attempts to bring intelligibility into the analogical conception of reality through the exchange of myth for mythos, he is still tied to its ontological roots. To determine a priori that the text places any causal activity in secondary terms as he emphasizes the communicative activity implies that Being is interpreted as timeless, and that the realities of the text cannot be grasped as they read—with divine action in the world. In other words, Vanhoozer attempts to bring intelligibility to an unintelligible analogical framework sustained by a timeless ontology via divine communication.

Following the work of William Alston,¹⁹³ Vanhoozer advocates the idea that “we may ascribe action to God in a literal or partial univocal manner, for there is a

¹⁹² For a full perspective of Vanhoozer's demythologizing project, see Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 26–30. For the purposes of this study, I will highlight only the points that deal with the topic of the God-human relation.

¹⁹³ William Alston, “Divine and Human Action,” in *Divine & Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism*, ed. Thomas Morris (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

common core to the concepts of human and divine agency.”¹⁹⁴ If God acts in only a partial univocal manner, this relation cannot accurately be termed “partially univocal,” but analogical. In this, Vanhoozer is correct, since God does not act only univocally to humanity (as seen in the discussion of divine time). The question is whether the analogy he proposes will be sustained by a timeless ontology (without divine action as depicted by the text), thus becoming unintelligible analogy, or by a temporal ontology (with the possibility of divine action as depicted by the text), where it is possible to make sense of the analogy, since *subject* and *object* relate within the same ontological framework.

Vanhoozer answers the question while articulating his understanding of divine speech in Scripture. First he resorts to arguments that will make an unintelligible analogical reading of Scripture logical and intelligible. He understands that in trying to make sense of audible divine speech in the text, there is “no need to consider the movement of vocal chords a necessary component of speech,”¹⁹⁵ since God “does not have vocal chords.”¹⁹⁶ Vanhoozer then arrives at his conclusion:

God may be able to bring about sound, or communicative action, through other,

¹⁹⁴ Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 58.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* Vanhoozer goes on to add: “So the way in which God speaks will not be exactly parallel to human speaking. . . . It is therefore legitimate to say ‘God (literally) speaks (because he performs communicative acts via words, which is what ‘speaking’ ordinarily means) even though ‘speaks’ is not being used univocally with regard to God and human beings (because the mode of God’s speaking may be extraordinary). The creator-creature distinction serves as a standing reminder not to apply terms univocally to God, but it presents no obstacle to affirming that God acts.” *Ibid.*, 210–11.

secondary means. Perhaps it would be preferable, then, to predicate “being an agent” and “being a speaker” of God analogically. There is a true but only partial, appropriate but only approximate correspondence between divine and human speaking.¹⁹⁷

While it is important to sustain the distinction between Creator and creature, one cannot negate the textual depiction of what took place. In denying the univocal import of divine and human speech, Vanhoozer dismisses what the text is saying in regards to Divine speech. Thus, Vanhoozer nuances the idea of Divine speech in terms of other means of communication, since it is not possible to affirm that a sound was heard when God spoke.¹⁹⁸

For Vanhoozer, then, what is literal in the text is the idea that God does act or speak. Here Vanhoozer keeps that which is in his reach (meaning what is allowed by a timeless presupposition of Being) to maintain the biblical language and depiction of what is taking place, yet still nuancing its meaning for the sake of relevance to the modern mindset.¹⁹⁹ He attempts to maintain the idea that God did speak, while articulating a modern understanding of its possibility in the background of a timeless

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 58.

¹⁹⁸ This leads Vanhoozer to conclude: "we could say that God communicated by causing the disciples to hear words inside their heads." Vanhoozer, "Theological Commentary and 'The Voice from Heaven': Exegesis, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Interpretation," in Stanley E. Porter, and Eckhard J. Schnabel, eds., *On the Writings of the New Testament Commentaries: Festschrift for Grant R. Osborne on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 289.

¹⁹⁹ What I mean here is Gilkey's criticism: half orthodox and half modern. In conservative evangelicalism, Vanhoozer is the one who comes closest to a solution to the paradox, yet he still operates under a timeless conception of Being via tradition that forces him to address these issues in analogical terms, bypassing the depictions in the text itself.

ontology: God spoke, but not in an audible manner. The dichotomy between appearance and reality in Vanhoozer's remythologizing project is left unchallenged on macro-hermeneutical grounds.

Vanhoozer accommodates his understanding of divine acts and speeches in the interpretation of the biblical text through a method that is now receiving close attention in biblical studies—speech-act theory.²⁰⁰ While Bultmann resorted to science and existential philosophy to sift through the appearance and the reality depicted in the biblical text, Vanhoozer resorts to modern linguistics, i.e., speech-act theory.²⁰¹ It is important to note that I side with Vanhoozer on his basic premise that the “fundamental issue in the doctrine of Scripture concerns the manner of God's

²⁰⁰ Vanhoozer addresses speech-act theory in more detail in his book *First Theology*. For more on the birth and development of the method, see Richard S. Briggs, “Speech-Act Theory,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al. (London: SPCK, 2005), 763–66; John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²⁰¹ Bultmann's guiding principle is grounded in a macro-hermeneutical framework, that is, in a scientific worldview. For Vanhoozer and other theologians, the guiding principle is found in a micro-hermeneutical framework that applies to exegetical work. The problem with the latter is that it is inevitably subjective. The manner in which one uses speech-act theory determines the outcome of the analysis. Speech-act theory is not exempt from macro-hermeneutical principles acting as presuppositions, and used in the wrong manner, it can be a new way of working under the rule of JEDP (source criticism) and other critical approaches to the text. For Vanhoozer, speech-act theory is equated to the manner in which God is present in the world. He writes, “The principal mode in which God is ‘with’ his people is through speech-acts.” See Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 149. Vanhoozer's thesis of divine speech acts would also work better under a different ontology. To speak of a God who interacts with humanity through speech-acts while holding to a timeless conception of God and reality is, to say the least, counterproductive.

involvement in the words of Scripture and thus the manner of God's activity in the world."²⁰² So, to clarify how Vanhoozer moves his understanding of God's relation to the world and humanity into the interpretation of Scripture, it is important to demonstrate how that takes place in speech-act theory.

In short, speech-act theory attempts to make a distinction between that which is said (locutionary act) and the significance/meaning of the saying (illocutionary act). Jeannine K. Brown writes, "Speech-act theory distinguishes a saying (locution) from the force of that saying or what it does (illocution) and the response of a hearer (perlocution) to the locution and its illocution."²⁰³ Even so, speech-act theory runs the risk of not solving the dilemma of the intelligibility of the textual analogy between things as they appear in the text and the reality behind the appearance. This is because the interpretation of the "meaning" of a divine saying, or "illocution," will always be, to a great extent, under the control of the interpreter. It is up to the interpreter to decide, under the influence of macro-hermeneutical assumptions established a priori, what the univocal saying of Scripture means (locution) and accomplishes (illocution); the guiding pre-understanding that stems from a timeless ontology is that it cannot mean what it says.²⁰⁴

²⁰² Ibid., 129.

²⁰³ Brown, *Scripture as Communication*, 111.

²⁰⁴ Here I arrive again at the original philosophical problem of the appearance against the reality. The dichotomy created through a timeless conception of Being that leads the interpreter to understand the text through unintelligible analogy is appropriated by speech-act theory through locutions, illocutions, etc. As mentioned earlier, this method is free of macro-hermeneutical verifications, and in turn, can become another form of source criticism (JEDP) at the level of literary criticism (or

Vanhoozer is the one who comes closest to the possibility that the biblical accounts concerning God's actions, including but not limited to speech-acts, are not timeless. This is evident when he writes that "God's eternity is the form of his own life and hence the medium of his own being in communicative act" and "as such it is not timeless."²⁰⁵ Yet Vanhoozer, like the open-view thinkers (but in a different manner), does not apply this discovery to the level of Being itself. By sustaining a timeless ontology, he cannot escape unintelligible analogy. For Vanhoozer, in the end, "time is not the contradiction but as it were the finite analogy of eternity."²⁰⁶ Consequently, because we can only know one side of the analogy, God's actions become inevitably unintelligible. In the end, Vanhoozer recognizes that "Langdon Gilkey criticized the biblical theology movement for being only half orthodox and half modern. . . . I have precisely the same problem."²⁰⁷

Both Bultmann and Vanhoozer attempt to maintain the language of the text, but struggle to express the reality of which the text speaks. For Bultmann, it is science and existential philosophy that sift through what is relevant and truthful in the text, but for Vanhoozer it is the idea of God as a communicative agent in the

even communicative criticism). In speech-act theory, speech-acts are partly univocal, in that all speech-acts have locution/illocution/perlocution. Yet the issue here is not whether speech-act theory takes into account univocal elements in the text, but whether the bridge between the locution and illocution is equipped to unpack the reality expressed in the text itself.

²⁰⁵ Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 254.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 150.

context of speech-act theory. While Bultmann denies the univocal depiction of the reality implied in the text, Vanhoozer attempts to clarify what it means or accomplishes. Even so, for both, the ontological foundations that shape their approach to the text assume a timeless conception of Being creating a dichotomy between appearance (text) and reality (the reality the text points to).

From these representative examples, one can perceive that both liberal and conservative scholars who assume a timeless ontology are caught in the same paradox—the paradox of dealing with unintelligible analogy. At the same time, the assumptions that shape their approach to the text are left unchallenged on their macro-hermeneutical, ontological grounds: Being continues to be interpreted as timeless.

Summary

This section outlined how ontological premises influence the interpretation not only of the text, but also of the interpretation of God and God-acts. Again, these conceptions uncover the macro-hermeneutical principles at work within the presuppositional frameworks of biblical scholars and theologians as they touch on the notion of how God relates to humanity. First, I provided an introduction to the concept of timelessness and how it carries two basic assumptions that influence interpretation: the dichotomy between things as they appear and things as they are, and the understanding of Being as timeless. I also briefly outlined the two main alternatives to a timeless conception of Being, namely the open view and the work of Fernando Canale, along with their similarities and differences.

Second, I attempted to demonstrate how these basic ontological assumptions

are incorporated and addressed in biblical interpretation. Knowing that a timeless ontology creates a dichotomy between appearance and reality, both liberal and conservative scholars who assume such an ontology face the difficulty of attempting to grasp an unintelligible analogy. I used the examples of Bultmann and Vanhoozer to sketch in broad strokes how scholars wrestle with this dichotomy in interpretation. For Bultmann, the divine acts as they appear in the text are dismissed through a scientific and existential approach, while for Vanhoozer, the divine acts and speeches are explained within the parameters of speech-act theory.

The assumption of timeless Being, then, directly affects not only interpretation, but how scholars perceive the meaning of a text that points to how God relates to humanity through both act and speech.²⁰⁸

The Principle of History

Introduction

So far, this study has focused on the first two components of the macro-hermeneutical notion of how God relates to humanity: the principle of epistemology (humanity's ability to know) and the principle of ontology (God and God-acts). This section will examine the third and final component in the God-human relationship structure: the principle of the nature of history. This principle, present in the presuppositional frameworks of biblical interpreters, relates to the locus or context in

²⁰⁸ Nicholas T. Saunders is right in affirming that “of all the challenges science has raised for theology, perhaps the most fundamental is that it has brought into

which God relates to humanity, according to the biblical text. Whether scholars validate or deny such a possibility, they do so under a particular conception of the nature of history established a priori. To this principle I now turn.²⁰⁹

The nature of history has been the object of struggle and debate in Old Testament interpretation and theology since its inception,²¹⁰ and remains “the key defining feature of modern-era readings of biblical and other texts.”²¹¹ Because the term *history* will be frequently used throughout this study, some definitions are in order.²¹² The term *history* will be understood in this study following the general

question the doctrine of divine action.” See Nicholas T. Saunders, “Does God Cheat at Dice? Divine Action and Quantum Possibilities,” *Zygon* 35 (2000): 518.

²⁰⁹ Because the nature of history is central to the evaluation of the historical-critical and grammatical methods in the next chapter, this section will provide only an introduction to the issues so that they might be fully explored then.

²¹⁰ For the history and development of Old Testament theology, see Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 11–53; Gerhard F. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), Ben C. Ollenburger, “From Timeless Ideas to the Essence of Religion: Method in Old Testament Theology Before 1939,” in *The Flowering of Old Testament Theology: A Reader in Twentieth-Century Old Testament Theology, 1930–1990*, ed. Ben C. Ollenburger, Elmer A. Martens, and Gerhard F. Hasel (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 3–19. On the interpretative development of the Pentateuch in particular, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Pentateuch,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 181–97; R. Norman Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 12–28; Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 11–28.

²¹¹ Richard S. Briggs and Joel N. Lohr, *A Theological Introduction to the Pentateuch: Interpreting the Torah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 9.

²¹² The challenge here is to deal with the reality that although the term is commonly used, “it is not easily defined.” See J. Maxwell Miller, “Reading the Bible Historically: The Historian’s Approach,” in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction*

definition given by the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga, due to its scope. Huizinga's definition encompasses both the contemplative and literal forms history can take. He writes: "History is the intellectual form in which a civilization renders account to itself of the past."²¹³

With this definition of history in mind, it is imperative to nuance at least two basic ways in which the term is used. The first, history as historiography, relates to the written record of the past; the second, history as historical process, relates to what actually happened to people, their actions and suffering.²¹⁴ While historiography is the product of reflection upon a historical process that has passed, the historical process itself is beyond the grasp of any historian. This reality inevitably allows historiography to be influenced, to some extent, by the perspectives and biases of historians.

The original division between historical-critical approaches to the text and the biblical theology movement, as two disciplines, revolved around the limits of what

to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application, ed. Stephen R. Haynes and Steven L. McKenzie (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 11. This reality is also expressed by Craig Bartholomew as he writes that "history has been, and continues to be, a hotly contested area in biblical studies, and theologians and biblical scholars express a diversity of views on these issues." See Craig G. Bartholomew et al., eds., *"Behind" the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 2.

²¹³ Johan Huizinga, "A Definition of the Concept of History," in *Philosophy and History: Essays presented to Ernst Cassirer*, ed. R. Klibansky and H. Paton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 9, quoted in J. J. Finkelstein, "Mesopotamian Historiography," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107, no. 6, Cuneiform Studies and the History of Civilization (December 20, 1963): 462.

historians were able to do. Notice how Ben C. Ollenburger addresses the issue as he writes on the debates between Walter Eichrodt and Otto Eissfeldt concerning the division between historical and theological approaches to the text. Ollenburger asserts that Eissfeldt was in favor of a distinction between the disciplines, since for him Old Testament theology could not be a historical inquiry “because it is concerned with what is timelessly or abidingly true.”²¹⁵

As for Eichrodt’s response, he understood that “historical investigation *can* get to the essence of Old Testament religion.”²¹⁶ But in order for the historian to reach this goal, Eichrodt had to change the understanding of “essence” from “timeless truth” to “the deepest meaning of its religious thought world that historical investigation can recover.”²¹⁷

As outlined previously, the understanding that the biblical text as a historical document is only a wrapping²¹⁸ for the essence or truth results from a timeless conception of reality. This reality formed the background of the original debates and discussions concerning the roles of historical and theological approaches to the biblical text. Regardless of the views of Eissfeldt or Eichrodt, the roles of historical

²¹⁴ For more, see David Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective of Historical Thought* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2000), 1.

²¹⁵ Ollenburger, “From Timeless Ideas,” 18.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ For more on the idea of text as wrapping or “husk,” see Peter J. Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 1–34.

analysis and theology were already established on a timeless ontological platform.

Apart from the influence of the ontological principle upon the task of the historian in biblical interpretation, the historian was also conditioned by scientific principles, as briefly mentioned thus far. Christoph O. Schroeder observes that “the historical method analyzes historical texts and traditions according to the principles of *critique, analogy, and correlation*.”²¹⁹

Van Austin Harvey traces the threefold framework that conditions the work of the historian back to Ernst Troeltsch.²²⁰ Concerning the meaning and implications of these principles, Harvey writes:

[Troeltsch] argued that critical historical inquiry rests on three interrelated principles: (1) the principle of criticism, by which he meant that our judgments about the past cannot simply be classified as true or false but must be seen as claiming only a greater or lesser degree of probability and as always open to revision; (2) the principle of analogy, by which he meant that we are able to make judgments of probability only if we presuppose that our own present experience is not radically dissimilar to the experience of past persons; and (3) the principle of correlation, by which he meant that the phenomena of man’s historical change can take place at any one point in the historical nexus without effecting a change in all that immediately surrounds it. Historical explanation, therefore, necessarily takes the form of understanding an event in terms of its antecedents and consequences, and no event can be isolated from its historically conditioned time and space.²²¹

Harvey also adds that Troeltsch himself “understood that the principles outlined

²¹⁹ Christoph O. Schroeder, *History, Justice, and the Agency of God: A Hermeneutical and Exegetical Investigation on Isaiah and Psalms* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 19. By “critique” Schroeder implies what I have called “doubt” previously in this study: that is, the interpretative prerogative to evaluate truth from error on the basis of scientific reason.

²²⁰ Van Austin Harvey, *The Historian and the Believer: The Morality of Historical Knowledge and Christian Belief* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 15.

above were “incompatible with traditional Christian belief and, therefore, that anyone who based his historical inquiries upon them should necessarily arrive at results which an orthodox Christian would consider negative and skeptical.”²²²

As far as these conceptions—the notion of timeless truth and historical text, along with the scientific principles that condition the work of the historian—relate to the God-human relation, the “biblical notion of divine agency cannot be part of a critical conception of history.”²²³ So, when dealing with these questions, the possibility of harmonizing the assumptions of the biblical interpreter with those of the text might, to some extent, render useless the common critical and even theological approaches to the text. This possibility arises from the fact that both theological and critical approaches are established upon philosophical conceptions that could be contrary to the textual portrayal of God’s relation to humans in the context of history. And it is this possibility that calls for a re-evaluation of the nature and function of the discipline of biblical theology altogether, especially as it relates to exegesis.

So far, I have attempted to outline in broad strokes how the principle of the nature of history is not exempt from macro-hermeneutical commitments. J. Maxwell Miller is correct in pointing out that the “historian’s own presuppositions, ideology,

²²¹ Ibid., 14–15.

²²² Ibid., 15.

²²³ Schroeder, *History, Justice*, 19. For more on the impact of the scientific approach to theology, see Langdon B. Gilkey, *Religion and the Scientific Future: Reflections on Myth, Science, and Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

and attitudes inevitably influence his or her research and reporting,”²²⁴ and that “it is not an overstatement to say that any book reveals as much about its author as it does about the period of time treated.”²²⁵

Knowing that assumptions about the nature of history influence the historian’s evaluation of a particular portion of history, and consequently the biblical text itself, it is in the interests of this study to further assess these assumptions and evaluate their impact on biblical interpretation.

This section, then, will be divided into two main parts. The first will provide a brief overview of how the nature of history has been understood by scholars from the eighteenth century to contemporary times. The second will provide a few examples of how presuppositions regarding the nature of history appear in biblical interpretation.

From Text to History

The roots of scholarly interest in the historical background of the biblical text in the context of the interpretation of Scripture—an interest that still influences interpretation today²²⁶—can be traced to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Findings in the field of archaeology, along with the effects of rationalism and the Enlightenment project, led biblical interpretation in the late seventeenth century to be

²²⁴ Miller, “Reading the Bible Historically,” 12.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ See Richard E. Burnett, “Historical Criticism,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 290.

heavily influenced by modern historical approaches to the point that “revelation became for many a predicate to history.”²²⁷

This fissure in the pre-critical approach to Scripture led the world depicted in the Bible “to look increasingly less like the world one actually sees in the Bible and increasingly more like the world of the modern historian.”²²⁸ By the eighteenth century, the “question of the use of history for religion was still one of the most pressing problems.”²²⁹

²²⁷ Ibid., 291. For more on the background of historical primacy over the text, see Peter Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); R. K. Harrison et al., *Biblical Criticism: Historical, Literary, and Textual* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978); and more importantly Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974).

²²⁸ Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 93. Although the change in mindset attempted to arrive at a modern sense of what really happened in history, that is, the historical facts behind the formation of the biblical text, it led in the opposite direction. In applying a modern framework to the historical processes, many earlier understandings of the same historical processes were left behind. Even apart from biblical hermeneutics, neglect of the inherent understanding of history in biblical or Ancient Near Eastern thought proved to be problematic in other areas. Ephraim A. Speiser writes that a failure “to incorporate the up-to-date findings on the Near East has thrown out of balance the existing philosophies of history and invalidated some of their principal results.” In Ephraim A. Speiser, “The Ancient Near East and Modern Philosophies of History,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 95, no. 6 (December 21, 1951): 584. This only testifies to the importance of being critical about the critical approach to the biblical text and its implicit understanding of the concept of history itself. J. J. Finkelstein is correct in warning the interpreter that in “our approach towards any aspect of non Western civilization we commonly expose ourselves to the hazard of applying Western categories to phenomena completely alien to us.” See J. J. Finkelstein, “Mesopotamian Historiography,” 461.

²²⁹ Peter Hanns Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historical Criticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 43. While many today believe that the historical approach to the text was almost an organized attack on religion (like for French intellectuals of the time), Reill observes that the German

Yet the modernistic historical approach to the text introduced in this period implied more than only attention to the relation of text and modern history, with its consequent effects upon biblical interpretation.²³⁰ At the foundation of the modernistic historical approach to the text was a monumental change in the perception of reality, truth, and consequently the meaning of the biblical text.²³¹ Was

approach attempted to defend or at least reinterpret religious worship “in the light of a revised religious consciousness.” Ibid.

²³⁰ It is important to keep in mind that these transitions in hermeneutical thinking were not exempt from radical changes at a theological and philosophical level. In fact, these radical changes facilitated a change in hermeneutics. Timothy J. Furry writes that “philosophical and theological issues matter in the writing of history, since they are part of its inevitable representational structure.” See Timothy J. Furry, *Allegorizing History: The Venerable Bede, Figural Exegesis, and Historical Theory* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 2.

²³¹ By *meaning* here, I imply the sense intended by the author as communicated through the text. For those who favor a noncritical approach, the sense of the text begins with a serious consideration of the text itself along with its historical presentation. For those who favor a more critical approach, the sense of the text is largely influenced by extrabiblical material, since the biblical material is considered an unreliable source for historical accuracy. In other words, for the critical mindset, the words and literary devices do not carry a full perspective of the sense of the text: it is only through historical reconstructions of the background of the text/author that the meaning, or sense, can be clearly seen. On the relation of truth and meaning, it is important to note that this period was marked by an outburst of possibilities. The question that must be answered at the outset is: are truth and meaning identical in Scripture? Through the work of Spinoza and others, the gap between these notions was created and increasingly widened. While the meaning of the text included a moral/ethical dimension, for Spinoza, that did not mean it should be considered truth (since only philosophy and reason were able to discuss matters of truth). He felt that the text was as important as this ethical sense, and could be discarded once the sense was discovered. This distinction in the work of Spinoza can be easily seen as he writes that “the sphere of reason is, as we have said, truth and wisdom; the sphere of theology is piety and obedience.” Benedict Spinoza, *A Theological-Political Treatise and a Political Treatise*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1951), 194. This same distinction was later picked up by Kant via his

the meaning of a biblical text to be found by a critical or a non-critical assessment of the text and the history it portrayed?

Once the modernistic, historical-critical approach became synonymous with biblical interpretation during this period, the meaning of the words of Scripture began to be “understood in terms of the world of external events”²³² and not the other way around. The reality Scripture described (with supernatural events and actions) was tied to the reality which modern history approved of (with no supernatural events and actions), and consequently, the key to uncover the true meaning and significance of the text could only be found through historical criticism. With the assumption that only modern historical reconstructions provided a window into reality,²³³ the verification of truth in the biblical text came not from a serious consideration of the historical point of view of the text, as in pre-critical times, but from the critical reconstructions of the modern historian.

Probing this departure from pre-critical to critical interpretation and its foundational changes to hermeneutics, Hans W. Frei observes that although the

distinction between form and content, things as they are and things as they appear—a notion addressed previously in the section dealing with ontology.

²³² Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 93.

²³³ Augustine’s distinction between “words” (*verba*) and “things” (*res*) informs much of the hermeneutical discussion around the biblical text. For him, the words (*verba*) of the biblical text “are the means by which one enters into the spiritual realities of the world of things (*res*).” *Ibid.*, 76. Although this distinction between text/words and reality/things is still foundational for historical approaches to Scripture, Sailhamer understands that “Augustine’s view, to be sure, is not that of the Protestant Reformers (*Sola Scriptura*)” and at the same time, is not “the view of

biblical narratives were written as realistic stories, “the meaning of the stories was finally something different from the stories or depictions themselves.”²³⁴ The departure from this pre-critical stage where “history demonstrated the veracity of the Christian message”²³⁵ to a modernistic approach where the veracity of the Christian message was attested with the aid of historical analysis can be seen as a “definite change”²³⁶ by 1760.²³⁷

From History as *Geschichte* to History as *Wissenschaft*

While the influence of these principles expanded throughout the eighteenth century, at the turn of the twentieth century, modern historical reconstructions resulting from scientific presuppositions became the main source of the discovery of what was conceived as truth. Iain W. Provan writes that by “the end of the 1880s, this history-as-science had replaced philosophy as the discipline to which many educated people in Europe and elsewhere in the Western world turned as the key that would unlock the mysteries of human life.”²³⁸

biblical authors.” Ibid., 77. I will revisit this distinction in the next chapter when dealing with how interpretative traditions arrive at the meaning of a biblical text.

²³⁴ Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 11.

²³⁵ Reill, *German Enlightenment*, 43.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ It is in this context that the historical-critical and grammatical approaches appear as formal methods in biblical interpretation.

²³⁸ Iain W. Provan, V. Phillips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 21.

Until then, though, following scientific principles, the historical approach had not received scientific attention and to some extent was considered merely another form of art. Before the nineteenth century, the purpose of history was “to delight the reader and to teach morals through examples.”²³⁹ In other words, before the nineteenth century, the process of history writing “was not taken seriously by the hard sciences.”²⁴⁰

During this period, two ways of approaching history emerged: the already old idea of history as *Geschichte*, carrying a sense of storytelling, a subjective report; and a new idea of history as *Historie*, carrying the scientific spirit of the possibility of the historian arriving at truth through the rigorous application of the scientific method.

After the nineteenth century, the historical approach became the means to arrive at truth (including historical truth or *Historie*), as a science. Raúl Kerbs explores this transition from history to history as science:

In the times of modernity there was no other model of objectivity distinct from that of the natural sciences and more adequate to history. But history knew that, in order to be science, it should fulfill the requisites of objectivity. This way had to adopt the idea of objectivity of the natural sciences together with the timeless interpretation of reality and reason that came with it. Therefore, the timeless categories of reason (foundationally the cause and effect relation applied to space and time, that is, to nature) provided the mark to determine what is real and what is not real in history. That is why miracles and all other supernatural causalities were discarded by historical methodology.²⁴¹

²³⁹ Ibid., 20.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Raúl Kerbs, “El Método Histórico-Crítico en Teología: En Busca de su Estructura Básica y de las Interpretaciones Filosóficas Subyacentes,” *DavarLogos* 1, no. 2 (2002): 120.

The new connotation of history as science, or history as *Wissenschaft*, incorporated within historical research several philosophical commitments that inevitably influenced not only the function of historical approaches to the biblical text, but also their results.

While the first half of the twentieth century enjoyed the possibility that history-as-science could provide a window into past truth (the historical processes themselves), the second half was marked by a “decrease in enthusiasm for the distinction between *Historie* and *Geschichte* among theologians and biblical scholars.”²⁴² In that period, “greater interest was shown to historiography,”²⁴³ that is, to the “way perception of facts are shaped by prior judgments.”²⁴⁴

From History as *Wissenschaft* to History as Historiography

As mentioned previously, the concept of the nature of history underwent significant changes along with the capability and limitations of the historian. The twentieth century left behind the notion or possibility of history as *Wissenschaft* and became sensitive to the biases of the historian in the process of historical

²⁴² Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 80.

²⁴³ For more on the origins and crisis of historiography, see John C. Collins, *The Bible After Babel: Historical Criticism in a Postmodern Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 27–51.

²⁴⁴ Soulen and Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 80.

reconstruction.²⁴⁵

Dan O. Via, using the work of Hayden White, writes on the three categories that were attached to the concept of “the historical” before this transition. Via writes: “Historical theory [had] conventionally distinguished (1) past reality; (2) historiography, the historian’s written discourse about his past object; and (3) philosophy of history, the study of possible relations between the object and the discourse.”²⁴⁶ To speak of history, then, implied addressing three distinct categories that can be summarized under the terms *event* (what actually happened), *narration* (the historian’s historiographical report of the event), and *truth* (the correspondence between event and narration). According to Via, traditional historiography understands that historical truth is found in this last category, in the “correspondence between the lived story and the told story.”²⁴⁷

At least two problems can be identified in the idea that historical truth is found in the correspondence between event (what actually happened) and narration (the historiographical report). The first deals with the fact that the historian has no access to the event. History is written, “not found.”²⁴⁸ So, no correspondence between event and narration can be established, since the historian only has access to

²⁴⁵ These changes at the level of history followed the changes in the philosophical perspective of epistemology, that is, in this period more attention was given to the *subject* in the formation of knowledge.

²⁴⁶ Via, *Revelation of God*, 29.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

historical documents (which are not exempt from bias), not events. A second problem relates to the role of the historian. Because the historian has no access to the events, the truthfulness and effectiveness of historiography relies on the historian's ability to handle evidence in a "judicious way."²⁴⁹ In other words, access to events resides in the ability of the historian to be, to some extent, unbiased, yet history itself proves this to be an impossibility.

These problems led biblical interpreters to uncover historical events via one of three hermeneutical approaches. The first, reconstructionism, upholds the premise that "the more carefully we write history, the closer we will get to what actually happened."²⁵⁰ The second, constructionism, "refers to the approaches to history that invoke general laws."²⁵¹ The third, deconstructionism, is seen in postmodern approaches, which "stress the fact that history writing is always an example of literary production, with all the attendant complexities that brings."²⁵² That is, history writing carries an agenda, resulting in an "ideologically compromised"²⁵³ historiography.

As the last point indicates, the focus on the *subject* has brought to light significant issues that stem from the epistemological turn to the *subject* addressed

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Bartholomew, "*Behind*" the Text, 9.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid., 5.

previously in this study. The trend in present historiographical assessments is that historians bring into historiography a wide range of presuppositions that influence their historical reconstructions. But because the postmodern approach is not in itself a break from modernity, Provan indicates that the modernistic mindset is still active:

History is still widely perceived, in spite of the postmodern turn and the convictions of many historians themselves, as comprising ‘facts’—facts that can be scientifically established and woven together to produce ‘the past’, which can then be used as a canonical rule against which to measure particular stories about the past and to pronounce them uncertain or false.²⁵⁴

In sum, in the contemporary setting of the understanding of history, two competing models remain. The first maintains the old Enlightenment goal of objectivity and seeks to reconstruct the past by scientifically discovering facts and distinguishing them from fables. The second follows the postmodern turn and understands history as written by individuals who have a hermeneutical background and framework that influences their writing. Since historical events are not an object to be attained, historical reconstructions in the latter view are focused on the uncovering of the hermeneutical background of the historian.

In each model, the *subject*, or historian, in charge of historical reconstructions evaluates texts, documents, and artifacts on the basis of a macro-hermeneutical structure that establishes conceptions of God, humans, and history a priori. Each position mentioned above is not only influenced by such conceptions, but becomes the repository of the principles that create the framework for historical

²⁵⁴ Iain W. Provan, “Knowing and Believing: Faith in the Past,” in *“Behind” the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 229.

reconstructions.

I now turn to two remaining questions. How do these conceptions concerning the nature of history affect biblical interpretation? How do theologians appropriate these assumptions into their work?

History, Presuppositions, and Biblical Interpretation

Presuppositions concerning the nature of history had a greater influence upon biblical interpretation at the turn of the eighteenth century. Again, this was a period when the pre-critical “face value” reading of the text to understand history was abandoned for a more rational approach to history based on scientific principles. Von Rad correctly assesses the situation of the concept of history in this period:

These two pictures of Israel’s history lie before us—that of modern critical scholarship and that which the faith of Israel constructed—and for the present, we must reconcile ourselves to both of them . . . The one is rational and ‘objective’ . . . The other . . . is confessional . . . The fact that these two views of Israel’s history are so divergent is one of the most serious burdens imposed upon Biblical scholarship.²⁵⁵

The problem Von Rad identifies here requires some explanation.

Biblical interpretation, in the transition from pre-critical to critical times, was confronted with two alternatives: first, the possibility that the biblical depiction of the life and story of its characters, that is, biblical historiography, was accurate and true as it related to the historical process of its characters; second, the possibility that modernistic historiography, which critically evaluated the biblical text (along with its

²⁵⁵ G. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. I (Edinburgh, Scotland: Oliver & Boyd, 1973), quoted in *“Behind” the Text: History and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 5.

depictions of the historical process of the biblical characters), was the only rational approach to interpretation and the true sense of the biblical text.²⁵⁶

The hermeneutical pendulum tended to swing toward the latter side: the modernistic historiographical conceptions of the events. This led Gilkey to correctly summarize the situation in theological circles as follows: “The Bible is a book of the acts Hebrews believed God might have done and the words he might have said had he done them and said them—but of course we recognize he did not.”²⁵⁷

In order for biblical interpretation to remain a scientific discipline, the distinction between history as *Historie* (modernistic reconstructions) and history as *Geschichte* (how the biblical writers retold history or Hebrew faith) has to be maintained, along with the macro-hermeneutical conditions that create the distinction.

Summary

This section attempted to trace the origins of the macro-hermeneutical presuppositions relating to the principle of the nature of history, along with their influence upon biblical interpretation and the book of Exodus.

²⁵⁶ The second point, seen in the historical-critical approach to the text, introduced the idea of “retrojection” into interpretation, that is, “anachronistically attributing present ideas, attitudes, or practices to earlier times,” making the biblical text along with its history a vessel in which to carry an earlier message. See Millar Burrows, “Ancient Israel,” in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Robert C. Dentan and Roland H. Bainton (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1955), 107. The way these principles affected the development of the historical-critical and grammatical interpretative methods will be discussed further in the next chapter.

²⁵⁷ Gilkey, “Cosmology, Ontology,” 197.

I began by tracing how historians approached history at the turn of the eighteenth century by leaving behind the pre-critical approach to the text and embracing a scientific approach along with its macro-hermeneutical commitments. This made it possible for history to be seen as *Wissenschaft*. Yet in the twentieth century these conceptions were left behind, to some extent, due to the turn to the *subject*, to the way in which the historian was not exempt from biases and assumptions. This period brought forth the approach known as historiography, an approach not exempt from macro-hermeneutical influences.

Second, I attempted to trace the implications of scientific presuppositions concerning the nature of history for biblical interpretation in general and the book of Exodus in particular. From this analysis, I was able to outline how the distinction between fact and faith is still prevalent in the interpretation of Exodus: the macro-hermeneutical influences of the scientific approach to the text are still prevalent. This reality widens the gap between the assumptions of the interpreter and those of the biblical writer/audience.

Summary

This chapter attempted to identify the macro-hermeneutical principles that act as presuppositional frameworks for biblical scholars as they relate to the notion of the God-human relationship.

The first section outlined the macro-hermeneutical principle of epistemology, that is, the notion of “human” in the God-human relationship structure. I attempted to demonstrate how the understanding of the human ability to know developed over the centuries, how such conceptions affect how the biblical text is perceived by the

interpreter who reads the text for knowledge, and how that mirrors the understanding of how biblical characters could arrive at knowledge.

The second section outlined the macro-hermeneutical principle of ontology, that is, the notion of “God” in the God-human relationship structure. In this evaluation, I attempted to show how the interpretation of Being affects how interpreters perceive God and his actions in the text. I also used the work of Bultmann and Vanhoozer to show how biblical scholars deal with the dilemma of unintelligible analogy, created by a timeless understanding of Being, between things as they are and things as they appear.

The third section outlined the macro-hermeneutical principle of the nature of history, that is, the notion of “relationship” in the God-human relationship structure. Since God’s interaction with humanity takes place in Scripture within the flow of history, this section examined how historians have approached the biblical text in search of history and truth. The analysis showed that the presuppositions established by modernity and science have dominated the practice of biblical interpretation, leading the historiography of the text to be perceived as accounts of faith.

In the next chapter, I will evaluate how the macro-hermeneutical or philosophical presuppositions above are present within two main interpretative traditions: the historical-grammatical and historical-critical methods.

CHAPTER 3

THE GOD-HUMAN RELATION IN INTERPRETATIVE TRADITIONS

Introduction

This chapter will attempt to identify the presence, influence, and roots of the philosophical notion of how God relates to humans in two of the most influential interpretative traditions in the study of the book of Exodus: the historical-grammatical and historical-critical methods.²⁵⁸

I will begin by evaluating the historical-grammatical method with a focus on how the method interprets the God-human relation, that is, how it carries within its

²⁵⁸ This study will not evaluate these approaches to the text as they stand and function today; it is focused on the philosophical presuppositions in these traditions. In order to assess the presence and influence of these presuppositions, this study will evaluate only the period when both approaches formally appeared—at the turn of the eighteenth century. The formative period of these interpretative approaches provides an appropriate context to identify the presuppositions that influence their use and application. These two interpretative traditions are chosen as representative examples of the influence of presuppositions in methodology. This evaluation calls for more in-depth analysis of other methodological approaches to the text that will not be addressed here, including the more idealistic approaches such as reader-oriented criticism, etc. For more on contemporary approaches to the book of Exodus, see Dozeman, *Methods for Exodus*; Scott M. Langston, *Exodus through the Centuries* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006); Tremper Longman, *How to Read Exodus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009).

framework conceptions of ontology, epistemology,²⁵⁹ and history. Then, I will evaluate the historical-critical method with a focus on the same philosophical presuppositions.

The idea here is that, regardless of the subjective awareness of presuppositions regarding the God-human relation in shaping the approach and outcome of one's interpretation, the choice of a particular interpretative method carries within itself, by default, an interpretation of the God-human relation.²⁶⁰ With this general idea in

²⁵⁹ Since both the historical-grammatical and historical-critical methods at the turn of the eighteenth century operated under the direct influence of the epistemological ideas of Descartes, a separate analysis of the epistemological component in both approaches is unnecessary. Even so, a brief review of Cartesian epistemology is in order so the reader will not have to go back to the previous chapter for answers. Descartes is referred to as the father of modern philosophy, since his method consisted of introducing the principle of doubt into all activities of the mind or thinking, creating a gap between the interpreter and the external world. Rejecting the reliability of the senses, Descartes “whittled his way down to the mind,” the one thing that could secure a reliable foundation for rationality. See Labron, *Wittgenstein and Theology*, 25. This led him to the expression he is known for: “I think, therefore I am,” or *cogito ergo sum*, that is, the reliability and precedence of rationality over existence. These ideas are key to what this study calls “objectivist epistemology,” where the human mind (as a *tabula rasa*) is able to grasp reality as a whole through reason, without resorting to the “questionable” influence of the senses. These ideas at the epistemological level would lead theologians and exegetes to evaluate text and reality under this rational outlook. One of the first implications of such an outlook for biblical interpretation (apart from the abused principle of doubt) is rejection of the supernatural elements in the biblical text, along with the idea that authority resides in the mental capabilities of the interpreter and not in any inherited tradition or text. At the same time, these epistemological concepts are inherently tied to ontological commitments. Descartes rejects the reliability of the senses of the body because they are inherently part of the material world. So, to assume such an epistemological standpoint, to some extent, is already to sustain the cosmological/anthropological dichotomy tied to a timeless ontology.

²⁶⁰ Oeming writes that “each method of biblical interpretation is necessarily dependent on specific philosophical predilections.” This chapter attempts to assess these predilections. See Oeming, *Contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics*, 2–3.

mind, I turn to the evaluation of the historical-grammatical method.

The Historical-Grammatical Method

Introduction

To pinpoint the precise origin of the historical-grammatical method is a complex task.²⁶¹ However, the influences that led to the formation of the grammatical approach to the biblical text can be traced as far as the school of Antioch,²⁶² as well as to rabbinic interpretation.²⁶³ Even so, John H. Sailhamer²⁶⁴ points to Johann

²⁶¹ Scholars like Richard M. Davidson see the origins of the method during the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century; he writes that the “biblical principles of interpretation recovered by the Reformers, coupled with the advances in textual and historical-grammatical analysis of the Renaissance (Erasmus and others), led to a robust Protestant hermeneutic that has carried until now and has become known as the historical-grammatical-literary-theological approach or (for short) the grammatico-historical method or historical-biblical method.” See Richard M. Davidson, “Biblical Interpretation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Series 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 90. Hans W. Frei also sees the emphasis on grammar and the literal historicity of the text as beginning around the same time frame. He writes about Luther’s rejection of the multiplex approach to the text set forth by his predecessors: “Luther’s simplification meant drastic relief, affirming as it did that the literal or, as he preferred to call it, the grammatical or historical sense is the truest sense.” See Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 19; cf. Martin Luther, “Auf das überchristlich, übergeistlich ind überkünstlich Buch Bock Emsers zu Leipzig Antwort,” *Werke*, 650–52. Another example would be Louis Berkkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation: Sacred Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1950), 27.

²⁶² For more see Thiselton, *Hermeneutics*, 109–14; D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch: A Study of Early Christian Thought in the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Vahan S. Hovhanessian, ed., *Exegesis and Hermeneutics in the Churches of the East: Select Papers from the SBL Meeting in San Diego, 2007* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

²⁶³ Especially Karaite interpretation in medieval times. See Meira Polliack, “Medieval Karaism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies*, ed. Martin Goodman,

August Ernesti as the one who best articulated what is today known as the historical-grammatical method.²⁶⁵ For Sailhamer, “Ernesti’s view remains the definitive statement of the grammatical-historical approach.”²⁶⁶ Yet, surprisingly, the manner in which the historical-grammatical approach was understood and applied by biblical interpreters changed with time, looking less and less like that which Ernesti envisioned.²⁶⁷ Before I address these changes, it is necessary to focus on Ernesti’s vision for, and articulation of, the historical-grammatical method. This evaluation of

Jeremy Cohan, and David Sorkin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 305–12. Polliack affirms that the only precursor to the grammatical or linguistic-contextual approach of Karaite hermeneutics is found in the “vaguely attested” rabbinic interpretative orientation known as *peshat*. Ibid., 306.

²⁶⁴ I am greatly indebted to the work of John H. Sailhamer in this section. His thorough analysis of the work of Johann August Ernesti and its historical developments is of utmost importance to biblical interpretation. I summarize some of his findings here and outline some implications within the lines of what this chapter proposes to accomplish. Since Ernesti wrote in Latin, I rely on Sailhamer’s evaluation of Ernesti’s material and on my own readings of Moses Stuart’s translation of Ernesti’s work: J. A. Ernesti and Moses Stuart, *Elementary Principles of Interpretation*, 4th ed. (New York: Dayton & Saxton, 1842). From my own reading of Ernesti’s work, I believe Sailhamer has done a magnificent job in articulating Ernesti’s main ideas and the issues that have risen because of mistranslations of his work from the original Latin.

²⁶⁵ Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 105. Other scholars also see Ernesti as the one who established the hermeneutical parameters for what is currently known as the historical-grammatical method. Robert Jumonville also understands that Ernesti is “regarded as founder of the grammatical-historical school of hermeneutics.” See Robert Moore-Jumonville, *Hermeneutics of Historical Distance: Mapping the Terrain of American Biblical Criticism, 1880–1914* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), 104.

²⁶⁶ Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 105.

²⁶⁷ Among these changes is the development of Ernesti’s approach to the historical-critical method itself. See Sailhamer, “Johann August Ernesti: The Role of

Ernesti will inevitably address the notion of history, a conception that is central to the formative periods of the method.

The Principle of History

From History to Text

Johann Ernesti (1707–1781), “one of the dominating figures of his time,”²⁶⁸ studied at Wittenberg and Leipzig and began teaching theology in Leipzig in 1759. Sailhamer and others see Ernesti as the father of a conservative and even evangelical approach to the text, yet along with Johann Salomo Semler,²⁶⁹ Ernesti is considered one of the founders of the historical-critical method, due to two main premises in his work on biblical hermeneutics:

Firstly, Ernesti made clear the necessity of studying the Old and New Testaments not as a homogeneous whole but as distinct bodies of literature. Secondly, he applied to the New Testament the philological-historical method that had been developed in the interpretation of classical texts.²⁷⁰

History in Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 2 (June 2011): 194.

²⁶⁸ M. A. Knoll, “Ernesti, Johann August,” in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 316.

²⁶⁹ Both Semler and Ernesti are also listed as the influences behind the thinking of Johann Philipp Gabler. See Magne Sæbø, *On the Way to the Canon: Creative Tradition History in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 311–12.

²⁷⁰ David R. Law, *The Historical-Critical Method: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 42. In Ernesti’s words, “the Scriptures are to be investigated by the same rules as other books.” See Ernesti, *Elementary Principles of Interpretation*, 27.

The difficulty some scholars have in pinpointing the actual role and thinking of Ernesti is due to the fact that although Ernesti held to some of the rising historical-critical premises of his time,²⁷¹ he failed “to follow these insights to their logical conclusion and, affirming the doctrine of inerrancy continued to hold a conservative view of Scripture.”²⁷² Thus Ernesti is influential in a paradoxical way. On the one hand, he popularized the historical-critical mindset of his time in his grammatical approach to the text,²⁷³ but on the other hand, he upheld a conservative posture of inerrancy.

Even so, because Ernesti is considered the main articulator of what is today known as the historical-grammatical method, it is important to briefly highlight some important aspects of his approach and trace some of the roots of his ideas.²⁷⁴ The

²⁷¹ The roots of his premises are also numerous, yet some recognize that the philosophy of Christian Wolff played a significant role in his moderate rationalistic approach to the text. Knoll writes that Ernesti inherited “from Wolff a rational view of the universe in which revelation as a distinct source of knowledge apart from reason had a well-defined place.” See Knoll, “Ernesti, Johann August,” 316. Others see the influence of Schleiermacher in Ernesti’s thinking; see Cornelia Richter, “Friedrich Schleiermacher: Symbol Theory, Hermeneutics, and Forms of Religious Communication,” in *Schleiermacher, the Study of Religion, and the Future of Theology: A Transatlantic Dialogue*, ed. Brent W. Sockness and Wilhelm Gräb (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 384. Moses Stuart sees the heavy influence of Samuel F. N. Morus’s *Hermeneutica* in the work of Ernesti; on this, see the preface written by Stuart in Ernesti, *Elementary Principles of Interpretation*, iii-iv.

²⁷² Law, *Historical-Critical Method*, 42.

²⁷³ Ernesti’s rationalistic approach to interpretation can be seen when he discusses the need for methodological steps in interpretation so that interpreters might not “be left to depend on chance rather than reason.” See Ernesti, *Elementary Principles of Interpretation*, 16.

²⁷⁴ This study does not provide an exhaustive account of the development of the historical-grammatical method; I intend to use the seventeenth and eighteenth

question here is: how did Ernesti understand and articulate the historical-grammatical approach?

In Ernesti's writings, the meaning of the historical and the grammatical in his method was tied to the parameters set forth by the text: that is, the grammatical and the historical were not two different steps in interpretation, but one and the same.²⁷⁵ This he termed the "*usus loquendi*."²⁷⁶ In regard to the "historical" element in the "grammatical historical" approach, Ernesti "meant simply the 'grammatical' meaning of the words of Scripture," that is, that to understand the meaning of history "meant 'reading' the historical narratives."²⁷⁷

Historical implied that the narratives found in the biblical text were trustworthy depictions of real historical events, and to have access to those events one must read what is in the text. As for *grammatical*, it simply implied careful attention to the grammatical, syntactical, and literary components of the Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic texts of the Bible. To understand history, one needs to understand grammar.

centuries as a window on the method in order to raise questions, concerns, and possible problems for further reflection.

²⁷⁵ For Ernesti, "the act of interpretation implies two things; viz., (1) A right perception of the meaning of the words. (2) A proper explanation of that meaning." See Ernesti, *Elementary Principles of Interpretation*, 14.

²⁷⁶ Daniel O'Leary, "Environmentalism, Hermeneutics, and Canadian Imperialism in Agnes Deans Cameron's *The New North*," in *The Elusive Land: Women and the Canadian Environment*, ed. Melody Hessing, Rebecca Raglon, and Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands (Vancouver: UBC, 2005), 19.

²⁷⁷ Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 107.

From Text to History

It did not take long before scholars misunderstood Ernesti's articulation of these concepts; "the phrase 'grammatical-historical method' went from being a description of the primarily textual procedure of studying written narratives to an almost exclusive search for the meaning of the historical events (*realia*) lying behind those narratives."²⁷⁸ This shift indicates the essential difference between Ernesti's vision of the historical-grammatical method and the historical-critical methodologies: namely, the acceptance or rejection of criticism based on historical depictions of the Bible as an access to meaning.

What triggered this misunderstanding, according to Sailhamer, was the English translation of Ernesti's *Institutio interpretis Novi Testamenti*²⁷⁹ by Moses Stuart.²⁸⁰ While for Ernesti the meaning of the text rested within the text itself, independent of critical external historical verifications (apart from the philological

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 105. Ernesti is categorical in assigning the meaning of the text to the boundaries set forth by the words and not to outside notions. He writes: "The meaning, which according to grammatical principles should be assigned to any word of Scripture, is not to be rejected then on account of reasons derived from things or previously conceived opinions; for in this way interpretation would become uncertain." See Ernesti, *Elementary Principles of Interpretation*, 30. This is a positive feature of Ernesti's approach to the text, and it goes against the critical approach to the text in the sense that it is the text which determines the validity of the previously conceived notions of the interpreter. On this Ernesti writes: "In the Scriptures, if any sentiment does not agree with our opinions, we must call to mind the imbecility of human reason and human faculties; we must seek for conciliation, and not attempt a correction of the passage without good authority." *Ibid.*

²⁷⁹ Johann August Ernesti, *Institutio interpretis Novi Testamenti* (Leipzig, 1761).

²⁸⁰ Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 106.

historicity of the words themselves), Stuart “advocated the use of history to uncover the meaning of biblical events,”²⁸¹ not realizing that this “was not the intent in Ernesti’s work.”²⁸² In other words, Stuart missed the authorial intent of Ernesti’s grammatical method in his translation, especially in regard to how Ernesti understood the interrelation between history and text in the search for meaning.

Following this translation of Ernesti’s work, other biblical scholars maintained the distance between the grammatical and the historical initiated by Stuart. While Ernesti understood the historical and the grammatical to be one,²⁸³ scholars applied the method as a two-step process: the first “historical,” using the historical tools to uncover the historical background of the text where true historical facts resided, and the second “grammatical,” the intended spiritual/religious meaning of the text.

Among these scholars was Karl August Keil, who, according to Sailhamer, originated the hyphenated form *grammatical-historical* in his German translation of Ernesti’s Latin original.²⁸⁴ With this simple change the method began to imply “a

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ In addition, for Ernesti, even the tropical or figurative sense of a possible word has a “grammatical” meaning. See Ernesti, *Elementary Principles of Interpretation*, 37.

²⁸⁴ Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 108. Sailhamer also notes that the change from one to two hermeneutical procedures in the historical-grammatical method is already indicated by the translations of Ernesti’s work. Sailhamer writes: “In earlier hermeneutical works, the two terms ‘grammatical’ and ‘historical’ were commonly connected by the Latin conjunction *sive*, meaning something like our word ‘namely.’ It was ‘the grammatical, namely, the historical’ sense of Scripture

historical, along with a grammatical, interpretation,²⁸⁵ that is, a softened version of what later came to be known as the historical-critical method, where meaning was not only restricted to the text itself, but was derived to a large extent from the historical-critical evaluations and reconstructions of the interpreter.

While the historical-critical approach to the text uncovered the veracity and consequently the meaning of the text from critical reconstructions, the historical-grammatical method, as modified by Ernesti's translators, placed a partial yet significant importance on these historical-critical backgrounds. To arrive at the final meaning of a text, the interpreter had to look at both history (through modern historical-critical tools) and text (through critical grammatical tools).²⁸⁶

What is interesting in this small historical development is that from its conception, the historical-grammatical method was utilized as a way for scholars to advocate different sets of assumptions. It comes as no surprise, then, that today the method is still being shaped and modified to suit the philosophical commitments of

that was sought after. When later biblical scholars such as Karl August Keil connected the two terms with a *dash* or an *et*, it suggested the two terms no longer meant the same thing. It was now 'the grammatical and historical' method." See Sailhamer, "Johann August Ernesti," 195.

²⁸⁵ Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 108.

²⁸⁶ Again, this reliance on the history behind the text and the text itself was already envisioned by Baruch Spinoza. Spinoza writes: "The interpretation of nature consists in the examination of the history of nature, and from there deducing definitions of natural phenomena on certain fixed axioms, so Scriptural interpretation proceeds by the examination of Scripture, and inferring the intention of its authors as a legitimate conclusion from its fundamental principles." See Spinoza, *Theological-Political Treatise*, trans. R. H. M. Elwes, 99. This established the

each interpreter using it.

While Ernesti believed that “the meaning of things ought to be derived solely from the words,”²⁸⁷ Keil saw the meaning as “not in the words of the author, but in his mind.” It was for this reason that Keil considered “the investigation of the sense of words to be a historical task.”²⁸⁸ The interpreter was to critically reconstruct the historical setting where the text was written in order to arrive at the true, factual meaning of the text, because this was as close as one could get to the mind of the author. In other words, to arrive at the authorial intention (what was in the mind of the author), the interpreter had to critically reconstruct the text. This reconstruction was done in the context of a suspicion toward the historical setting depicted by the biblical writer. What the biblical author actually wrote in relation to history would take on a secondary role under this critical assessment.

As noted so far, Ernesti’s intention with the historical-grammatical method was to find the reality and meaning of the text within a somewhat uncritical approach to the text itself.²⁸⁹ Hans Frei draws out three implications of this literal,

foundation for the positivistic approach to the text, since the approach of the scientist and that of the theologian were quite similar.

²⁸⁷ Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 119.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ Ernesti understood that an interpreter must have the capability of discerning between words and things, and that to arrive at the sense of the task or the thing to which it refers, one must have “an accurate knowledge of languages” and “an acquaintance with the principles of interpretation”: in other words, the sense of the text is found within the text, not outside it. See Ernesti, *Elementary Principles of Interpretation*, 16.

realistic, and semi-pre-critical²⁹⁰ interpretation of the text: first, if a story was to be read literally (as Ernesti envisioned), the story “referred to and described actual historical occurrences”²⁹¹; second, “if the real historical world described by the several biblical stories is a single world of one temporal sequence, there must in principle be one cumulative story to depict it,”²⁹² that is, “without loss to its own literal meaning or specific temporal reference, an earlier story (or occurrence) was a figure of a later one”²⁹³; and third, because the world of the text was unified as one single story, “it must in principle embrace the experience of any present age and reader.”²⁹⁴

Now that the general tenets of Ernesti’s vision for the method in its historical context have been laid out, the question is: according to Ernesti’s historical-grammatical method, how does an interpreter arrive at the meaning of the text?

Historical-Grammatical Structure of Meaning

At the outset, it is important to establish the basic dimensions of meaning

²⁹⁰ Semi-pre-critical in the sense that while Ernesti understood the value of critical grammatical tools to uncover the meaning of the text within the text itself, his assumptions regarding the textual depictions were quite conservative. In some sense, the historiography provided by the biblical authors had preeminence over modern historiography, because Ernesti believed that the historical process recorded in Scripture was true.

²⁹¹ Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 2.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 3.

present in interpretation in order to analyze Ernesti's approach to the text. Kevin J. Vanhoozer correctly notes that the production of a text involves at least three dimensions: "Interpreters testify to what acts an author performed in inscribing just these words (content) in just this way (form) on just this occasion (context)."²⁹⁵ He concludes that the "meaning of a text pertains to all the things the author was doing in attending to his or her words."²⁹⁶ With this in mind, how does the historical-grammatical methodology relate to content, form, and context?

So far, I have attempted to demonstrate how Ernesti understood that to arrive at the meaning of the text, one must not necessarily subjugate it in favor of extrabiblical critical categories. Ernesti's emphasis on the importance of the text to arrive at meaning derived from his understanding that the exegetical approach to Scripture needed to be "identical to the newly developed philological approach taken

²⁹⁵ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?: The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 5. The historical developments in biblical hermeneutics are marked by changes in emphasis on these three areas, and more specifically in this study, on the interpretation of "context." I chose Vanhoozer at this stage since I am analyzing in broad strokes the basic elements present in the interpretation of a text. For a more detailed analysis of text and meaning, see Oliver Glanz, *Understanding Participant-Reference Shifts*, 57–76.

²⁹⁶ Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning*, 5. If one was to add another dimension to Vanhoozer's basic scheme it would be that of the reader, that is, the possibility of the reader being involved in the generation of meaning in the text. Even so, because this particular study is aimed at the historical-grammatical method, I will keep this fourth dimension out of the evaluation of the method, especially because the historical-grammatical method gives no role to the reader in the generation of meaning apart from the methodological steps to find the meaning within the text itself. This way, I will limit myself to the definition of meaning set forth by Vanhoozer as centered on everything "the author was doing to his or her words," even though I believe such definition lacks the crucial dimension of the reader.

in the study of other ancient literature.”²⁹⁷ Ernesti’s approach was not based on any inner reasoning within the text, but on the philological approaches of his time. What informed his understanding that “the text can have no other meaning than its grammatical, or historical, sense”²⁹⁸ found in the individual words was his reliance upon this philological background. This is why some see the grammatical and historical approaches to the text as foundational for the critical method, since both understand that any method for biblical interpretation should follow the same parameters found in the interpretation of any other book.²⁹⁹

Yet Ernesti’s emphasis on two of the three dimensions of meaning, namely content and form, creates the necessity of understanding how Ernesti viewed the function of language. In order to establish some parameters to analyze one’s philosophy of language, especially in the context of Scripture, I resort to the philosophy of language found in the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein.³⁰⁰ Wittgenstein’s work can be divided into two main periods: his early work,³⁰¹ based on foundational

²⁹⁷ Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 117.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ See Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics; Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 38.

³⁰⁰ For an introductory perspective on the writings of Wittgenstein see Hans D. Sluga and David G. Stern, *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Probably the best analysis of Wittgenstein’s work in the context of Scripture and theology is found in Labron, *Wittgenstein’s Religious Point of View*, and Labron, *Wittgenstein and Theology*.

³⁰¹ See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

theories of language that viewed the sense of language as attached to ideal Forms and explained by foundational categories; and his later work,³⁰² based on a more pragmatic and functional approach that viewed the sense of language as attached to its use and practice. While the former was more Platonic in nature, with words pointing to pre-established realities, the latter was more Hebraic, in the sense that to understand language one does not need to learn the reality to which it points, but to understand how language functions within its context.³⁰³

Ernesti for his part understood that “the reason for a word’s meaning is not arrived at logically.” This implies that to arrive at the meaning of a word, one needs to see “how it functions in that language.”³⁰⁴ In this sense, Ernesti’s understanding of language comes close to Wittgenstein’s functional understanding of language,³⁰⁵

³⁰² See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*.

³⁰³ On the Hebraic sense of Wittgenstein’s later work, Wittgenstein himself writing to M. O’C. Drury asserts: “Your religious ideas have always seemed to me more Greek than biblical. Whereas my thoughts are one hundred percent Hebraic.” In M. O’C. Drury, “Conversations with Wittgenstein,” in *Recollections of Wittgenstein*, ed. Rush Rhees (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 79. The Hebraic sense is found in Wittgenstein’s later work and asserted as such because his later work, following the general tendencies of biblical writings, seems to “attach meaning to the historical and contemporary applications of language—the forms of life—in contrast to positing additional elements or foundational theories beyond normative practices.” In Labron, *Wittgenstein’s Religious Point of View*, 5.

³⁰⁴ Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 117. Ernesti when speaking about the meaning of words writes: “How can the meaning in each case be found? From the general manner of speaking, i. e. from the common usage.” In Ernesti, *Elementary Principles of Interpretation*, 21.

³⁰⁵ The main difference is that while Wittgenstein does not believe scientific positivism of any sort can influence the understanding of what language is, Ernesti will follow a rigorous philological approach to uncover the meaning of the words: that is, a scientific approach. Also, while Wittgenstein focuses on modern languages,

which is closer to the Hebrew way of writing than the Greek.

Ernesti's historical-grammatical approach, then, arrives at the meaning of the text by emphasizing the first two elements of the scheme of meaning—content and form. It attends to context to better understand the nature and history of the text/language, but not in the sense that history is the reality to which the textual meaning points. As mentioned earlier, in the historical-grammatical methodology envisioned by Ernesti, there is no role given to the reader apart from the methodological steps to reach a proper understanding of what was written, what Ernesti calls the *subtilitas explicandi*.³⁰⁶

The implications of a semi-pre-critical understanding of the text present in Ernesti's intention for the historical-grammatical method, along with how the approach uncovers the meaning of the text, prepare the ground for the evaluation of the second macro-hermeneutical premise: ontology.

So far, in the analysis of the premises that relate to the issues surrounding the term *history* in the historical-grammatical method, I have pointed out that the usage

Ernesti is working in biblical interpretation, where there is no way to understand the usage of words without a basic grasp of the ancient languages. Even so, the similarity between Ernesti and Wittgenstein is evident when Ernesti speaks of the sense of words as follows: "The sense of words depends on the *usus loquendi*. This must be the case, because the sense of words is conventional and regulated wholly by usage. Usage then being understood, the sense of words is of course understood." Ernesti, *Elementary Principles of Interpretation*, 25.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 17.

of the method is divided between two camps³⁰⁷: those who follow Ernesti and his original vision (the grammatical and historical are one interpretative action), and those who follow the translations of his work (the grammatical and historical are two different interpretative actions). This dual understanding of the method in the historical sphere will be repeated in the ontological sphere.

It is also important to note that both those who follow the translations of Ernesti's work (two-step) and those who follow Ernesti (one-step) are looking for the true historical meaning of the text. In this they agree. The difference is seen in whether this meaning is found in critical reconstructions of the events surrounding the formation of the text, or in what the text itself says about the historical process it describes. The historical critics of the time understood that the bridge to meaning required careful historical-critical reconstruction of the life setting (*sitz in Leben*) of the author, along with close attention to the sources that shaped the formation of the text. On the other hand, Ernesti understood that philology alone was the bridge to meaning,³⁰⁸ that is, the historical meaning of the text was found within the text

³⁰⁷ For a sample of those who understand the grammatical-historical method differently than Ernesti (emphasizing the two-step application), see Hank Voss, "From 'Grammatical-Historical Exegesis' to 'Theological Exegesis': Five Essential Practices," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 37, no. 2 (April 2013): 145; Milton Spenser Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974), 203–4.

³⁰⁸ Sailhamer also argues that Ernesti relied on his philological enterprise because of his Lutheran background, which relied on the verbal inspiration of the text (see Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 112–14), a meso-hermeneutical notion not lacking macro-hermeneutical commitments. Canale himself departs from a strict model of verbal inspiration in his work: "Both verbal and thought inspiration depends on those of classical philosophy, presuppositions we have dismissed and

itself.³⁰⁹

The Principle of Ontology

Now that the presuppositions that relate to history have been laid out, this section turns to two ontological issues that emerged from the evaluation of the historical premises of the historical-grammatical method. The issues that remain to be addressed are the issue of time in pre-critical figuration and typology and the issue of the dichotomy between words (*verba*) and things (*res*) in order to find the meaning (*sensus*) of the text.

replaced with biblical ones.” See Fernando L. Canale, *The Cognitive Principle of Christian Theology: A Hermeneutical Study of the Revelation and Inspiration of the Bible* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Lithotec, 2005), 404. Even so, it is important to keep in mind that some argue that a full-blown notion of verbal inspiration and consequently the notion of inerrancy only appeared later in the Lutheran tradition; for Peter Leithart, only by the seventeenth century had “the Reformation doctrine of Scripture . . . been refined into a strong doctrine of inerrancy.” See Leithart, *Deep Exegesis*, 7.

³⁰⁹ To summarize this difference in another light, while the historical-critical method focuses on the world of the author, historical grammarians focus on the world of the text; see Oeming, *Contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics*. One must realize that “What is the intention of the author within his own world?” is a question historical critics have been trying to answer for over two hundred years. Canale (as well as SDAs), in emphasizing the significance of history, cannot ignore the historical context in which God revealed himself to the biblical authors and how they appropriated this revelation in their historical contexts (including culture, language, customs, etc.). This certainly is not an endorsement of the historical-critical methodology and all its current ramifications. But this is a reminder that an emphasis on time/history at the ontological level creates several questions that must be dealt with at a hermeneutical level. The temptation here is to avoid and neglect these questions by hiding them “under the rug” of the more conservative historical-grammatical method without a basic knowledge of what the method sets forth to do.

Figuration, Typology, and Time

As noted above, one of the primary features of pre-critical interpretation, which forms the background of the historical-grammatical method,³¹⁰ is figuration or typology. Since the grammatical-historical method originally assumed a realistic reading of the text—that is, narratives that literally pointed to real past historical events and processes—one of the primary consequences of such reading was an emphasis on the unity of Scripture.³¹¹ Scripture told one single story, with older events serving as types/figures for newer events.

At the same time, it was because of figuration and typology that the reader could be immersed in the reality of the world of the text. Hans Frei writes that figuration “was at once a literary and historical procedure, an interpretation of stories and their meanings by weaving them together into a common narrative referring to a single history and its patterns of meaning.”³¹² Yet behind the possibility of this weaving of stories into one single narrative is the element of time.

³¹⁰ Figural or typological interpretation that stemmed from a literal or grammatical approach to the Bible was also central to the hermeneutic of the Reformation. Frei writes: “The affirmation that the literal or grammatical sense is the Bible’s true sense became programmatic for the traditions of Lutheran and Calvinistic interpretation.” See Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 37. This is yet another reason why some tie the premises of the historical-grammatical method to the hermeneutic of the Reformation, and rightly so. Both the Reformers and Frei resort to a literal realistic reading of the text leading to a unified narrative that opens itself to the reader.

³¹¹ This is why the critical approach to the text, with its dissection of the text and its unity, virtually destroyed any possible realistic reading of Scripture. By appealing to several traditions and dividing the text along with its narrative, the unity of the story was compromised and the text no longer carried a unified narrative.

Frei points out not only the importance of unity for a figural understanding of the text, but also the importance of time. He writes: “If figural or typological interpretation was to be successful, it required a delicate balance between the temporally separated occasions, a firm connection with literal or realistic procedure, and a clear rooting in the order of temporal sequence.”³¹³

Yet while Frei emphasizes the importance of the sequence of past history for figural interpretation, Erich Auerbach, examining the development of the interpretation of Scripture in the Middle Ages, clarifies that in that particular period, time was secondary to the eternal/timeless divine plan.³¹⁴ He writes that figural interpretation “is not regarded as primarily a chronological or causal development but as a oneness within the divine plan, of which all occurrences are parts and reflections.”³¹⁵ In this sense, because God was understood to be omnitemporal³¹⁶ or timeless, the element of time, or the “horizontal, that is the temporal and causal, connection of occurrences is dissolved.”³¹⁷

From this, one notices two possibilities for understanding figural or

³¹² Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 2.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 29.

³¹⁴ Since Frei quotes Auerbach in his study, it seems that even Frei did not see the difference of emphasis in what Auerbach writes and its implications for understanding the pre-critical mindset.

³¹⁵ Erich Auerbach and Edward W. Said, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 555.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

typological interpretation in pre-critical times. The first follows a temporal historical dynamic where events are incomplete, since they point to future events highlighting the importance of the “historical now.” The second follows a timeless dynamic where current events are already fulfilled in their timeless connection to future events, highlighting the importance of the eternal divine plan over the present “historical now.” Again, one is caught between two camps with different assumptions.

Regardless of how one chooses to interpret the ontological direction of pre-critical figural interpretation, by the late eighteenth century the canonical unity supported by the approach was overcome by historical criticism and its divisive nature. While in pre-critical times the literal explicative nature of the text was identical with historical reference, in the hermeneutical developments of the eighteenth century, they were broken apart.³¹⁸

Even so, Ernesti’s original intention for the historical-grammatical method implicitly emphasized the role of time and history for the unity of the text and God’s action in the world according to the reality depicted by the biblical authors, as frequently seen in the work of Fernando Canale.³¹⁹ Auerbach’s evaluation of realism in Scripture provides insight into the context of the classical ontology of medieval times, a philosophical outlook that often blurs what seems to be the ontological

³¹⁸ Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 28.

³¹⁹ Much, if not all, of the work of Fernando L. Canale flows from this basic assumption: that the ontological premises of the biblical authors are radically

perspective implicit in the work of the biblical authors: that is, of time, history, and divinity acting and working within it.

In sum, one of the key characteristics of a pre-critical understanding of the text, a characteristic also seen in Ernesti's vision of the historical-grammatical method, is figuration and typology. Yet in order for the story of Scripture to be considered as a whole, it must be unified by the element of time and progression. As seen above, even in this question, scholars are divided between those who understand figuration and typology in a temporal chronological sense and those who understand it as a divine timeless plan.

Verba, Res, Sensus: The Text and Truth

Besides the notions of figuration, typology, and time, a second point that must receive attention at this stage is the significance of the interrelation of words (*verba*), things (*res*), and sense (*sensus*) in hermeneutics, which can be traced as far back as Augustine's *De Doctrina Cristiana*.³²⁰ This also recalls several other notions

different from the premises that shaped Christian theology. For more on his basic understanding of these issues, see Canale, *Criticism of Theological Reason*.

³²⁰ For a thorough analysis of Augustine's hermeneutic and its relation to critical methodology, see Augustine A. Gilmore, "Augustine and the Critical Method," *Harvard Theological Review* 39, no. 2 (April 1946): 141–63. This section does not intend to provide a thorough investigation of Augustine's hermeneutic for several reasons; among them is the fact that because his material on hermeneutics is so extensive, "study of his techniques can lead us into intellectual quagmire." See Frederick Van Fleteren and Joseph C. Schnaubelt, *Augustine: Biblical Exegete* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 2. At this stage I will focus primarily on Augustine's dichotomy between words and things, since it might help the reader grasp how the historical-critical and grammatical methodologies understand the flow of meaning in the text.

introduced earlier, since “all of Augustine’s endeavors in metaphysics, epistemology, and exegesis coincide with a relentless effort to define the functions and limits of human language.”³²¹ This brief evaluation might help to clarify the dual approach to meaning (from history to text, or text to history) found in the historical-critical (which will be evaluated subsequently) and historical-grammatical approaches to the text, especially the changes made to the historical-grammatical approach.

For Augustine, “all doctrine concerns either things or signs.”³²² The word *thing* means “that which is part of the real (*res*) world referred to in the Bible but lying outside the Bible itself,” that is, “a piece of the outside world identified specifically by a specific word (*verbum*).”³²³ The words of Scripture play the role of a sign pointing to a different reality.³²⁴ The question that arises is: what is the nature of a “thing” that signs point to?

Some argue that this dichotomy between words and things stems from Augustine’s conception of God and time. Among them is Eugene Vance, who correctly depicts Augustine’s view that “even though God created the temporal

³²¹ Eugene Vance, *Mervelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 34.

³²² “Omnis doctrina vel rerum est vel signorum” in Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, 1.2.

³²³ Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 74.

³²⁴ This basic idea influences his own understanding of the “real meaning” of a particular text. See Van Fleteren, *Augustine: Biblical Exegete*, 10. Van Fleteren pinpoints at least four spheres in which Augustine articulates these meanings: historical, aetiological, analogical, and allegorical, all carrying a perspective that the text is a sign, pointing to different things.

world, God remains eternally present to himself as pure Being beyond time.”³²⁵ So, to some extent, for Augustine, the final purpose of the words of Scripture is to connect the reader with that reality or thing (*res*) “outside” the world.³²⁶ In other words, “the words (*verba*) of Scripture are what takes us into the world of things (*res*), the real world. . . . where we comprehend (and contemplate) eternal spiritual realities.”³²⁷ In the end, the words are only a means, a husk,³²⁸ pointing forward to, or wrapping, the eternal content found in the text.

Historical critics at the turn of the eighteenth century questioned the plausibility of the premise of eternal truth existing within the text. For them, the “thing” (*res*) or reality to which the text pointed ceased to be this eternal revealed truth in the text (in pre-critical times), and became the historical process behind the formation of the text. Revelation took place in an event in the past. The text only testified to this event, but did not contain revelation.³²⁹ The text continued to be a

³²⁵ Vance, *Mervelous Signals*, 35.

³²⁶ In relation to Augustine’s hermeneutic, Vance writes: “Augustine believed that the meaning of Scripture is strictly autonomous—independent of the temporal, verbal signs by which it is expressed, and such temporal meaning must be grasped by the reader in a direct process of illumination from within.” See Vance, *Mervelous Signals*, 41.

³²⁷ Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 76.

³²⁸ For the analogy of the text as a husk see Leithart, *Deep Exegesis*, 1–34.

³²⁹ Canale traces this subjective reality to the influence of Schleiermacher upon the formulation of the historical-critical methodology, affirming that the “historical-critical methodology of exegesis necessarily implies the encounter theory of revelation, and the artistic view of inspiration.” See Canale, *Cognitive Principle*, 169.

vessel through which truth was communicated, but the truth was behind the text, not in it. In other words, truth was seen as grounded in the subjective experience of the author and in its effect upon the readers, who fit themselves within the same reconstructed storyline.

As for historical grammarians, they attempted to maintain the eternal content of the text (via Augustine), while at the same time sustaining the fact that the text was only a wrapping covering the eternal content. The reality (*res*) of which the words were signs was found within the text, making the words mere signs to be disposed of once the meaning was reached.³³⁰

Interestingly, in both approaches to the text, the Platonic dichotomy between words and things seen in Augustine's work (an understanding that can be traced through Spinoza to Kant) remains intact at an ontological level. Both historical critics and historical grammarians exercise their differences under this Augustinian, and consequently Platonic, umbrella. The risk of a naive use of the historical-grammatical method is just this: that the interpreter ends up unconsciously resorting to a hermeneutical framework that flows from Platonic ontology.³³¹

³³⁰ Thus, on both the historical and ontological levels, the importance of the text for historical critics is partial: at the historical level the biblical authors used the text and its historiographical import to convey an earlier message, and at the ontological level the text is only a vessel carrying an ethical religious message relevant at the time of its composition. Again, the dichotomy between things as they appear and as they are looms in the background.

³³¹ This evaluation might vary if the interpreter does not resort to classical ontology when using the historical-grammatical methodology. Even so, because of the volatile nature of the method, its use renders problematic results. Ángel M. Rodríguez has pointed out the problematic implications of a modified version of the

In sum, the distinction between words and things that has shaped hermeneutical discussions for centuries—a distinction prevalent in the historical-critical and historical-grammatical approaches—is fundamentally tied to ontological commitments. Although the two approaches to the text differ in practical priorities, the macro-hermeneutical structure remains the same.

Based on this brief evaluation of the formative periods of the historical-grammatical method, it is possible to draw out the implication that the volatile nature of the method allows it to be applied in any way a particular interpreter wants under the umbrella of Platonic categories. Although the method assumes specific conceptions of history and ontology, the interpreter can still shape how the method functions based on the application of particular presuppositions concerning the relation of text, history, and truth.

The historical-grammatical method can function in a variety of ways under varied philosophical conditions that create varied interpretations. As for the historical-critical method, scholars understand that its “methodology cannot be claimed as a neutral discipline.”³³² This is only one of the reasons why a proper evaluation of the macro-hermeneutical premises of the historical-critical approach is

historical-critical method. See Ángel M. Rodríguez, “The Use of the Modified Version of the Historical-Critical Approach by Adventist Scholars,” in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, ed. George W. Reid, Biblical Research Institute Studies 1 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2006), 339–51. Perhaps the same should be said of the historical-grammatical method and any of its modified versions.

³³² Eugene F. Klug, foreword to *The End of the Historical-Critical Method*, by Gerhard Maier (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1977), 8.

imperative. To this evaluation I now turn.

Historical Criticism

Introduction

The historical-critical method was and still is the “dominant approach in the academic study of the Bible,”³³³ including both the “Hebrew Bible and New Testament.”³³⁴ Dozeman writes that “most scholarship in the United States, and an even larger majority of work done in Europe still falls comfortably under the historical-critical banner.” In addition, “the method has been used almost exclusively by the overwhelming majority of biblical scholars, both Catholic and Protestant.”³³⁵ The method crosses denominational lines; Keegan understands that even “fundamentalists have recognized the validity and power of this method and have used it to the extent that its results could be harmonized with their religious concerns.”³³⁶ The historical-critical method is overwhelmingly accepted by biblical scholars across geographical and denominational spectrums, but before it can be evaluated, it must be defined.

As with the grammatical method, to properly define the historical-critical

³³³ John Barton, “Historical-Critical Approaches,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9.

³³⁴ Dozeman, *Methods for Exodus*, xi.

³³⁵ Keegan, *Interpreting the Bible*, 24.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 24–25.

method is a complex task.³³⁷ *Historical-critical method* “is a term sometimes used erroneously as a synonym for the whole body of critical methodologies and approaches related to the discipline of Biblical Criticism.”³³⁸ I intend not to fall into this misconception in this study. Archie L. Nations notes that many believe “the method is so well understood that it needs no definition,”³³⁹ asserting that in the end historical criticism is “not a uniform method but rather a set of assumptions thought to be operative in doing historical research.”³⁴⁰ Therefore, this section will focus not on the varied facets of the historical-critical method itself, but on the formation of what is known as “historical criticism” and the philosophical presuppositions or “set of assumptions” the approach inherently carries within its structure.³⁴¹ Historical

³³⁷ John Barton writes: “What is the historical-critical method? Unfortunately, its definition is almost as controversial as its desirability.” See Barton, “Historical-Critical Approaches,” 9. Ben F. Meyer, on the other hand, offers what he believes to be a stable understanding and definition: “philologically learned, critical (as opposed to ‘dogmatic’), and devoted to scientific (as opposed to ‘pre-critical’) interpretation and history.” See Meyer, “Challenges of Text,” 3.

³³⁸ Soulen and Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 11.

³³⁹ Archie L. Nations, “Historical Criticism and the Current Methodological Crisis,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36, no. 1 (1983): 63.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Nations writes that these assumptions normally align with the following tenets: “Criticism must be freed from dogmatic presuppositions, maintain a high degree of objectivity, eschew ecclesiastical controls, and accept secular historians’ notions of historical homogeneity, of cause and effect relationships and of the criticism of sources.” Ibid. Another author who speaks of the general assumptions within biblical criticism is Ben F. Meyer. Meyer writes that the historical-critical method “has now been in use for approximately 200 years” (claiming that two thirds of this period followed the vision set forth by Baruch Spinoza) and that throughout “this period its connotations have been relatively stable: philologically learned,

criticism will be understood in this study not as a uniform method, but as this “set of assumptions” implemented in the various practices within the historical-critical method. With this definition in mind, the origin of these assumptions within biblical criticism can be examined.

While the majority of scholars see the rise of historical criticism as best perceived in the context of the Enlightenment and the turn of the eighteenth century, Travis F. Frampton writes that “these commonly held notions are not completely accurate.”³⁴² Although no one can deny that the eighteenth century was central to the appearance of the historical-critical approach to the text, Frampton attempts to convey that other circumstances should also be taken into account.³⁴³ Frampton asserts that “to understand the rise of modern critical approaches to biblical texts properly, one must at least begin with the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.”³⁴⁴

Frampton understands that the Renaissance and later the Reformation were key historical developments that led up to the historical-critical approach to the text.

Frampton writes:

critical (as opposed to ‘dogmatic’), and devoted to scientific (as opposed to ‘pre-critical’) interpretation and history.” See Meyer, “Challenges of Text,” 3.

³⁴² Travis L. Frampton, *Spinoza and the Rise of Historical Criticism of the Bible* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 199.

³⁴³ I do not want to neglect this significant point, although assessing the developments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries falls outside the scope of this study. A door is here left open for further studies, particularly regarding whether the philosophical presuppositions present in the eighteenth century were also operative in the previous centuries.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 200.

The Renaissance contributed greatly to an increase of knowledge by a renewed interest in the erudition of Greco-Roman classical authors, by developing ways of carrying out text-critical analyses of manuscripts, and by scrutinizing received traditions—all of which eroded many ancient and medieval myths. Yet it did not challenge political and religious authorities to the extent the Reformation later would. The manner in which the Reformers conjoined reason and the Bible, setting the latter up as a new locus of authority, however, left Protestants in an uncomfortable and compromising position.³⁴⁵

In other words, while the Renaissance paved the way for an emphasis on human reason, the Reformation counterbalanced these advancements with an emphasis on the authority of the text in the life of the individual. This dependence on the Bible as authority, and on the authority of the confessional community of believers, would be radically challenged at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While this study focuses on that transition between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it will not neglect the context of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, since some of the philosophical presuppositions within modern biblical criticism have roots in these earlier periods.

As in the previous section, I will evaluate two representative thinkers who are responsible for articulating the main philosophical presuppositions influential in historical criticism today,³⁴⁶ namely, Baruch Spinoza and Julius Wellhausen.³⁴⁷ To

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Ben F. Meyer directly connects the work of Spinoza with the historical-critical method, since for him “‘historical-critical’ work was largely aligned with the tradition of interpretation and history set in motion by Benedict Spinoza.” See Meyer, “Challenges of Text,” 3.

³⁴⁷ The majority of books on hermeneutics or Old Testament interpretation mention the work of Spinoza and Wellhausen. What the present analysis contributes to this long and common discussion is its object—the macro-hermeneutical or philosophical presuppositions (God-human relation) that these thinkers inserted into

this evaluation I now turn.

Spinoza

Introduction

The work of Spinoza³⁴⁸ was foundational for the development of what is today known as historical criticism. As Mark S. Gignilliat correctly points out, it is “important to come to terms with Spinoza because his work sets a trajectory for the modern-critical approach to Old Testament exegesis.”³⁴⁹ The particular work that is most influential in biblical interpretation is Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (henceforth TTP), a work that is not exclusively hermeneutical, but “examines the relation between religion and political theory through interpretation of the scriptures

what is today known as historical criticism. So, the focus here will not be on the particulars of their work (Spinoza’s philosophical conceptions as a whole or Wellhausen’s detailed understanding of the sources that formed the biblical text and their relation to the history of Israel), but on the presuppositions they held and inserted into biblical criticism. In this sense, the present analysis will not be exhaustive and inevitably will leave much information out. It is my hope that this brief evaluation might convince the reader of the presence and influence of philosophical presuppositions within biblical interpretation.

³⁴⁸ For more on Spinoza’s background and thinking, see W. N. A. Klever, “Spinoza’s Life and Works,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 13–60; James S. Preus, *Spinoza and the Irrelevance of Biblical Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Richard Mason, *The God of Spinoza: A Philosophical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); E. M. Curley, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969); Frampton, *Rise of Historical Criticism*; and the book that sets forth Spinoza’s basic ideas regarding biblical interpretation (already mentioned in passing), *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. From now on all texts from the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* will be taken from the 1989 Gebhardt edition and not from the already surpassed translation by R. H. M. Elwes.

³⁴⁹ Gignilliat, *Brief History*, 16.

and the history of the Hebrew nation.”³⁵⁰ This section is aimed at uncovering the philosophical presuppositions that govern Spinoza’s hermeneutic in the TTP, since these presuppositions are the platform upon which modern biblical criticism is built.

To further elaborate on the need for an analysis of the relation between Spinoza’s philosophical presuppositions and his hermeneutic, I turn to Brad S. Gregory, who writes: “The extent to which Spinoza’s philosophy provides the basis for his interpretation of Scripture, especially chapters 1-6, has not been sufficiently recognized.”³⁵¹ Furthermore, Gregory asserts:

The TTP is rightly acknowledged as a pioneering work in the establishment of modern Biblical exegesis, but it is permeated by a philosophy which, despite its author’s claims to the contrary, plays a crucial role in the scriptural interpretation.³⁵²

Along with his philosophy guiding biblical interpretation, scholars generally recognize that the terminology Spinoza uses to articulate his ideas includes biblical

³⁵⁰ Don Garrett, introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 2. What Spinoza attempts to secure in TTP is freedom. Freedom is his first principle, on which both religion and peace in society rely. Spinoza writes: “I think I am undertaking no ungrateful or unprofitable task in demonstrating that not only can this freedom be granted without endangering piety and the peace of the commonwealth, but also that the peace of the commonwealth and piety depend on this freedom. This then, is the main point which I have sought to establish in this treatise.” Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 51–52.

³⁵¹ Brad S. Gregory, introduction to *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, by Baruch Spinoza, trans. Samuel Shirley (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 41.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 42.

words, but carries extrabiblical conceptualizations.³⁵³ Gregory's evaluation of the influences behind Spinoza's hermeneutic is aligned with the assessment of this study in general, and this section in particular: that interpretative traditions carry within themselves extrabiblical philosophical presuppositions (such as biblical terminology with extrabiblical conceptualizations)³⁵⁴ that define the nature and scope of methodology, and consequently, its results.

Although there is no doubt that Spinoza's philosophy guided his biblical interpretation, it is also important to note that many of the presuppositions to be mentioned next did not first appear in Spinoza's work. As observed earlier, the developments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries cannot be neglected. So, at this introductory stage, I would like to briefly highlight some significant ideas that developed over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and provided the background for Spinoza's work. Gregory identifies at least three representative authors who created the general direction in which Spinoza would later develop his ideas. What follows is a summary of these authors and the main ideas that Spinoza would later develop.

³⁵³ Concerning Spinoza's definition of biblical terms, Gregory writes, "Spinoza's interpretation leans on such [naturalistic] definitions despite the fact that they are not found in the Bible." Ibid.

³⁵⁴ This was mentioned in the previous chapter relating to Gilkey's criticism of biblical interpretation being half conservative and half liberal. As one can notice, this interpretative dilemma in modern times has ancient roots. The difference in Spinoza is not that he was naïvely using biblical language to arrive at liberal conclusions: on the contrary, "Spinoza employs many of the same terms prevalent in traditional Jewish and Christian discourse . . . but he twists them and gives them new, unorthodox meanings that are compatible with his own philosophy." Ibid., 42–43.

First was the French millenarist Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1676), who wrote *Men Before Adam*, of which the “main thesis, based on both scriptural and extra-scriptural evidence, was that people had existed before Adam and hence the Biblical account of Adam as the first man had to be modified.”³⁵⁵ La Peyrère was also known for showing “numerous textual problems in the Pentateuch in addition to denying its Mosaic authorship.”³⁵⁶

The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) wrote *Leviathan* and advocated that the authenticity of the books of Scripture, that is, the canon, “are determined not by tradition, scholarship or an appeal to ‘the Spirit,’ but by the sovereign’s [the state’s] command.”³⁵⁷ Along with this idea, Hobbes also criticized the Mosaic authorship and, consequently, the general reliability of the Pentateuch.

The English Quaker Samuel Fisher (1606–1665), who wrote *The Rustick’s Alarm to the Rabbies*, influenced Spinoza’s work on both epistemological and historical levels. Gregory summarizes Fisher’s assumptions by affirming that his “fundamental epistemological distinction is between the Word of God and Scripture, an eternal, supernatural message of God on the one hand and on the other, a physical copy of this Word written by certain human beings at a specific time and place.”³⁵⁸

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 33.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 34.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 35–36.

Leithart adds another name to the list, that of the Dutch “amateur” theologian Lodewik Meyer, who published *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres*, a book that would later be distributed alongside Spinoza’s *Tractatus*. Meyer held that “any number of interpretations of a passage might thus be true and the test of their truth is their consistency with philosophy, that is, with the clear and distinct deliverances that arise from Cartesian method.”³⁵⁹ Leithart adds that “Meyer’s book is important because in it he initiates a hermeneutical method that detaches the truth and meaning of Scripture from its verbal expression.”³⁶⁰

In other words, the hermeneutical development between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was marked by the beginning of a detachment of truth and meaning from the text itself to external categories,³⁶¹ a detachment this study also aligns with a timeless conception of reality.

All of the ideas listed above appear in the work of Spinoza in a highly developed and articulated manner. This introduction only highlights the need to take a closer look at how Spinoza developed his biblical interpretation in the context of

³⁵⁹ See Leithart, *Deep Exegesis*, 9.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁶¹ These external categories vary. Even in the Reformation, the interpretation of the text itself was guided by a tropological or personal/ethical orientation making the text conform to “canons within the canon.” See Leithart, *Deep Exegesis*, 13–15. Later on, these external categories that detached truth and meaning from the text, and truth from meaning itself, included reason in the context of philosophy, science, and historical investigation.

the philosophical presuppositions that influenced his project.³⁶² I will begin by evaluating the principle of epistemology and ontology in Spinoza's work, followed by how Spinoza arrived at the meaning of the biblical text. To this evaluation I now turn.

The Principle of Epistemology and Ontology

Spinoza's philosophical presuppositions concerning reality depart from an

³⁶² As the introduction of this study indicates, the focus of this project is on intended philosophical presuppositions, rather than unintended presuppositions such as experiences, assumptions, and emotions, which are also quite influential in biblical interpretation. Even so, I would like to mention one significant unintended presupposition that highlights why Spinoza approached Scripture and religion the way he did: his frustration with incoherence in religion—a frustration that can still be experienced in contemporary times. Spinoza writes: “Matters have long reached such a pass that a Christian, Turk, Jew or heathen can generally be recognised as such only by his physical appearance or dress, or by his attendance at a particular place of worship, or by his profession of a particular belief and his allegiance to some leader. But as for their way of life, it is the same for all. . . . The very temple became a theater where, instead of Church teachers, orators held forth, none of the actuated by the desire to instruct the people, but keen to attract admiration, to criticise their adversaries before the public, and to preach only such novel and striking doctrine as might gain the applause of the crowd.” Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 52. This is just a glimpse at the internal frustrations Spinoza held toward religion and the religious way of life. So, even before I venture into an analysis of Spinoza's intended philosophical presuppositions, it is important to remember that behind the ideas of a man is a life full of complexity, a life that cannot be objectified and assigned to particular categories. In addition, Spinoza himself attacked the “preachers” of his time with an argument that is recurrent in this study: “I do not see that they [religious preachers] have taught anything more than the speculations of Aristotelians or Platonists, and they have made Scripture conform to these so as to avoid appearing to be the followed of heathens. It was not enough for them to share in the delusions of the Greeks: they have sought to represent the prophets as sharing in the same delusions.” *Ibid.*, 53. The question that is left open is: will Spinoza succumb to this same critique? Will Spinoza, in the end, conform the biblical text to Greek assumptions? Will the prophets speak Hebrew with the voice of Plato?

epistemological standpoint.³⁶³ Because knowledge of reality can only be acquired through reason, Spinoza creates a dichotomy between Scripture and philosophy: while Scripture can lead the individual to piety, only philosophy can lead to truth. This piety that Scripture proposes is a reasonable and acceptable form of religion, or what Spinoza calls “purified religion.” Opposed to purified religion is “superstitious religion,” that is, the religion set forth by the writings of Scripture itself (without the aid of reason) and the prophets who upheld elements contrary to the validation of reason, such as miracles,³⁶⁴ supernatural events, divine voices, etc. So, it is through

³⁶³ This study already alluded to Spinoza’s dependence upon Cartesian epistemology and the human subject at the center of the acquisition of knowledge through reason alone. That being said, two important yet corollary points must be made here: (1) Spinoza rejects the possibility of Scripture containing guiding principles. As it pertains to using Scripture to form our presuppositions in the study of Scripture, Spinoza believes that the author left interpreters “deprived of the foundations and principles of Scriptural knowledge.” See Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 161. The principles that guide Scriptural knowledge must come from outside the text. (2) The responsibility to correct. Spinoza holds that because the biblical authors did not leave us principles of any sort, his main task as an interpreter is “to correct these faults and to remove common theological prejudices.” *Ibid.* While this study values point number two, the necessity to challenge “common theological prejudices,” it does not support point number one. Part of the problem in biblical interpretation today (varied interpretations, disagreements, projection of ideas foreign to the text into the text) stems from reliance upon extrabiblical sources. In this sense, this study differs from Spinoza’s project.

³⁶⁴ Spinoza understands miracles as “that whose cause cannot be explained on scientific principles known to us by the natural light of reason,” and considers those who uphold the idea of miracles to be, in a sense, primitive, or what he calls “common people.” *Ibid.*, 127. What Spinoza does endorse is a natural theology where Nature itself, by being eternal and immutable, communicates the very attributes of God: eternal and immutable. It is this conception of miracles that enables Spinoza to conclude: “There can be no doubt that all the events narrated in Scripture occurred naturally; yet they are referred to God because, as we have already shown, it is not the part of Scripture to explain events through their natural causes; it only relates those events that strike the imagination . . . So if we find in

the validation of reason that the supernatural elements pointing to a biblical reality within the text are denied.

Interestingly, in separating Scripture from philosophy, Spinoza became a type of Reformer,³⁶⁵ since for him the “understanding of Scripture and of matters spiritual must be sought from Scripture alone,”³⁶⁶ and he adds that Scripture should not be interpreted “from the sort of knowledge that derives from the natural light of reason.”³⁶⁷ This is one of the first incoherences in the work of Spinoza. Spinoza claims that Scripture should be understood via Scripture and not by philosophy, but does not clarify that this choice stems from a philosophical standpoint. Spinoza also maintains that Scripture should be understood through Scripture and not by reason, and in this creates a second dichotomy between the words of the text and the word of God.³⁶⁸ Spinoza reduces this word of God to one simple proposition: “to obey God

Scripture some things for which we can assign no cause and which seem to have happened beyond—indeed, contrary to—Nature’s order, this should not perplex us. We need have no hesitation in believing that what truly happened, happened naturally.” *Ibid.*, 133. This conception was inevitably carried into the historical-critical approach to the text without contestation. Anyone who rejects it is considered “sacrilegious.” Spinoza writes: “Whatever is contrary to Nature is contrary to reason, and whatever is contrary to reason is absurd, and should therefore be rejected.” *Ibid.*, 134.

³⁶⁵ Leithart also sees the spirit of a Reformer within the work of Spinoza. See Leithart, *Deep Exegesis*, 10–13.

³⁶⁶ Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 54.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 54–55.

with all one's heart by practising justice and charity."³⁶⁹ So, in addition to detaching truth from the meaning of the biblical text, Spinoza creates a second dichotomy within the meaning of the biblical text itself, between the words of the text and the word of God. On this, Leithart adds that in the work of Spinoza "the husk of history and speculation can be stripped away to get to the mere kernel,"³⁷⁰ that is, "the letter is nothing; the ethical spirit of Scripture is all."³⁷¹ In sum, the epistemological outlook of Spinoza determined his understanding of reality, and consequently, of the relation between truth, meaning, and text.

Assuming a Cartesian epistemological framework, Spinoza attempts to determine what is and is not real within the text through reason, and this is how the possibilities of the dynamic between God and man are established. At this stage it is important to expand on how this epistemological outlook, which stems from a timeless perception of Being,³⁷² affects Spinoza's understanding of the text.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., 55.

³⁷⁰ Leithart, *Deep Exegesis*, 16.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² The effects of a timeless interpretation of Being permeate other areas in Spinoza's work, such as his view of God's involvement in the world. Spinoza indicates this with words such as "eternal decrees and eternal truth" as he writes: "By God's direction I mean the fixed and immutable order of Nature, or chain of natural events; for I have said above, and have already shown elsewhere, that the universal laws of Nature according to which all things happen and are determined are nothing but God's eternal decrees, which always involve eternal truth and necessity." See Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 89. Spinoza articulates the idea of man within this Nature in a deterministic fashion, since for him "no one acts except by the predetermined order of Nature—that is, from God's eternal direction and decree." Ibid., 90. The possibility that a timeless conception of Being is at play in

In the historical-grammatical method the text served as a vessel for the authorial meaning within it, and the same dichotomy is maintained in the work of Spinoza. The letter is subject to the eternal, universal content of the text—the ethical. Thus, for Spinoza, both the rational person and the common person can attain *beatitudo*, the former through philosophy, and the latter through purified religion (a religion that recognizes the ethical component apart from the mythological world picture), and as in the grammatical method, the text is left aside once this eternal content is unveiled.

Now that the basic structure of Spinoza’s approach in the context of the principles of epistemology and ontology has been laid out, I will address how Spinoza arrives at the meaning of a particular text and what this meaning consists of.

Spinoza’s Structure of Meaning

The question to be addressed at this stage is: how does Spinoza arrive at the meaning of a text? While Meyer and Ernesti considered truth and meaning to be identical in the text, Spinoza departs from this notion and determines that the “Bible cannot be relied on for truth [this is the role of philosophy], and the goal of biblical interpretation is not to arrive at truth, but rather to arrive at the meaning of the original text.”³⁷³ In order to arrive at the meaning of the text, Spinoza takes quite a literalistic approach to the text, yet under the guidance of the light of reason. An

Spinoza’s understanding of the text is supported when its effects are also noticed in the realm of cosmology and human freedom.

³⁷³ Ibid., 15.

example of this is in order:

Maimonides and some others take the view that this and all other instances of an apparition of an angel—as to Manoah and to Abraham when he was about to sacrifice his son—occurred in dreams, on the grounds that nobody could have seen an angel with his eyes open. But this is mere rubbish. They are concerned to extort from Scripture some Aristotelian nonsense and some fabrications of their own; and this I regard as the height of absurdity. It was by images, unreal and dependent only on the prophet's imagination, that God revealed to Joseph his future dominion.³⁷⁴

While Spinoza supports what the text says in itself,³⁷⁵ and even criticizes others for introducing Greek concepts into biblical interpretation, he still infers much into what the text is “attempting” to convey.³⁷⁶ On the one hand, he is looking for the face value meaning of the text, but what sifts this meaning from error is what is in harmony with reason, that is, an extrabiblical source. It is this reliance on Cartesian reason that leads him to affirm that the visions of Joseph were unreal and dependent on an imaginative posture of the prophet.³⁷⁷ Because of the primitive aspects of the

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 63.

³⁷⁵ On the literalistic approach, Spinoza uses expressions such as “the indisputable meaning of Scripture” to convey what the text is explicitly saying. Ibid., 62. Another example of this: “Scripture does clearly indicate that God has a form, and that when Moses heard God speaking, it befell him to see God, but to behold only his back parts.” Ibid., 63.

³⁷⁶ An example of this is in Spinoza's remarks concerning what the text is able to convey. Spinoza writes: “Nor can the belief in historical narratives, however certain, give us knowledge of God, nor, consequently, of the love of God. For the love of God arises from the knowledge of God, a knowledge deriving from general axioms that are certain and self-evident, and so belief in historical narratives is by no means essential to the attainment of our supreme good.” Ibid., 105.

³⁷⁷ Even if Spinoza allows for the possibility of the occurrence of revelation, this revelation was only for the prophet and had no universal validity. Spinoza makes this point in the context of the experience of Job. Spinoza writes: “These arguments were accommodated to Job's understanding and propounded to convoke

prophetic mind (which relied more on imagination than intellect), God had to reveal himself through images and words, things that for Spinoza are in his time unnecessary because of the light of reason.

This last point highlights Spinoza's basic understanding of the God-human relation. Spinoza writes: "With the exception of Christ, God's revelations were received only with the aid of the imaginative faculty, to wit, with the aid of words and images."³⁷⁸ With this in mind, he adds that "it was not a more perfect mind that was needed for the gift of prophecy, but a more lively imaginative faculty."³⁷⁹ In this sense, the need for words and images is disposed of once intellect is purified, that is, when it understands the ethical imperative. Because for Spinoza "God can communicate with man without mediation [words or images],"³⁸⁰ that is, communicating "his essence to our minds without employment of corporeal means,"³⁸¹ what results is access to God and reality that bypasses the need for biblical words. In other words, while the interpreter might reach the meaning of a particular biblical text, this meaning originated from a mind led by imagination, not intellect. And since Spinoza's reason emphasizes the role of the intellect in the life of the individual, the words of Scripture (and their meaning) are of secondary importance

him alone. They are not arguments of universal validity to convince all men." Ibid., 86.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 65.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 64.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

to truth, which is found in philosophy.

By disconnecting Scripture from philosophy, Spinoza, then, supports an analysis of the text itself in order to understand its authorial meaning. Yet the method in which this study of the text operates is not different from any other scientific method. Spinoza writes:

I hold that the method of interpreting Scripture is no different from the method of interpreting Nature, and is in fact in complete accord with it. For the method of interpreting Nature consists essentially in composing a detailed study of Nature from which, as being the source of our assured data, we can deduce the definitions of things of Nature.³⁸²

While Spinoza asserts that the object of biblical interpretation is the text itself, and the method to interpret it is a scientific method, he opens the possibility for another source of information to be added to the interpretation of Scripture as an object: namely, history.

Spinoza holds that no other principles or data can be allowed in interpretation except “those that can be gathered only from Scripture itself and from a historical study of Scripture.”³⁸³ From this, one can notice that what Spinoza does is determine the content or data for analysis (biblical text and historical reconstructions), and establish the method to analyze the data to arrive at the authorial meaning: the scientific, positivistic method.

In sum,³⁸⁴ Spinoza’s general approach to the text in order to arrive at the

³⁸² Ibid., 141.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ What I am summarizing here is Spinoza’s general approach to the text. More details could be explored here, such as Spinoza’s approach to biblical

authorial meaning follows the following pattern:

(1) Spinoza determines what meaning is, before looking for meaning. Since there is no truth in the text, what one finds in the text is the authorial meaning, a meaning that cannot be intermixed with philosophy. For Spinoza there is no connection between the meaning of the text and philosophy. By separating the two, Spinoza sets biblical studies on a subordinate level to philosophy, and makes it subject to the dissecting work of historians. This is so because once there is no truth in the text, and no bridge between text and reality, what is left for biblical studies is the study of historical backgrounds to understand the formation, context, and meaning of the text. In other words, if there is truth in the text, this truth relates to how it was formed, its meaning to the original audience, and possible “ethical” lessons for the present.

(2) Spinoza determines the methodological approach to evaluate the data. For Spinoza, the method for looking at the text itself is like any scientific method. It theoretically bypasses any intentional inference from the interpreter in order to arrive at the objective “plain” meaning of the text. Spinoza writes: “Knowledge of all these things—that is, of all the contents of Scripture—must be sought from Scripture alone, just as knowledge of Nature must be sought from Nature itself.”³⁸⁵ The only problem here is that Spinoza’s reliance upon reason and philosophy makes him fail in his own

contradictions (Ibid., 146). But to explore these details would lead this section away from its main purpose—of evaluating the philosophical presuppositions that influence Spinoza’s approach to the text.

³⁸⁵ Ibid., 142.

project.³⁸⁶

(3) Spinoza determines the data to be analyzed by the scientific method. For Spinoza, the data is both the text and historical reconstructions. Scripture gives the interpreter the textual content, but it does not provide an accurate historical account of what took place (since it is conceived by imagination and not intellect). Historical reconstructions, then, fill in the empty gaps in order for the interpreter to have a better grasp of what indeed took place.

At this stage, it is imperative to consider how Spinoza's approach relates to the three dimensions of meaning (seen in the analysis of the historical-grammatical method): content, form, and context. For Spinoza, the emphasis in biblical interpretation is on textual content (ethical) that he establishes a priori via the light of reason.³⁸⁷ That is, the meaning of the text is established beforehand. Since the text is insufficient to give a clear account of history, Spinoza adds the dimension of history as data for understanding the authorial meaning; this way, the context becomes just

³⁸⁶ Spinoza writes: "It is not permissible for us to manipulate Scripture's meaning to accord with our reason's dictates and our preconceived opinions; all knowledge of the Bible is to be sought from the Bible alone." *Ibid.*, 144. Spinoza does exactly the opposite: he not only determines the meaning to be sought in the text beforehand, but also is heavily influenced by Cartesian philosophy with its emphasis on reason. Both of these points directly influence his analysis of the "Bible alone."

³⁸⁷ This differs from the grammatical-historical method in the sense that for historical grammarians, the content was not external to the text, but found within it. For Spinoza, the content is the ethical, and it can be found in the text, but is established a priori via philosophy and reason.

as significant as the content.³⁸⁸ In relation to form, Spinoza values textual depictions (metaphors, etc.) in biblical interpretation, but only when they can support his main idea in particular: that the meaning is ethical and the rest is discarded as works of imagination. Although important, the form is irrelevant to lead an interpreter into truth.³⁸⁹ In a sense, form is significant only when it provides insight into the imaginative writing of the prophets, a writing that must be “baptized” into reason, creating a new being—“purified religion.”

Spinoza’s approach to the text establishes more than a biblical method proper,³⁹⁰ but a mindset, an approach to the text that creates a dichotomy between truth and meaning and between the words of man and the words of God. Philosophical truth and the word of God lead to an ethical, peaceful, intellectual existence, while the meaning of a text written with the words of man must be studied not in order to reach truth, but in order to understand the imaginative product of a religion of the past.³⁹¹

³⁸⁸ Gignilliat supports this, since he also understands that for Spinoza, “the search for the text’s meaning becomes equated with the search for the text’s ostensive historical referent, setting, and immediate attention.” See Gignilliat, *Brief History*, 16.

³⁸⁹ Spinoza emphasizes this same point: “The point at issue is merely the meaning of the texts, not their truth.” Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, 143.

³⁹⁰ Spinoza does call his method “the true method of Scriptural interpretation.” *Ibid.*, 154.

³⁹¹ It is this assertion that sets historical criticism at the center of biblical study. When discussing miracles, Spinoza expresses this same idea: “To interpret Scriptural miracles and to understand from their accounts how they really took place, one must know the belief of those who originally related them and left us written records of them, and one must distinguish between these beliefs and what could have been

Now that the basic presuppositions in the work of Spinoza are laid out, I will address the principle of history. Spinoza created the context for historical critics to take center stage in biblical studies. Spinoza utilizes history in interpretation not by resorting to ANE literature, but by uncovering the internal inconsistencies within the biblical text marked by temporal development.³⁹² So, in order to see how these ideas became implemented in biblical interpretation through the avenue of history, I will resort to another representative author in the formation of historical criticism: Julius Wellhausen.

Wellhausen

Introduction

Like the work of Spinoza, the work of Wellhausen (1844–1918)³⁹³ is not

presented to their senses.” Ibid., 135. The same principle can be applied to the entirety of the OT: to understand the imaginative work of the prophets, as well as their worldview, one must go to the historical setting around them. The reliability of the text is thus exchanged with the reliability of history.

³⁹² See particularly chapters 8–10 in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. From this internal analysis (as opposed to external analysis based on ANE sources), Spinoza concludes in relation to the Pentateuch that “it is clear beyond a shadow of doubt that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses, but by someone who lived many generations after Moses.” Ibid., 165.

³⁹³ For more on the life and work of Wellhausen, see John H. Hayes, “Wellhausen as a Historian of Israel,” *Semeia* 25 (1982): 37–60; Ernest W. Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century: The Legacy of Julius Wellhausen* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998); and Douglas A. Knight, foreword to *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, by Julius Wellhausen (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), v–xvi.

independent from previous influences and ideas.³⁹⁴ Even so, Wellhausen is distinguished from his contemporaries by “his clarity and the broad scope of his project, namely, a new conception of Israel’s history.”³⁹⁵ As mentioned earlier, Spinoza prepared the context for the role of the historian to become central in biblical interpretation.³⁹⁶ Spinoza’s rational approach created the necessity for historical analysis to uncover what truly happened behind the unreliable biblical text filled with contradictions and myth. The contribution of Wellhausen in this context “was his use of literary or source criticism as a means to reconstruct Israel’s history.”³⁹⁷ While Spinoza questioned the historical reliability of the text through an

³⁹⁴ Gignilliat correctly assesses that “Wellhausen was not the first to notice sources in the Pentateuch,” since these ideas began to be developed “over a century before Wellhausen with the work of Jean Astruc (1684–1766) and Richard Simon (1638–1712).” Gignilliat adds: “Neither was Wellhausen the first to suggest that the prophets of Israel came before the law of Moses. Graf suggested this seminal idea and Wellhausen seized the notion when he first heard it.” In Gignilliat, *Brief History*, 57. For a critique of these basic assumptions see Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method*, trans. Edwin W. Leverenz and Rudolph F. Norden (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1977).

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁹⁶ Wellhausen himself recognizes the influence of Spinoza in his work. See Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 6.

³⁹⁷ Gignilliat, *Brief History*, 62. Even so, source criticism itself “originated well before Wellhausen,” since as “early as 1711, the German pastor Henning Bernhard Witter, noting the differences in style and content and an alternation between Divine names in Genesis 1–3, posited separate pre-Mosaic sources to explain them.” See Knight, “Foreword,” ix. The difference in the work of Wellhausen is his critique of the already established JEDP sources and development of a new way to organize the sources behind the formation of the text and consequently Israel’s history. Since this study is not aimed at validating or disproving these source-critical concepts, this introduction to the issue will suffice. For more on this particular topic see Umberto Cassuto, *The Documentary Hypothesis and the Composition of the Pentateuch* (Jerusalem: Shalem, 2008).

internal evaluation of the text, Wellhausen approached the text with the same rational import and with the goal to reconstruct the history of Israel: that is, to reconstruct the historical process that led to the formation of the text.³⁹⁸

This section will briefly probe Wellhausen's understanding of history in order to uncover the basic assumptions and philosophical presuppositions (as they relate to the principle of history) of his project.

The Principle of History

As mentioned earlier, Ernesti attempted to understand Israelite history through the text itself as it is presented to the reader, and the historical-grammatical method was established to understand history through the text. The first difference between the historical-grammatical method and the work of Wellhausen does not involve the uncovering of history through the text itself, since both Ernesti and Wellhausen go to the text for information, but rather the influence of reason and Cartesian doubt upon the evaluation of the text and the objective of that evaluation. While Ernesti understood Israelite history through what the text says (the grammatical is the historical), Wellhausen reconstructed Israelite history, following Spinoza, through inconsistencies within the text (the grammatical inconsistencies/variations point to the historical).³⁹⁹ In other words, "Wellhausen

³⁹⁸ Wellhausen's thesis was related to "whether that law [the law of Moses] is the starting-point for the history of ancient Israel, or not rather for that of Judaism."

³⁹⁹ An example of this tendency in Wellhausen's work, seen in his discussion of the Mosaic law: "We have no express information as to the author and date of composition, and to get even approximately at the truth we are shut up to the use of

reconstructed the totality of Israel's history by means of analyzing the strata of her literary sources."⁴⁰⁰ Commenting on the place of the formerly called Elohist document, Wellhausen writes that this section in the Pentateuch is "historical only in form; the history serves merely as a framework on which to arrange the legislative material, or a mask to disguise it."⁴⁰¹ In other words, the history the text depicts is, to some extent, made up, and needs to be critically evaluated by reason.

With this general movement in mind, it is evident that the emphasis of historical criticism through the work of Wellhausen is not on the textual meaning itself (at least at first), but on the history behind the text (historical process) that inevitably formed the text.⁴⁰² Once the Israelite background is reconstructed, the meaning of the text can be understood. The focus is on the sources that formed the text. These are windows into not only the historical processes that formed the text, but the meaning of the text itself.

The basic assumption behind Wellhausen's project is the idea, already

such data as can be derived from an analysis of the contents, taken in conjunction with what we may happen to know from other sources as to the course of Israel's history." *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁰⁰ Gignilliat, *Brief History*, 66. Wellhausen's credibility, though, is almost questioned when he writes: "I learned through Ritschl that Karl Heinrich Graf placed the Law later than the prophets, and, almost without knowing his reasons for the hypothesis, I was prepared to accept it." See Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 3.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁰² Knight agrees, since for him "Wellhausen did not conduct source criticism for its own sake, nor merely to the end of understanding the literature. For him, the value of such examinations resided in their historiographical usefulness." See Knight, "Foreword," xi.

anticipated in Spinoza's work in relation to philosophical categories, that the biblical text does not give the reader a proper historical account of the historical process behind the formation of the text. On this, W. Robertson Smith writes in the preface to Wellhausen's major work *Prolegomena to the History of Israel* that the "Old Testament does not furnish a history of Israel, though it supplies the materials from which such a history can be reconstructed."⁴⁰³

As it pertains to the text, the object of interest in the work of Wellhausen and historians after him is the historical *tendenz* of the writer: that is, the writer's context, situation, life, and worldview. Once this is reconstructed from a critical evaluation of the text searching for the possible sources that shaped its formation, the history of Israel can be understood as well as the meaning of the text. Again, the idea here is that truth and reality are not presented by the text or found within the text, but are found, with the aid of internal textual pointers, in the formation of the text itself. As for the nature of this "truth," it is not moral, spiritual, or universal truth, but the arrival of a clear picture of the historical process behind the text.

At work in this approach to the text are, at least, the following philosophical presuppositions: (1) as it pertains to epistemology, the Cartesian principle of doubt along with its reliance and dependence on human reason (what is presented in the text cannot be accepted at face value); (2) as it pertains to ontology, a timeless conception of Being that inevitably creates a dichotomy between text and reality, as

⁴⁰³ W. Robertson Smith, preface to *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, by Julius Wellhausen (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), vii.

well as the need for a historical-scientific evaluation of the text. In this sense, the interpreted historical principle within the structure of historical criticism is inevitably tied to specific philosophical commitments. It is not a neutral methodology: its structure, implementation, and results flow from these pre-established concepts.

Although Wellhausen's contribution affected the flow of biblical studies for more than a century after him, the discipline has grown and developed several different critical approaches and tasks. Knight is correct in assessing that exegesis "is now unthinkable without form criticism, tradition criticism, and 'new' literary criticism,"⁴⁰⁴ among other exegetical disciplines that have emerged since Wellhausen. Even so, the task of this section was to evaluate how extrabiblical philosophical presuppositions are present within the very fabric of historical criticism. In the end it is not only a matter of the text having a "historical meaning," but a historical meaning without any philosophical weight, and consequently, no import to the reality of the reader (apart from a moral/ethical dimension as advocated by Spinoza, or literary aesthetic features uncovered by narratology and reader-oriented approaches).⁴⁰⁵

Summary

The evaluation of the historical-grammatical method was divided into two

⁴⁰⁴ Knight, "Foreword," xv.

⁴⁰⁵ For a more sensitive use of the historical-critical method (one that uses Ernst Troetsch's principles of criticism, analogy, and correlation, but adds the element of "hearing" to foster dialogue and sensitivity), see Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism*.

main sections. The first dealt with the principle of history (as well as text and meaning), and the second with the principle of ontology.

The first section pointed out how in the formative periods of the method, and under the work of Ernesti, the grammatical method developed under an extrabiblical approach, namely, philology. No role was given to the reader apart from the rigorous application of the philological approach. This indicates that the mindset of the time followed classical epistemology, where the subject is passive in the generation of meaning. Although Ernesti understood the grammatical method as one interpretative action, that is, the grammatical is the historical, interpreters after Ernesti understood the method as two interpretative actions, a grammatical as well as a historical. What this implies is that, over time, the influence of historical criticism grew and immersed itself in a grammatical approach that was volatile enough to incorporate any presupposition into its application.

The second section dealt with the principle of ontology in the context of some features of the grammatical and pre-critical approach to the text, namely, figuration, typology, and conceptions of time, as well as the question of the influence of Augustine in the relation of text and truth. Because the words of the text (*verba*) were signs pointing to a truth or reality within the text (*res*), in the end, the words themselves were disposable. Regardless of how the grammatical method is used, this interpretative context created by Platonic categories of reality remains.

The explicit use of philosophical presuppositions within historical criticism began with the work of Spinoza. As mentioned earlier, what Spinoza established was broader than an interpretative method proper: it was a set of a priori conditions

under which the historical-critical method would function in the following centuries. These conditions are as follows: (1) the primacy of reason (as primary source) over the biblical text, ruling out by default any supernatural elements such as divine voices, miracles, and theophanies, as well as any connection between textual depictions of reality and reality itself⁴⁰⁶; (2) the dichotomy between Scripture (ethical piety) and philosophy (truth); (3) the dichotomy between the words of man (subject to imagination) and the word of God (conceived as the ethical content that passes the validation of reason); (4) the general idea that the text and its history are a wrapping around the ethical essence, or content.⁴⁰⁷

With these main ideas established, historical criticism had an open path ahead. Through the years, scholars developed more ways to question the credibility of the text as it relates both to philosophy and history. Julius Wellhausen appeared in the nineteenth century, articulating well how these presuppositions directly affected how a historian viewed and used the text.

Wellhausen and Spinoza advocate that the presuppositions given to the reader by the text are false and must be corrected by reason through different means. Yet what if the presuppositions of the writers of the Bible—in relation to both history

⁴⁰⁶ But, as mentioned earlier, with the exception of the “real voice of God” sounding from Sinai. As for textual connections to reality, I mean the possibility of the text presenting macro-hermeneutical principles that would engage common philosophical notions. This study proposes that the text carries an inherent macro-hermeneutical or philosophical perspective that might aid not only how the interpreter views the reality or worldview of the biblical author/audience, but how the interpreter understands the notions of God, humanity, history, etc.

and philosophy—are correct? What would biblical interpretation look like if the original historical-critical approach to the text was rejected? These questions build a bridge to numerous possibilities hidden within the text. At this stage, it is time to cross the bridge to the other side, to look at the text and see how it understands the God-human relation, and to notice how extrabiblical assumptions influence the interpretation of the text.

⁴⁰⁷ For other representative figures in biblical studies, such as Peter Enns and James Barr, who make this same assumption, see Leithart, *Deep Exegesis*, 29–34.

CHAPTER 4

THE GOD-HUMAN RELATION IN THE INTERPRETATION OF EXODUS

Introduction

Now that a general exposition of the philosophical presuppositions relating to the God-human relationship within the presuppositional framework of thinkers and methods has been presented, I will move to the effects of such presuppositions upon the interpretation of the God-human relation in Exodus. This movement from self and method to the biblical text is necessary if one is to attest the influence of extrabiblical presuppositions in interpretation. In order to provide a basis for this evaluation, I will focus on the text of Exodus by way of its literary structure. From the literary structure of the book of Exodus, I will be able to perceive how the text points to its own understanding of God's relation to humanity as well as how scholars understand and interpret these conceptions.

In order to accomplish these goals, this chapter will be divided into three main sections. The first will provide a brief literature review of how biblical scholars have interpreted the literary structure of Exodus; the second will provide a short presentation of the macro-structure of the book of Exodus, introducing its main themes and flow; and the third will outline how the extrabiblical conceptions of the God-human relation noted so far affect the interpretation of the God-human relation presented by Exodus.

This final section will be organized in two parts. The first part consists of textual notes addressing the issues that emerge from the text relating to the God-human relation by means of the literary structure of Exodus. The second part consists of God-human relation notes, that is, notes on how scholars perceive and interpret the issues the text raises concerning the God-human relation.

Review of Literature

As observed in previous chapters, the interpretation of the book of Exodus—like any other book within the Torah—has been severely influenced by the documentary hypothesis.⁴⁰⁸ Discussions relating to the literary structure of Exodus normally form the backdrop for more detailed developments and theories concerning the sources scholars assert to be present within the book. As Umberto Cassuto correctly observes in his evaluation of the history of interpretation of Exodus, “the

⁴⁰⁸ From the publishing of Brevard S. Childs's *The Book of Exodus* to newer commentaries such as Thomas B. Dozeman's *Exodus*, the majority of studies on Exodus follow the general tenets of the documentary hypothesis. Differences in opinion are common, yet these take place within the parameters set forth by the documentary hypothesis. For a brief review of how scholars understand the composition of Exodus, see Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2014), 15–20. Garrett is among the few who reject the documentary hypothesis as a framework to understand the contents of Exodus, and concludes that “continually flogging the dead horse of the documentary hypothesis is pointless.” *Ibid.*, 20. For more on his position on the documentary hypothesis, see Duane A. Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Source and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991). For at least three others who question the authority of the documentary hypothesis as a framework to understand the Torah, see Cassuto, *Documentary Hypothesis*; Isaac M. Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was: The Unity of Genesis 1–11* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1985); and in the context of the book of Exodus, Douglas K. Stewart, *Exodus* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2006), 29–34.

study of sources takes precedence over that of the book as we have it.”⁴⁰⁹ As a result of this tendency—based on extrabiblical philosophical conceptions—investigation of any intentional literary structure of the book as a whole is rarely entertained.

The general mindset within current biblical scholarship is that “the tasks of the biblical critic are purely excavative and thus irrelevant to constructive projects.”⁴¹⁰ Even an analysis of the structure of the book is required to follow the tutelage of the different sources scholars identify within the text.⁴¹¹ Thus, because the text is made up of different sources possessing different worldviews,⁴¹² the possibility of a unified conception of how God relates to humanity in the book as a whole along with any proposal of a macro-structure of the book is overlooked by scholars in general.⁴¹³ As a result, any theological or philosophical proposal that considers the

⁴⁰⁹ Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 1.

⁴¹⁰ Benjamin D. Sommer, “Revelation at Sinai in the Hebrew Bible and in Jewish Theology,” *Journal of Religion* 79 (1999): 422.

⁴¹¹ See, for instance, George W. Coats, *Exodus 1–18, Forms of the Old Testament Literature IIA* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 3–8.

⁴¹² One of the primary sources in the development of the book of Exodus for source-critical scholars is the Priestly or P source. For more on the particular perspective of the world according to the P source, see Philip Peter Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*, JSOT Supplement Series 106 (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992).

⁴¹³ Hazony agrees with this assessment as he writes: “In light of this picture of a corrupt and fragmented Bible, the idea that the biblical texts could be capable of advancing a consistent view on any subject has come to seem far-fetched in the eyes of many scholars.” Hazony, *Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture*, 19. Because of the traditional perspective of a fragmented text, “the ideas that find expression in the Bible—the metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and political philosophy, of the biblical authors—have all too often eluded the interest of academic scholars of [the] Bible.” *Ibid.*, 19.

book as a whole is considered not only naïve, but impossible.⁴¹⁴

Due to the issues outlined above, scholars—whether they follow the source-critical orientation or not—generally organize the final form of the book either by its evident geographical markers (e.g., Egypt—Wilderness or Egypt—Wilderness—Sinai) or by theological subheadings (e.g., Redemption—Covenant/Law—Tabernacle).⁴¹⁵ From these two general choices, then, at least four ways to organize the contents of Exodus can be perceived in the majority of the studies on Exodus: (1) two-part or “bifid” structures; (2) three-part or “tripartite” structures; (3) four-part structures; and finally (4) multi-part structures.⁴¹⁶ Below are some representative

⁴¹⁴ Traditionally, critical scholars understand that the book of Exodus carries three distinct traditions: Yahwist (J), Elohist (E), and Priestly (P). For more on the different sources assigned to Exodus, see Thomas B. Dozeman, *Exodus*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 31–43. In recent years, some of these conceptions have been challenged, since for some the source-critical assessment of at least Exodus 19–24 has “proved less than satisfactory.” See T. D. Alexander, “The Composition of the Sinai Narrative in Exodus XIX 1–XXIV 11,” *Vetus Testamentum* 49, no. 1 (1999): 2. In this study, the authorship of the text is secondary to the evaluation of the philosophical presuppositions found within the text regarding the God-human relation. That being said, approaching the text as it is, I will suspend the assumption that the text has several sources as well as the assumption that it has a single author.

⁴¹⁵ At least one problem that stems from these descriptive headings must be highlighted here. While these literary structures of the book—that assume a descriptive geographical or theological reduction—serve as an organizing scheme of its contents, they do not provide any inner reasoning as to why the structure takes that particular form in the text, nor do they present any textual support to show authorial intentionality (even if this intentionality would come from a final redactor). They are just descriptive schemes deprived of any depiction of authorial or editorial intention that would give sense both to the scheme itself and to the book as a whole.

⁴¹⁶ Multi-part structures are literary structures that organize the material of the book into five or more sections. Brevard Childs’s commentary on Exodus, for

examples of those who organize the book around these different structures.⁴¹⁷

Two-Part Structures

a. Benno Jacob simply divides the book into a “first half” (Exod 1–19) and “second half” (Exod 20–40).⁴¹⁸

b. William H. Propp divides the book by the following theological themes: “double revelations to Moses and Israel” (Exod 1–15) and “double covenant” (Exod 16–40).⁴¹⁹ Peter Enns follows the same textual markers, but with a more geographical justification for his structure: “departure from Egypt” (Exod 1–15) and “journey and arrival at Sinai” (Exod 16–40).⁴²⁰

c. Carl F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch divide the book within the theological scheme of “liberation” (Exod 1–15:21) and “adoption of Israel as the people of God” (Exod 15:22–40).⁴²¹ Thomas B. Dozeman follows the same textual division, but under the two theological themes of “divine power” (Exod 1–15:21) and “divine

instance, presents an outline of twenty-four sections. See Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974).

⁴¹⁷ I am deeply indebted to the research of Richard M. Davidson on the way scholars perceive the literary structures of Exodus in this section.

⁴¹⁸ Benno Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus*, Part 1 (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 2007).

⁴¹⁹ William H. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1999).

⁴²⁰ Peter Enns, *Exodus*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000).

⁴²¹ Carl F. Keil, Franz Delitzsch, and James Martin, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1864).

presence” (Exod 15:22–40).⁴²² Willem H. Gispen also divides the book with the same textual markers, and is among those who combine geographical descriptions with theological themes in his bifid structure: “Departure from Egypt” (Exod 1–15:21) and “Covenant” (Exod 15:22–40).⁴²³ Mark S. Smith follows the same textual markers, but with geographical subheadings: “Egypt” (Exod 1–15:21) and “Sinai” (Exod 15:22–40).⁴²⁴

d. Carol Meyers proposes at least two bifid structures to organize the material of Exodus. The first is through the descriptive-theological themes of “slavery to freedom” (Exod 1–15) and “Sinai experience” (Exod 16–40); the second, through the geographical markers of “Midian-Jethro frame” (Exod 1–18) and “theophany at Sinai” (Exod 19–40).⁴²⁵ Paul Wright shares the textual markers of Meyer’s second scheme, following theological concepts such as “Israel’s redemption and preservation” (Exod 1–18) and “Israel’s ratification of the covenant/law and preparation for worship at Sinai (Exod 19–40).”⁴²⁶

⁴²² Dozeman, *Exodus*.

⁴²³ Willem H. Gispen, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982).

⁴²⁴ Mark S. Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997).

⁴²⁵ Carol L. Meyers, *Exodus*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁴²⁶ Paul A. Wright, “Exod 1–24 (A Canonical Study)” (PhD diss., University of Vienna, 1993).

Three-Part Structures

a. Umberto Cassuto organizes the book around the following descriptive scheme: “bondage and liberation” (Exod 1–17), “Torah and precepts” (Exod 18–24), “tabernacle and services” (Exod 25–40).⁴²⁷

b. John Durham divides the book into three geographical points: “Egypt” (Exod 1–13:16), “wilderness” (Exod 13:17–18:27), and “Sinai” (Exod 19:1–40).⁴²⁸

c. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. divides his tripartite structure into three theological headings pointing to three main divine actions: “divine redemption” (Exod 1–18), “divine morality” (Exod 19–24), and “divine worship” (Exod 25–40).⁴²⁹ Tremper Longman follows the same textual markers and a similar theological descriptive scheme: “God saves Israel from Egyptian bondage” (Exod 1–18), “God gives Israel His law” (Exod 19–24), and “God commands Israel to build the tabernacle” (Exod 25–40).⁴³⁰

Four-Part Structures

a. Nahum Sarna simply divides the book into four parts: Exod 1–15:21;

⁴²⁷ Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus*.

⁴²⁸ John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987).

⁴²⁹ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “Exodus,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).

⁴³⁰ Longman, *How to Read Exodus*.

15:22–18; 19–24; and 25–40.⁴³¹ David Dorsey also divides the book into four sections, but in the following way: Exod 1–6:13; 6:14–13:16; 13:17–19:2; 19:3–40.⁴³²

b. R. Alan Cole provides a mixture of geographical and theological-descriptive in his reading of the literary structure of Exodus: “Egypt” (Exod 1–11:10), “exodus to Sinai” (Exod 12–18), “covenant and law” (Exod 19–31), and “rebellion and revival” (Exod 32–40).⁴³³

c. Gerald Janzen organizes the content of the book around four parts and two main themes: covenant and presence. His structure is laid out in the following way: “Oppression, redemption, covenant” (Exod 1–24); “Planning a place for presence” (Exod 25–31); “Sin, redemption, covenant” (Exod 32–34); and “preparing a place for presence” (Exod 35–40).⁴³⁴

Multi-Part Structures

a. J. P. Fokkelman organizes the book of Exodus into five different sections: Exod 1:1–6:27; 6:28–15:21; 15:22–18:27; 19–31; 32–40.⁴³⁵ Claus Westermann also divides the book into five sections, which highlight divine action and human

⁴³¹ Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991).

⁴³² David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999).

⁴³³ R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973).

⁴³⁴ Gerald J. Janzen, *Exodus* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

⁴³⁵ J. P. Fokkelman, “Exodus,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1987).

response: “God’s Saving Act: Deliverance out of Distress” (Exod 1–14); “Man’s Response in Praise” (Exod 15:1-21); “God’s Action: Preservation” (Exod 15:22–18:27); “Man’s Response in Obedience” (Exod 19–31); “Transgression and Renewal” (Exod 32–40).⁴³⁶

b. James Bruckner outlines the book in six separate parts under descriptive geographical and theological terms: “Exodus” (Exod 1–14); “Journey to Sinai” (Exod 15–18); “Decalogue and Book of the Covenant” (Exod 19–24); “Tabernacle Plans” (Exod 25–31); “Golden Calf” (Exod 32–34); and “Tabernacle Constructed” (Exod 35–40).⁴³⁷ Ross Blackburn also uses a six-part division of Exodus in his structure of the book and organizes the contents similarly to Bruckner:

“Redemption” (Exod 1–15); “Wilderness” (Exod 16–18); “Law” (Exod 19–24); “Tabernacle Instruction” (Exod 25–31); “Golden Calf” (35–40); and “Tabernacle Constructed” (Exod 35–40).⁴³⁸

c. Duane A. Garrett organizes the book into seven main sections in the following manner: “Until Moses” (Exod 1:1–2:10); “Unlikely Savior” (Exod 2:11–7:7); “The Twelve Miracles of the Exodus” (Exod 7:8–15:21); “The Journey to God” (Exod 15:22–19:25); “The Sinai Covenant” (Exod 20:1–24:11); “The Worship of

⁴³⁶ Claus Westermann and Robert Henry Boyd, *Handbook to the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1967).

⁴³⁷ James K. Bruckner, *Exodus* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008).

⁴³⁸ Ross W. Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus* (Downers Grove, IL: Apollos, 2012).

God” (Exod 24:12–31:18); “Sin and Restoration” (Exod 32:1–40:38).⁴³⁹

d. Terence E. Fretheim provides a detailed structure of the book in nine main sections. Like his predecessors, he organizes them based on descriptive geographical and theological themes: “Growth and Bondage in Egypt” (Exod 1–2); “Moses and God: Call and Dialogue” (Exod 3:1–7:7); “The Plagues” (Exod 7:8–11:10); “From Passover to Praise” (Exod 12:1–15:21); “The Wilderness Wanderings” (Exod 15:22–18:27); “Law and Covenant” (Exod 19:1–24:18); “The Plan for the Tabernacle” (Exod 25:1–31:18); “The Fall and Restoration of Israel” (Exod 32:1–34:35); “God Fills the Tabernacle” (Exod 35:1–40:38).⁴⁴⁰

e. John Sailhamer organizes the contents of Exodus into ten descriptive theological themes: “The Oppression of the Israelites” (Exod 1:1-22); “The Preparation of a Deliverer” (Exod 2:1-25); “The Call of Moses” (Exod 3:1–4:31); “The Deliverance from Egypt” (Exod 5:1–15:21); “Wilderness Wanderings” (Exod 15:22–18:27); “The Covenant at Sinai” (Exod 19:1–24:18); “The Tabernacle” (Exod 25:1–31:18); “The Golden Calf” (Exod 32:1-35); “The Restoration of Israel” (Exod 33:1–34:35); “The Construction of the Tabernacle” (Exod 35:1–40:38).⁴⁴¹

f. Victor Hamilton presents a compact fifteen-part structure that covers the main scenes within the book under one heading: “Oppression” (Exod 1–2:25); “Trepidation” (Exod 3:1–4:31); “Rejection” (Exod 5:1-23); “Reaffirmation” (Exod

⁴³⁹ Garrett, *Commentary on Exodus*.

⁴⁴⁰ Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1991).

6:1-30); “Confrontation” (Exod 7:1–12:30); “Liberation” (Exod 12:31–14:31); “Celebration” (Exod 15:1-21); “Itineration” (Exod 15:22–17:15); “Administration” (Exod 18:1-27); “Legislation” (Exod 19:1–24:18); “Specifications” (Exod 25:1–31:18); “Deviation” (Exod 32:1–33:23); “Reconciliation” (Exod 34:1-35); “Construction” (Exod 35:1–40:33); “Glorification” (Exod 40:34-38).⁴⁴²

Now that an overview of the ways in which scholars organize the contents of Exodus has been presented, I will introduce what I perceive to be the macro-structure of Exodus as it presents itself to the reader: namely, a parallel-panel structure.⁴⁴³ This structure is not conditioned by the extrabiblical conceptions ingrained in the critical methodologies mentioned above, as it assumes and functions upon the intentional organization of the text in its final form as it presents itself to the reader.

⁴⁴¹ John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992).

⁴⁴² Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

⁴⁴³ The organization of the literary structure to be presented here followed the descriptive methodology outlined in the introduction to this study. The structure does not provide the reader with an exhaustive assessment of the God-human relation in Exodus (especially because much more is at stake in the book than just the God-human relation). In this study, the structure provides a textual basis upon which the issues relating to the God-human relation within the book itself might be identified and addressed. The reader is not obligated to accept the validity of the structure in order to understand the issues that the book is presenting.

The Parallel-Panel Structure of Exodus: An Introduction⁴⁴⁴

The general division of the panel structure follows the hypothesis that the book of Exodus emphasizes the experience of Moses on one side, and the Israelites on the other.⁴⁴⁵ Like many other leaders in the Hebrew Bible, Moses must go through that which the people will eventually go through. Both Moses and Israel are rescued from the water; both Moses and Israel are led out into the wilderness and meet God at Sinai. A second theme that emerges from the general division of the panel

⁴⁴⁴ The ideas to be proposed here were perceived and developed in community. I am deeply indebted to the insights and support of Christian Vogel and Richard M. Davidson in this section. Christian Vogel noticed the possibility that the macro-structure of Exodus was fashioned in a parallel-panel structure. Vogel proposed that this parallel-panel structure sets out to—among other things—show the similarities and differences between the life of Moses and the life of the Israelites, as well as the physical Exodus from Egypt and the spiritual Exodus from sin. With these basic ideas in place and an initial outline, Richard M. Davidson pointed out that if the author of the book intended to lay out the contents of the book in a parallel-panel structure, the beginning and ending of the book should provide the necessary pieces of information for its correct framing. Davidson asserted that the book ends with the imagery of God’s presence in a cloud filling the tabernacle and leading the people onward, and that the ending of Exodus 13 presents the same imagery. This insight uncovered the starting and ending points of the parallel-panel structure. In the process, Davidson also identified seven different micro-structures within the book. With these initial insights and a rough outline of the possible parallel-panel structure, I charted the contents of the book to find further textual confirmations for these ideas and to reorganize the initial outline according to the natural literary development of the book. What emerged from the text not only confirmed the initial hypothesis of a parallel-panel structure functioning as the macro-structure of the book, but uncovered significant theological insights that could be useful in different areas. The results of this joint effort will be published in a forthcoming article. This chapter will continue the work initiated in that article.

⁴⁴⁵ This idea has been perceived by other scholars as another theme that emerges from the narrative of Exodus, but I have not found any scholar who noted the development of the literary structure of the book based on this idea. Some scholars who point out significant similarities between Moses and Israel that will reappear in this chapter are Fretheim, *Exodus*, 41–46; Enns, *Exodus*, 83.

structure is the relation between the physical Exodus from Egypt on one side and the spiritual Exodus from sin on the other. In the lives of Moses and Israel, and in the Exodus from Egypt and from sin, it is God who is in control; it is God who leads; it is God's presence that guides. The presence of God provides the theological context in which these themes are unfolded in the book. For Moses and Israel, in the Exodus from Egypt and from sin, God's presence guides in different ways. With these main themes shaping the flow of the book as a whole, the parallel-panel structure of Exodus unfolds in seven stages or sections.⁴⁴⁶

The first section consists of A (Exod 1:11–2:15a) and A' (Exod 14:1–15:21), and highlights both Israel's entrance into Egypt and subsequent oppression under an unnamed Pharaoh and Israel's exodus out of Egypt and subsequent persecution by another unnamed Pharaoh.

The second section consists of B (Exod 2:15b–25) and B' (Exod 15:22–18:27), and includes both Moses' entrance into the wilderness after killing an Egyptian and Israel's entrance into the wilderness after Egypt is destroyed.

The third section consists of C (Exod 3:1–4:31) and C' (Exod 19–24:11), and emphasizes God's remembrance of the covenant as YHWH calls and commands Moses and what is known as "the Book of the Covenant," which includes God's call

⁴⁴⁶ The parallel-panel structure of Exodus contains seven sections. There are no textual markers that justify the transitions between these sections. Because of this, I arranged the flow of the literary structure taking into consideration significant turning points within the narrative. The sections are organized so that the reader can understand the flow of the book in its different stages, which do contain lexical connections.

and commands to both Moses and the people.

The fourth section consists of D (Exod 5–7:2) and D' (Exod 24:12–32:30). D comprises Pharaoh's building project without *Shabbat*, God's command to let his people go, and Pharaoh's disobedience. D', on the other hand, shows God's commands in relation to his own building project, which would include *Shabbat*, and Israel's disobedience (through the episode of the golden calf).

Table 1. Seven sections of Exodus

Part I: God's Presence with Israel in Egypt: Deliverance from Egypt (Exod 1–13)	Part II: God's Presence with Israel in the Wilderness and Mount Sinai: Deliverance from Sin (Exod 14–40)
A. Children of Israel Come to Egypt and Are Oppressed by Pharaoh (1:1–2:15a)	A'. Children of Israel Depart from Egypt and Are Delivered from Pharaoh (14:1–15:21)
B. Moses Goes into the Wilderness (2:15b–25)	B'. Israel Goes into the Wilderness (15:22–18:27)
C. God Remembers His Covenant (3:1–4:31)	C'. Book of the Covenant (19–24:11)
D. Pharaoh's Building Project without <i>Shabbat</i> : God's Command and Pharaoh's Disobedience (Part I) (5–7:2)	D'. God's Building Project with <i>Shabbat</i> : God's Command and Israel's Disobedience (Part I) (24:12–32:30)
E. Pharaoh's Building Project without <i>Shabbat</i> : God's Command and Pharaoh's Second Disobedience (Part II) (7:2–13)	E'. God's Building Project with <i>Shabbat</i> : God's Command and People's Obedience (Part II) (32:31–36:7)
F. De-Creation Through Plagues (which include other commands in the context of disobedience) and Preparation for Deliverance from Egypt (7:14–12:32)	F'. Re-Creation Through Tabernacle (which include other commands in the context of obedience) and Preparation for Deliverance from Sin (36:8–40:33)
G. God with People (12:33–13)	G'. God with People (40:34–38)

The fifth section consists of E (Exod 7:2–13) and E' (Exod 32:31–36:7). E

includes God's second command to Pharaoh to let the people go and Pharaoh's renewed disobedience; Pharaoh's second refusal to liberate the people leads into the ten plagues found in the next section. In E' Moses pleads for the people, new commands are given with the intention to provide Israel with another chance to obey, and it ends with Israel's eventual obedience to God's commands. This acceptance of and obedience to the divine commands leads to the ten phases of the sanctuary construction in the following section (Exod 36:8–39:43).

The sixth section consists of F (Exod 7:14–12:32) and F' (Exod 36:8–40:33). F highlights the result of Pharaoh's disobedience: the de-creation of the earth through the ten plagues. F' attempts to show the results of Israel's obedience to God's commands, which lead to the re-creation of the world through the establishment of the tabernacle (interestingly, in ten different stages).

The seventh and final section consists of G (Exod 12:33–13) and G' (Exod 40:34–38) and highlights the actual exodus from Egypt and the potential exodus from sin marked by the consecration of the tabernacle through God's presence. This final section ends, as mentioned earlier, with the imagery of the cloud, the fire, and God's presence leading the people onward on both sides of the panel.

One of the features of the way the book presents itself is the imbalance between the two sides of the panel. While one would expect a panel structure of a book of forty chapters to be divided somewhere in the middle, the structure moves from chapters 1–13 and then from 14–40. This does not show a lack of authorial intentionality, but the opposite. At least two elements in this structural imbalance can testify to the intentionality behind its weaving.

The first insight from the imbalance is that while the deliverance of the people from Egypt is a great divine act, God's greatest challenge is not this physical deliverance, but in reality, the spiritual deliverance of the people from sin.⁴⁴⁷ The second part of the panel—God's plan to deliver the people from their sin—takes up the majority of the chapters. The plan of salvation established on the right side of the panel through the construction of the sanctuary was not to be limited to the Israelites in the wilderness, but was to be central to all the subsequent generations. The sanctuary, from the book of Exodus onward, becomes the central divine plan of salvation for all people. After all, a salvation plan that is given in the desert—that is, the land of no one—should be accessible to everyone. The rest of the Hebrew Bible testifies to this basic insight that can already be seen in the imbalance of the parallel-panel structure of Exodus.

The second insight that justifies this imbalance would be that while the left side of the panel emphasizes, to some extent, the actions and experience of Moses, the right side focuses on God's provision for the people. As an example, on the left side of the panel Moses provides deliverance and water for the daughters of Jethro, while on the right side of the panel God does not limit himself to deliverance or the provision of water, but also provides food, protection, and other signs of care for the people. In other words, while Moses is the representative of God to deliver and lead the people, he is only a shadow of the God of deliverance, who is leading the people

⁴⁴⁷ Hamilton correctly observes that if “the book of Exodus is about the exodus event, then the book should be concluded by the end of chap. 14.” Hamilton, *Exodus*, xxi.

onward, showing even more care and goodness.⁴⁴⁸ God on the right side of the panel is not only a better Pharaoh—he is a better Moses. Both of these insights tied together allow the reader to grasp the significance of the imbalance within the panel structure and the overall theological angle of the book as a whole.

Now that this basic overview of the literary structure of Exodus has been presented, I will plunge into each of these sections to explore how the book presents the God-human relation, and how scholars under the influence of extrabiblical conceptions of the God-human relation interpret such dynamic.

The God-Human Relation in Exodus

This study will approach the biblical text to uncover its understanding of the God-human relationship through a descriptive analysis of the literary structure of Exodus, as already introduced in Chapter 1. From the literary structure of the book, it may be possible to determine how the contents of the book were organized and derive insights relating to how the divine-human relation is depicted in the book as a whole. This presentation will serve as a basis to identify both the issues relating to the God-human relation that emerge from the text and how scholars interpret them under the influence of extrabiblical assumptions.⁴⁴⁹

As mentioned earlier, each of the seven sections of the literary structure will

⁴⁴⁸ I am indebted to my colleague Christian Vogel for this crucial insight.

⁴⁴⁹ To provide a proper analysis of the God-human relation in the book as a whole falls beyond the scope of this project. As I assess the scholarly interpretation of the issues pertaining to the God-human relation in the text, I will provide a few notes

be evaluated in two ways: first, I will provide textual notes that highlight the general literary flow of the structure as it points to issues concerning the God-human relation in the text; and second, I will provide notes on how the text depicts the God-human relation in the context of how scholars understand and interpret these themes through a different presuppositional framework.⁴⁵⁰ These two steps will show the reader how extrabiblical philosophical presuppositions relating to the God-human relation directly influence interpretations of the depiction of God's relation to humanity proposed by the text through its literary development.

Section I: A and A' (Exodus 1:1–2:15a and 14:1–15:21)

Textual Notes

The first section, A (1:1–2:15a) and A' (14:1–15:21), contains at least three important developments: (1) the introduction of the book with Israel's entrance into Egypt as well as Israel's departure from Egypt; (2) Pharaoh's attempt to destroy Israel through oppression and murder and a second attempt to destroy Israel by a different Pharaoh in the Red Sea; (3) Moses' and Israel's deliverance out of water and departure from Egypt. Each of these developments is evaluated below.

on how the text might provide insight for a proper theology/philosophy of God's relation to humanity.

⁴⁵⁰ Because this section covers the book of Exodus as a whole, the issues to be selected in the text will be those that both are discussed by commentators and relate to the question of the God-human relation. The presuppositions regarding the God-human relation will be seen in the backdrop of the textual depiction of the God-human relation. Also, I will not be able to present an exhaustive account of what has been written concerning each issue, but I will provide an overview of the insights seen in the main commentaries and books dealing with Exodus.

Table 2. A and A' textual notes

A. Children of Israel Come to Egypt and Are Oppressed by Pharaoh (1:1–2:15a)	A'. Children of Israel Depart from Egypt and Are Delivered from Pharaoh (14:1–15:21)
• Children of Israel come to Egypt (1:1-7)	• Children of Israel leave Egypt and come to the Red Sea (14:1-2)
• Pharaoh tries to destroy Israel/Moses (1:8-22)	• Pharaoh tries to destroy Israel (14:3-10)
• Pharaoh Speech #1: “the <i>children of Israel</i> will go up from the <i>land</i> ” (1:9-10)	• Pharaoh will say: “the <i>children of Israel</i> are wandering in the <i>land</i> ” (14:3)
• Pharaoh Speech #2: “ <i>why have you done this?</i> ” (1:15-19)	• Pharaoh and people: “ <i>why have we done this?</i> ” (14:5)
• Pharaoh acts/Speech #3: “commanded all <i>his people</i> ” (1:22)	• Pharaoh acts: “he took <i>his people</i> ” (14:6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses is saved from water - Moses is left “<i>by the bank of the Nile</i>” (2:3) - Moses cries out (2:6) - Miriam questions Pharaoh’s daughter - (2:7) - Pharaoh’s daughter replies: go ahead (2:8-9) - Moses drawn out of the water (2:10) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Israel is saved from water - Israel is left “<i>camping by the sea</i>” (14:9) - Israel cries out to the Lord (14:10) - Israel questions Moses/God (14:11-12) - God replies: go forward (14:15-18) - Israel drawn out of the water (14:19-31)
• Moses sees the oppression of the Egyptians and acts without divine aid (2:11-12)	• Moses sees the approach of the Egyptians and acts with divine aid (14:21, 26-27)
• Hebrews and Moses (do not recognize him as authority—“ <i>prince or judge</i> ”) (2:13-14a)	• Israel and Moses (recognize him as authority—“ <i>servant</i> ”) (14:31)
• Moses fears and flees (2:14b-15a)	• Israel believes and sings (14:31–15:21)

The first development in A introduces the book with a summary of the people who entered Egypt with Jacob. The text adds a note about the death of Joseph and the subsequent multiplication (פָּרְו וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ וַיִּרְבוּ וַיַּעֲצְמוּ בְּמֵאֵד מְאֹד) of the people (cf. Exod

1:7). In A' the people turn to the sea in their departure from Egypt with a עַרְב־רַב "mixed multitude" (cf. Exod 12:38). While on the one hand the people enter Egypt and multiply in the shadow of the death of Joseph, on the other, the people are depicted as accompanied by a mixed multitude who appear at the shadow of the death of the firstborns, that is, a multitude formed immediately after the last plague. Death leads to multiplication in both A and A'.

Each section is also marked by attacks upon Israel by Pharaoh. In both sections, these attacks appear as reactions against two of the divine imperatives found in Gen 1:28: multiplication and filling the earth. In A, once the people begin multiplying in Egypt, a Pharaoh who does not know Joseph begins his plan to control this growth through forced labor, murder at childbirth, and finally, open genocide of infants. In A' the threat of death appears as the people begin spreading out of Egypt into the wilderness and Canaan.⁴⁵¹ Several textual connections are significant in this section. Three elements in three different speeches of Pharaoh in the first chapter of Exodus are seen again in Exodus 14. These connections seen in the following scene justify the relation between chapter 1 and 14 and the possibility that the events within the book not only unfold, but are organized in a parallel-panel manner.

In the second development in A, the first speech of Pharaoh (Exod 1:9-10)

⁴⁵¹ This ties the literary developments in the events of Exodus to those of Genesis. In Genesis 11 the people come together under a unified building project and god intervenes. In Exodus, the people are forced to remain in Egypt to continue a building project and God, once again, intervenes. The issue of the relation between Genesis and Exodus will be further explored below.

mentions the threat of the children of Israel (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) going up from the land (הָאָרֶץ). In the second speech (Exod 1:18), in response to the Hebrew midwives who did not kill the Hebrew boys, Pharaoh asks: “Why (מַדּוּעַ) have you done (עָשִׂיתֶן) this (הַזֶּה)?” The final speech (Exod 1:22) simply expresses Pharaoh’s final command to “all his people” (כָּל-עַמּוֹ). In A’, these same elements are found in Pharaoh’s reasoning and subsequent persecution of the people toward the Red Sea.

The first textual connection is seen in God’s command to Moses to take the people toward the sea (Exod 14:3): “Pharaoh will say of the sons of Israel (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל), ‘they are wandering aimlessly in the land (בְּאֶרֶץ).’” The reasoning behind the second attempt to annihilate the people follows the same *rationale* and textual elements as those found in A: the people (בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) and the land (בְּאֶרֶץ). The second connection is found in another question uttered by Pharaoh concerning the liberation of the people from the land (Exod 14:5): “Why (מַה) have we done (עָשִׂינוּ) this (זֶה)?” The question led to the resolution of pursuing the Israelites, once again leading Pharaoh to take “his people (עַמּוֹ)” with him in this new objective (Exod 14:6).

The third and final development in sections A and A’ presents more similarities, and serves as an introductory example of how the story of Moses in A foreshadows the story of Israel in A’. Both Moses and Israel are left “by” a body of water: Moses by the “banks of the Nile” or עַל-שְׂפַת הַנְּיָלוֹ and Israel “by the sea” or עַל-הַיָּם (Exod 2:3, 14:9). Also, both Moses and Israel are rescued from the water (Exod 2:10, 14:19–31). The leader of Israel goes through that which the people will later experience. Being left by water and rescued from it shows how the existence of Moses and Israel depends upon divine action. These divine actions might appear

through the actions of other people in A,⁴⁵² or through God's own visible deeds in A'.

This dependence upon the divine is not a theme exclusive to Exodus but runs through the entire Hebrew Bible. This could point to the reason why the actions of Moses in what follows in A could be seen as problematic (Exod 2:11-12). Moses sees the oppression of the Egyptians and kills an Egyptian without any divine indication for that to take place.⁴⁵³ Because of his actions, the Hebrews question Moses' ability to lead or act as their "prince" (רֶשֶׁת) or "judge" (שֹׁפֵט) (Exod 2:13-14a), leading Moses to flee Egypt once his murder is discovered (Exod 2:14b-15). In A', the text demonstrates how Moses is still learning how to depend on God as the people go through that which he went through in the past. Because Moses trusts God to deliver the people from the Red Sea, the people recognize him as an authority (Exod 14:31). Yet the authority Israel recognizes in Moses is not that of a prince, or a judge, but of a servant (עֲבָד). Because of this obedience to YHWH's instructions, both Moses and Israel cross the Red Sea, and A' presents the first major difference from A in adding a large section of poetry known as the "Song of Moses."

⁴⁵² Moses' rescue from the Nile is the third instance in which a woman serves as a type of YHWH within the book of Exodus. The midwives of the Hebrews, as well as Moses' mother with Miriam, already appeared in the book. Each of these women act in their contexts as God would later act in the book. The midwives of the Hebrews save the Hebrew boys from injustice; Moses' mother and Miriam preserve life in the midst of oppression; and the daughter of Pharaoh rescues the child from the water and cares for him.

⁴⁵³ Similarly, in Genesis 12, after Abraham accepts the imperative to leave his family and land behind, he arrives at the "promised land" where famine has taken over. Without any divine revelation, Abraham journeys to Egypt. Both in the narrative of Abraham and in the second chapter of Exodus, the problem is not failing

God-Human Relation Notes

Several notes illuminating the relation between the first section of the literary structure of Exodus and conceptions of the God-human relation are in order. As indicated earlier, this section will focus on how extrabiblical conceptions of the God-human relation influence the interpretation of the literary content of the Hebrew text. Two particular issues that emerge from the first section of the literary structure of Exodus will be analyzed: (1) the relation between Genesis and Exodus; (2) the relation between the Hebrew text and history.

The relation between Genesis and Exodus

One of the first issues that arises in any commentary on Exodus is the relation between the texts of Genesis and Exodus. Scholars are generally divided on the understanding that Exodus is a separate literary unit from Genesis.⁴⁵⁴ Moshe Greenberg comments on literary continuation between Genesis and Exodus:

The beginning and the end of the book indicate that it was designed as a distinct

to obey an explicit divine command—especially because there was no command in both stories—but acting without waiting on God’s word.

⁴⁵⁴ For a summary of recent developments in the study of the relation between Genesis and Exodus, see Dozeman, *Exodus*, 18–20; D. M. Carr, “Genesis in Relation to the Moses Story. Diachronic and Synchronic Perspectives,” in André Wénin, *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History* (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2001), 273–96; Thomas B. Dozeman, *God at War: Power in the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 171–83. I would agree with Sarna in his balanced position that “while the book [Exodus] is more or less a self-contained literary unit, it is incomprehensible except as a sequel to the Book of Genesis.” Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Origins of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1996), 5.

literary unit. Exodus 1:1 does not pick up where Gen 50:26 left off. The first verses of Exodus recapitulate the main event of the last chapters of Genesis: the descent of Jacob's family to, and their settlement in, Egypt. Into the recapitulation the true start of the new narrative has been interwoven (Exod 1:6-7). This manner of opening the narrative means that an author (or creative redactor) regarded the events about to be narrated as making a sufficiently important break with the past to merit a new start. He therefore provided them with a prologue signifying a new literary unit.⁴⁵⁵

As noted by Jeffrey Tigay in the prologue to this same volume, Greenberg's reasoning in approaching the book of Exodus—like that of most scholars who sustain a complete or partial disconnection between Genesis and Exodus—is deeply influenced by the documentary hypothesis.⁴⁵⁶

By default, this conception does not consider the possibility that the Torah is a single literary unit based on the evidence outlined in the second chapter of this study. Such a reasoning not only would go against the seemingly intentional unity of the book as a whole—as outlined by the literary structure above—but would also exclude significant theological points that could help in uncovering the author's perception of the God-human relation.⁴⁵⁷ The thematic arrangement of the book

⁴⁵⁵ Moshe Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus: A Holistic Commentary on Exodus 1–11*, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 2.

⁴⁵⁶ Tigay writes that Greenberg's contribution inevitably incorporates modern scholarship, something that would "naturally include the results of biblical criticism, particularly the Documentary Hypothesis." Jeffrey H. Tigay, foreword to *Understanding Exodus: A Holistic Commentary on Exodus 1–11*, by Moshe Greenberg, 2nd ed. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), ix.

⁴⁵⁷ One of the significant transitions in the parallel-panel structure of Exodus is that the beginnings of sections A and A' find conclusions in G and G'. A begins, as noted earlier, with the people entering Egypt, while A' begins with the people leaving Egypt. In G, the people begin their journey into the wilderness under the leadership of God through the cloud and the fire, and in G' God continues leading the people

favors the possibility of a unity, be it from one single author or from one or several redactors who arranged the themes of the book in its final form with a unified vision.

Among these themes that portray unity—something mentioned in passing above—is divine action. The difference between A and A' is that while in A' God is visibly present and active in the physical deliverance of the people from Egypt, in A God is seemingly active yet elusive. Traditionally scholars explain the differences by way of critical tools, yet if the narrative is allowed to flow naturally, a richness of meaning is uncovered. One could attest to the possibility that God is acting in Exodus 1 by tracing the signs of blessing that stem from covenant faithfulness. The description of the people multiplying and spreading out in the land—as noted by other scholars—is filled with creation language.⁴⁵⁸ The multiplication of the people implies that the principle of life stemming from humanity's connection with the divine imperative to procreate and inhabit the land is a reality in Exodus. Even so, God is seemingly absent in A. The first mention of his name is at the end of chapter 1, with an explicit reference to God's blessings upon the Hebrew midwives who preferred to sustain life by risking their own. This absence is significant because it

onward with the cloud and fire. The beginning and the ending of the book are intimately connected. Even so, Greenberg, sustaining the principles of the documentary hypothesis, questions the possibility of such connections: "The book thus has an epilogue marking its conclusion no less definitely than the prologue marks its beginning." Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 2.

⁴⁵⁸ Victor P. Hamilton observes, for instance, that "the climax of Genesis 1 is Exodus 1." Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*, 5. Sailhamer writes that the first chapter of Exodus "follows the prophetic word about Israel's future given to Abraham in Genesis 15:13." Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 241.

connects the narrative of Exodus to the narrative that immediately precedes it, in the book of Genesis.

The God of the patriarchs—contrary to the God depicted in the majority of books on Christian doctrine—was not omnipresent, nor was he wholly absent, “dwelling” in a timeless realm.⁴⁵⁹ The extrabiblical roots that lead to these conceptions were outlined in the previous chapters. In the Hebrew Bible, YHWH speaks to Abraham in Gen 18 concerning the fate of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. As soon as YHWH finishes speaking, the Hebrew text says יהוה יָלַךְ (“the Lord departed”; Gen 18:33). And this God, who speaks in particular and departs, is promised to return before the book of Genesis ends. Twice Joseph mentions the return of God to his people through the use of the verb פָּקַד (“to visit”). Joseph at his deathbed says, “I am about to die, but God will surely *visit* you and bring you up from this land” (Genesis 50:24, 25) and in the following verse the promise is reiterated when Joseph asks the sons of Israel to swear: “God will surely *visit* you.”

The book of Exodus begins in the shadow of this promise, in the void of divine absence. When will the Lord visit his people? Why is he absent before the rising oppression of the Egyptians? In the first section of the literary structure of Exodus, the reader is confronted with two different Pharaohs attempting to thwart

⁴⁵⁹ Even some Exodus scholars are uncomfortable with the notion. Carol Meyers, for instance, writes that “the idea of divine omnipresence is not entirely convincing.” Meyers, *Exodus*, 134. And Baruch A. Levine writes: “Rarely does the biblical spokesman, be he priest, prophet, or Psalmist, assume the omnipresence of God.” Baruch A. Levine, “On the Presence of God in Biblical Religion,” *Religion in Antiquity*, ed. J. Neusner (1968), 72.

life. The first instance of death is found in the destruction of the infant boys in the Nile; the second through the annihilation of the entire people in the Red Sea. A battle between the forces of life and death serves as the introduction to the book. The question of the visitation of YHWH left unanswered in Genesis is answered in Exod 3:16 when YHWH asks Moses to gather the elders of Israel and tell them: פִּקֹּד פְּקֻדָּתִי אֲנִי אֶבְרָכָה (“I have surely visited you!”). God has seen what has been done, and now God will act upon it.

The philosophical principles behind the documentary hypothesis prevent the reader from seeing these significant literary and theological developments from one book to the other, which directly influence a possible philosophical reading of God’s actions in the book of Exodus.⁴⁶⁰ While scholars in the critical tradition of interpretation assign different sources and agendas to different sections of the book—shifting the unified perspective of God’s actions to several distinct perspectives—the flow of the narrative provides the reader with a unified conception of the God-human relation with little room for conflicting agendas.

The relation between the Hebrew text and history

The issue of the relation between the Hebrew text and history was introduced in the second chapter of this study. The historiography of the writer of Exodus is conceived by scholars as either a truthful depiction of the events narrated in the

⁴⁶⁰ To develop an ontology of the God-human relation is beyond the scope of this study. At this stage the focus is on how an extrabiblical conception of the God-human relation prevents the reader from seeing the principles that could lead to a biblical portrayal of the God-human dynamic.

book, or a historiography based on Hebrew faith that is truthful but not as it pertains to the events themselves (*Geschichte*).⁴⁶¹

Among the scholars who address the issue of the relation between the Hebrew text and history is Nahum M. Sarna. Sarna's evaluation of the historiography given by the writer of Exodus is as follows:

If it [Exodus] has so profoundly affected peoples of widely different cultures, this is hardly because the biblical narrative is a straightforward account of an historical event; it is not. . . . It is a document of faith, not a dispassionate, secular report of the freeing of an oppressed people. . . . Not the preservation and recording of the past for its own sake but the culling of certain historic events for didactic purposes is the intent.⁴⁶²

Sarna goes on to say that the various episodes the writer of Exodus narrates “project Israelite concepts of God and of His relationship to the world; that is, they embody the fundamental tenets and crucial elements of the religion of Israel and of its worldview.”⁴⁶³

Sarna uses the theological expression “God’s relationship to the world” in his commentary, but without reference to the reality to which it points: God’s actual relation to the world. He speaks of God’s relationship to the world as depicted in the

⁴⁶¹ For more on the different arguments regarding the problem of the historicity of the book, see Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, The New American Commentary, Vol. 2 (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2006), 23–26; Durham, *Exodus*, xxiv–xxvi; J. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997); J. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Dozeman, *Exodus*, 21–26.

⁴⁶² Sarna, *Exodus*, xii–xiii.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, xiii. For the sake of clarity, the expression “religion of Israel” here implies a pre-scientific, primitive view of the world, and consequently, of God’s relation to humanity.

text, yet denies its factuality, since according to him this report from the writer of Exodus is an account of faith, not an attestation of a real event. Ontological claims such as “God chooses to enter into an eternally valid covenantal relationship with His people”⁴⁶⁴ are written within the context of a historiography that is divested of its relation to the events, and consequently, of the philosophical outlook of the biblical writer who is presenting the reader with a description of the events.

This reality is attested when Sarna writes that “the biblical narratives are essentially documents of faith, not records of the past.”⁴⁶⁵ And as documents of faith, the biblical narratives have the function of communicating matters of faith “through the forms of history.”⁴⁶⁶ This implies that the content of the biblical text is the cultural creation and development of Hebrew faith expressed in historical language and form. Again, the presupposition hidden in the distinction between faith and history is that the content the text addresses cannot be determined by the text, but must be supplied by modernistic philosophical principles that deny any agency of God, at least as recorded by the text.

So far, I have mentioned how Sarna incorporates presuppositions concerning the nature of history into his interpretation of Exodus. At this stage, it is important to balance the discussion with a representation of scholars who are more moderate when speaking of the historicity of Exodus, since they emphasize not the “Hebrew

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 7.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

faith” of the biblical author but the “historicity” of the book proper. Among these is John I. Durham.

Durham writes:

What we cannot do, without more specific data than we have, however, is provide historical confirmation for anything or anybody mentioned in the Book of Exodus, . . . this is not of course to say that the events and persons referred by Exodus are not historical, only that we have no historical proof of them.⁴⁶⁷

Durham adds that it “is far better to speak of the narrative of Exodus in History rather than as history and to be content with the general historical context we can have rather than longing for specific historical proof we cannot have.”⁴⁶⁸ Although this is a more balanced approach to the accuracy of the historiography of Exodus, it is still open to critical interpretation. In other words, this approach is open to the possibility that until empirical or archaeological data is provided, Exodus is to be understood as a “document of faith” *in* history rather than a description of faith *as* history. The truthfulness of the text is not in the text, but external to it, in empirical archaeological evidence.

In sum, this presupposition concerning the nature of history has significant implications for biblical interpretation. A modernistic scientific approach to the biblical text leads to the understanding that the biblical text serves the purpose of portraying a primitive perspective of the God-human relationship, deprived of any ontological significance when compared to modern philosophical or scientific

⁴⁶⁷ Durham, *Exodus*, xxv.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

conceptions of the same relationship.⁴⁶⁹

With these conceptions in mind, I will now outline how the Hebrew text might address the issue of history and faith. Historical events in Exodus recur.⁴⁷⁰ The literary structure is organized in a way that communicates meaning,⁴⁷¹ but this construed meaning is not independent from life, or the actual events. While the author of Exodus has control over what he chooses to write about, he cannot control the events themselves. In this sense, the writer of Exodus is not a mere recorder of events, but a witness of recurrent events.

The parallel-panel structure narrates in A and A' how Moses goes through the very same things that Israel will eventually go through. This is not primarily a literary device: it is the way in which the historical events unfold. In this sense, the flow of history and God's actions within it are theological. The recurrent events happened before the author wrote about them. The author is not a historian in the sense that he is organizing the events at a distance from them; he is a witness to the

⁴⁶⁹ John H. Walton has argued that Gen 1–2 was written “for us” but not “to us.” See Walton, *Lost World of Genesis*, 9. In this way, Walton attempts to accommodate what the text affirms to the scientific perspective of the time. He adds, “Israel understood its God in reference to what others around them believed.” See Walton, *Lost World of Genesis*, 13. Because Walton sustains a modernistic scientific approach to the text, his reading of the text is affected by the conditions the approach creates.

⁴⁷⁰ I will not call these repetitions typological at this stage. For more on the issue of typology, see Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical Typos Structures* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981); and Leithart, *Deep Exegesis*.

development of historical events that are inherently theological. The story repeats itself in the text because history repeated itself in reality. The author's recording of history implies a theological viewpoint, yet at the same time, the events unfolded theologically.

Apart from the fact that in this sense historical events and their recording take place in the realm of time and history, two additional elements can be noted. The first is the possibility of interpreting history theologically. This is attested by the promise of the visitation of God mentioned above. One looks toward the future, toward the historical events to come theologically, that is, waiting for the promise of God to be fulfilled. The second element is the possibility that within a divine promise, with its inherent anticipation of future events, history is still open. God does not determine actual events—which would eliminate human freedom and choice—but only his actions. What the text portrays is the dynamic of God in freedom and history with man in freedom and history, acting and interacting toward the fulfillment of the promises of God within an open conception of history.

The literary structure highlights changes of events. Sometimes an event in A or A' has no counterpart on the other side. For example, in A Moses flees to the desert in silence after killing an Egyptian, acting without divine aid, and the story moves into the scene in Midian and a problem with water. In A', because Moses and the people trust in God, before they are led into the desert the text diverts to chapter

⁴⁷¹ There were certainly more historical events than those recorded in the book. I do not believe that the author provides a window into everything that happened. History writing implies selectivity.

15, with the “Song of Moses.” This change in the flow of the book highlights how history is not closed. There is no counterpart to the “Song of Moses” in A.

If indeed history was determined, the structure of Exodus would reflect an unreal organization of events in perfect parallel to each other. Yet the text portrays the fact that humanity can freely interact with God in a historical flow that is open to change based on free will and action, and this affects the very structure of the book. God determines his actions; he promises; he saves; he visits. And at the same time, humanity is free to act in the flow of history and within the determined acts of God for their salvation. This will not be the first time that the relation between God and man in freedom and history is central to the development of the narrative.

Section II: B and B' (Exodus 2:15b-25 and 15:22–18:27)

Textual Notes

The second section in the literary structure of Exodus, B (2:15b-25) and B' (15:22–18:27), contains two important scenes: (1) Moses and Israel in the wilderness, the imagery of water, and additional signs of divine care for Israel; and (2) Moses' family. The comparison between the experiences of Moses and Israel continues from A and A' into B and B'. The number of similarities between B and B' here is beyond mere coincidence.⁴⁷²

⁴⁷² While some could assign the same source to these similar sections, frequently scholars assign different sources to sections that are seemingly parallel to each other.

Table 3. B and B' textual notes

B. Moses Goes into the Wilderness (2:15b-25)	B'. Israel Goes into the Wilderness (15:22-18:27)
• Moses goes into the wilderness (2:15b)	• Israel goes into the wilderness (15:22a)
• Women and water (2:16-17a)	• Israel and water (15:22b-23)
• Moses is challenged (2:17b)	• Moses is challenged (15:24)
• Moses provides water (Israel cries out in Egypt) (2:17b-2:23)	• God/Moses provide water (Moses cries out to the Lord) (15:25a)
• God “ <i>hears</i> the cry of Israel” (2:23-24)	• Israel to “ <i>hear</i> the voice of the Lord God” (15:25b-26)
• God remembers His covenant and “ <i>knows</i> ” Israel (2:24-25)	• God makes a statute/regulation and tests Israel (15:26-27)
	• Additional signs of divine provision (16:1-17:16) - God provides bread (16:1-7) - God provides bread/meat (16:8-21) - <i>Shabbat</i> and bread (16:22-36) - God/Moses provide water (17:1-7) - People question the presence of God (17:7b) - Battle against Amalek (17:8-16)
• <i>Jethro</i> (2:16, 18)	• <i>Jethro</i> (18:1)
• <i>Egypt</i> (2:19)	• <i>Egypt</i> (18:1)
• <i>Daughter Zipporah</i> (2:21)	• <i>Daughter Zipporah</i> (18:2)
• <i>Gershom</i> (2:22)	• <i>Gershom</i> and <i>Eliezer</i> (18:3-4)
• <i>Meal</i> (“ <i>eat bread</i> ”) (2:20)	• <i>Meal</i> (“ <i>eat bread</i> ”) (18:12)

Now in the wilderness, both Moses and Israel encounter the problem of lack of water (Exod 2:16-17a and 15:22b-23). In both instances Moses is challenged: the first time by the shepherds (רעה) in Midian (Exod 2:17), and the second by the very people of Israel (Exod 15:24). In Midian Moses’ actions—like God’s actions in

Exodus 14:13, 30 and 15:2—are considered acts of “salvation,” indicated by the use of the verb *עָשָׂה* (“to save”). Moses provides water for the women, and in partnership with God in Exodus 15:25a also provides water for Israel.

Exodus 2 ends with God remembering the covenant and a note on His knowledge of the suffering of the people (2:23–25). After the provision of water to Israel, YHWH sets statutes (*קָח*) and regulations (*טַעֲמָה*) indicating the conditions of His relation to the people. YHWH’s covenantal relation to Israel in B provides the context for the actions that follow. At the same time, the statutes and regulations YHWH establishes for Israel as they enter the desert in B’ also provide the context for the actions that will follow.

As noted earlier, B’ provides additional signs of divine care for Israel in the wilderness. The reason for this is perhaps to show how YHWH is a greater Moses. While Moses provides the women in Midian with water, YHWH demonstrates his care for the people by providing water, food, and protection throughout their journeys.

The second main section in B and B’ points to Moses’ relatives on both sides of the parallel-panel. As Moses in B and Israel in B’ begin settling in the wilderness, the names of Jethro (Exod 2:16, 18 and 18:1), Zipporah (Exod 2:21 and 18:2), Gershom (Exod 2:22 and 18:3-4), and a reference to Egypt (Exod 2:19 and 18:1) are mentioned.⁴⁷³ In both instances, the meeting with Jethro ends with a meal (Exod 2:20

⁴⁷³ Because this is an issue that goes beyond the depiction of the God-human relation in the text, it is important to mention that scholars trace the appearance of Jethro in these two sections of Exodus to an early source. Sarna writes: “The friendly

and 18:12), with them eating (אכל) bread (לֶחֶם). When Israel questions the existence of YHWH in Exod 17:7 by saying הֲיֵשׁ יְהוָה בְּקִרְבָּנוּ אִם־אֵין (‘‘is YHWH among us or not’’), the first battle against a foreign enemy takes place.

God-Human Relation Notes

At least two important issues relating to the God-human relation in Exodus must be pursued in this section in the context of how scholars perceive and interpret them: (1) God’s actions in relation to Israel in Egypt and in the wilderness, and (2) Israel’s response to God’s actions.

Divine action: Egypt and wilderness

The actions of YHWH for Israel on both sides of the parallel-panel are sparked by his covenant faithfulness. In B, God is reminded of the covenant made with Abraham, and acts in accordance with what he promised (cf. Gen 15:13–16). This is also the first time the expression בְּרִית (‘‘covenant’’) appears in Exodus. Scholars have no difficulty seeing this idea in the text. Greenberg writes: ‘‘They [Israel] cried out because of their labor, and their cry reached God. Mindful of his

relations between Israel and the Midianites that are reflected in the story of Moses are consonant with the account in Genesis 25:2 that traces the lineage of Midian back to Abraham. They also accord with the later report in Exodus Chapter 18 of Midianite influence upon the organization of the Israelite judiciary system. This amicable situation must be both authentic and quite early because toward the end of the period of the wilderness wanderings, and during the period of the Judges, relations between Israel and Midian were thoroughly hostile.’’ Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 35. If indeed the mentions of the Midianites in Exod 2 and Exod 18 are from the same source, their being tied together in the literary structure of Exodus implies that the final redactor (or R) had exquisite capabilities to organize source materials into a meaningful whole.

covenant, God took note of the people's distress and considered what he must do."⁴⁷⁴

This is yet another text in the narrative of the Exodus that attests to YHWH's intimate involvement in what is taking place in Egypt.⁴⁷⁵ Remembering his covenant, at the right time,⁴⁷⁶ he acts. In B', the unusual episode after the deliverance at the Red Sea ends with God's establishment of statutes in covenant language.⁴⁷⁷ These terms inform Israel about how God will act toward them in the subsequent chapters. The

⁴⁷⁴ Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 41.

⁴⁷⁵ God had already fulfilled part of His promise to Abraham—the multiplication of the people—in the first chapter of Exodus. Greenberg observes: “When God is said in verse 24 to have remembered his covenant with the patriarchs, the reference is to its second part, the promise of a land for their descendants. (Its first part, the promise to make them numerous, had already been fulfilled.)” Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 44. This enhances the possibility that though elusive in the first chapters of Exodus, God was active in providing the conditions for his covenant promises to be fulfilled.

⁴⁷⁶ Another anticipation of the actions of God in Exodus seen in Genesis—apart from the idea of “visitation” mentioned earlier—is God's promise to Abraham in Gen 15:13. God tells Abraham that his descendants will be enslaved and oppressed as strangers in a foreign land for a total of four hundred years. Furthermore, in Gen 15:16 God reiterates this prophetic insight as he promises that in the fourth generation the people will return to the land. To discuss the dating of Exodus and the historical background of these numbers is beyond the scope of this study. What is in the interest of this section is the fact that God anticipated in Genesis, through covenant, how he would proceed in the future events of the Exodus. As mentioned earlier, the book begins with this expectation of God's visitation, as well as the fulfillment of the promise. History flows freely within God's promises.

⁴⁷⁷ Frank H. Polak sees covenantal language in this section: “The notion of imposing ‘law and justice’ may remind one of the covenant theme, and especially of the ceremony at Shechem (Joshua 24:25). This suggestion would be in line with the sequel, which opens with a summary statement of the covenant idea (15:26a), followed by a conditional blessing (v. 26b).” Frank H. Polak, “Water, Rock, and Wood: Structure and Thought Pattern in the Exodus Narrative,” *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 25 (1997): 21.

general pattern of how God acts for the people does not change from B to B'.

YHWH's actions for the people follow promises, statutes, regulations, and covenant.

Even so, scholars are generally divided in assigning a particular source to the two sides of this section. Recent research sees the addition of statutes and regulations in B' (Exod 15:26) as pointing to a possible deuteronomistic source.⁴⁷⁸ At the same time, scholars understand that YHWH's remembrance of the covenant in B—the counterpart to this section—pertains to the priestly source.⁴⁷⁹ Again, the assumption of the documentary hypothesis diverts the attention of the reader to speculation rather than to the natural flow of the book. Once two different sources are assigned to the two sections (B and B'), any continuous or harmonious portrayal of God's relation to humanity is dismissed by extrabiblical commitments established a priori. Through such a conception, the God who remembers the covenant in B is different from the God who establishes statutes and regulations in B'. This makes it impossible to trace a pattern of divine action based on His covenant promises in Genesis and Exodus.

YHWH's actions based on covenant and promise raise additional questions about the nature of God's actions in the book: namely, the epistemological question

⁴⁷⁸ See A. Schart, "Moses und Israel in Konflikt," *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis* 98 (Freiburg-Göttingen, 1990), 173–77; Childs, *Exodus*, 266–67. Dozeman understands that this section pertains to non-P History: *Exodus*, 371–74. Durham summarizes the source-critical predicament in this section: "The tendency of the source critics has been to assign different motifs to different sources, or at least to different layers in the same source." For his summary on how scholars interpret this section, see Durham, *Exodus*, 212.

⁴⁷⁹ See Dozeman, *Exodus*, 92; Childs, *Book of Exodus*, 28; Durham, *Exodus*, 25.

of the knowledge of God and the ontological question of the location of the presence of God.

In regard to God's knowledge, in Exod 2:23–25 “four terms give voice to Israel's suffering: ‘groaning,’ ‘cried out,’ ‘cry for help,’ ‘moaning’; and four verbs express God's response.”⁴⁸⁰ God hears the cry of the people, God remembers his covenant, God sees the people, and God knows. The Hebrew text unusually presents no object for this divine knowing. Dozeman notes that there is “no object for the divine knowledge, creating a parallel with the Israelite cry in v. 23,”⁴⁸¹ which also has no object.

Dozeman understands that the objectless knowledge of God matches the objectless cry of Israel and “underscores the anguish of their situation and most likely their lack of knowledge of God.”⁴⁸² In other words, even though the people of Israel forget God in the context of their suffering, God still remembers them. Conservative scholars assert that the cry of Israel was a prayer, even though no object is given.⁴⁸³ Even so, not much is said by commentators about God's knowledge or the nature of his actions, apart from the fact that they are triggered by the cries of Israel and that they anticipate the next section in the narrative. The general consensus is that God

⁴⁸⁰ Sarna, *Exodus*, 13.

⁴⁸¹ Dozeman, *Exodus*, 91.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 93. The problem with this perspective is that the Hebrew text does indicate knowledge of God (in the episode of the Hebrew midwives who “feared God” in Exod 1:17), and the results of covenant blessing (in the multiplication of the people in the first chapter).

⁴⁸³ Stuart, *Exodus*, 102.

acts because the people cry, and no attention is given to the significance of the knowledge of God in the text.

Each of these readings assume a particular conception of God and of Israel's condition. Dozeman's conclusion is based on the assumption that Israel had no knowledge of God: their cry is objectless because, like the Pharaoh who did not know Joseph, Israel also forgot Joseph and his God. Stuart's perspective that the objectless cry of the people rises up to the heavens as a prayer is based on the assumption that the people still maintained a connection with God.

The Hebrew text presents the information that the people simply cry (זעק), this cry raises up to God as a cry for help (שִׁוּעָה), God remembers his covenant, and acts. The action of God is not primarily based—as indicated by the majority of scholars—on their cry, but on God's remembrance of the covenant. God acts in favor of a people who—as indicated by Dozeman—might not have even called upon his name. What precedes divine action is his own promise, his covenant stipulations, as well as a sensitivity toward the condition of the people.

Again, to tear the text apart into different sources with different conceptions of the divine-human relation would lead the reader away from the unified emphasis on God's action in the context of a covenant that is introduced in the early Genesis accounts and still valid in Exodus. To reduce conceptions of God and his actions to the agenda of the redactors in each source period neglects the complexity of the God who acts in the context of covenant. To simplify God and his actions into formulas pertaining to different sources misses the richness of what the text is presenting.

In regard to God's presence, it is significant to note that the first time God is

explicitly mentioned—apart from Exod 1:17, 20-21 in the context of the blessing upon the midwives—is in Exod 2:23. The Hebrew text says that the cry of Israel “rose up to God” (וַתַּעַל שְׁוַעֲתָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים).⁴⁸⁴ God is not in Egypt, not in Midian, but upward. Commentaries are generally silent on the location of the divine in this text. Donald Gowan correctly observes that the “theme of the presence of God has been a popular subject in Old Testament studies, but its opposite has been generally neglected.”⁴⁸⁵ The significance of this text is that before God manifests himself in the next section, the first two chapters are marked by divine absence.

As indicated in the first chapters of this study, theologians normally begin their evaluation of the actions of God with an already established idea of who God is. God’s actions are then understood and interpreted in the context of the reality of God, thus onto-theology. If the theological construct begins with what the text presents in relation to God, the picture changes. The ontological question about the divine location in the book of Exodus provides insight on the discussion by highlighting God’s awareness of what is taking place in Egypt from this upward location, and his subsequent action through revelation to Moses in the world and within the flow of history. Reflection on the reality of who God is—if it is a proper object of reflection—must begin with an evaluation of the text itself that primarily depicts his actions, thus theo-ontology. The reader understands who God is through

⁴⁸⁴ I already mentioned the dialogue between Abraham and YHWH that preceded YHWH going up. The idea of the divine being located in the heavens can be found throughout the Hebrew Bible (1 Sam 5:12, Jonah 1:2, Jer 16:2, etc.).

the textual depiction of how he acts.⁴⁸⁶ The Hebrew text in B, then, presents the reader with an understanding that although absent, God is aware, and will act in the world and for man because of his covenant. In B', God is fully present and interacting with Israel throughout their journeys.

Israel's rebellion: wilderness

So far, this section has focused on God's actions in relation to Israel. At this time, I will explore the human side of the God-human relation with a focus on the battle of the Amalekites depicted in B' (Exod 17:8-16). Because the battle of the Amalekites appears at the backdrop of the question of divine presence, it seems an appropriate setting to continue the exposition of the God-human relation in the text.

For several scholars, the battle with the Amalekites appears in the text for varied reasons, so different theories abound.⁴⁸⁷ The preceding narrative (Exod 17:1-7)

⁴⁸⁵ Donald E. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 7.

⁴⁸⁶ It is also important to note that this same dynamic functioned for the Israelites. As readers of the text, the Israelites were not given a description of who God is in any section of Exodus. They only experienced the acts of God. The acts of God gave the people a glimpse into what we now consider the ontological question of the nature of God. The focus of the text is not on the nature, but on the acts, in the context of divine faithfulness to the covenant God established with the patriarchs.

⁴⁸⁷ Stuart and Durham see the reason as historical and trace the relation of Israel and Amalek to the book of Genesis; see Stuart, *Exodus*, 387; Durham, *Exodus*, 234. Garrett writes that the reason for the attack was the vulnerability of a people deprived of water. See Garrett, *Commentary on Exodus*, 433. Sarna agrees with this assessment, which is in harmony with Deut 25:17-19; Sarna, *Exodus*, 95. Meyers writes that, like the lack of water, this is yet another challenge in the wilderness; see Meyers, *Exodus*, 134. And finally, Hamilton sees no apparent reason for the attack. See Hamilton, *Exodus*, 269.

indicates another problem with water. Israel grumbles, Moses turns to God, and God indicates that He will “stand before” (עָמַד לְפָנָיִךָ אֲנִי) Moses and a rock that is to be struck (Exod 17:6). The text, contrary to the beginning of the book, makes explicit God’s presence with the people in this particular scene. According to the text, this is not a speech act or an illusion. The Hebrew language cannot communicate something in a clearer fashion: God was present there and then. Whether interpreted as myth or reality, this is the perspective of the author. It is surprising, then, that in the conclusion of this episode, the people—who are unaware of the dialogue between God and Moses—question the presence of a God who was there. The people ask, “Is the Lord in our midst, or not?” (הֲיֵשׁ יְהוָה בְּקִרְבָּנוּ אִם־אֵין; Exod 17:7b).⁴⁸⁸

It is important to note that in this instance, what determines God’s actions is not any particular covenantal commitment—apart from the fact that he is still leading the people to the promised land—but Moses’ intercession for the people. This movement between Moses and God will continue throughout the book and serves as another argument against the idea of a timeless God outside of time and space. God interacts with Moses in time, and these altercations change the flow of the narrative.

The questioning of the divine presence leads not only to Moses’ intervention, but to the seemingly unexplainable appearance of the Amalekites. This is the only

⁴⁸⁸ The people question God’s presence here, and in chapter 32 they will question Moses’ presence in their midst. There seems to be an underlying theme relating to the people’s need for a divine figure constantly present with them. By questioning and fashioning a divinity that will be present at all times, they sin.

time in Exodus that a foreign nation attacks Israel. Because scholars generally assign the section of Exod 17:1-7 to P and 17:8-16 to J or E,⁴⁸⁹ any proposal in the narrative that assumes a continuation from one section to the other is rare.⁴⁹⁰ Even so, it seems natural to see that there would be challenges in the wilderness journey toward Sinai: water, and now war. The people's reaction of questioning the divine presence is significant not only because it provides another window into the freedom God and humanity have in their interactions in history, but because it provides insight into the way Israel evaluates God's actions. Although the reader is informed of God's presence in the provision of water—through the dialogue between God and Moses—the people do not associate the water with the immediate provision of a God who acts for them in the wilderness.

The human perception of the divine continues to be in focus in the next section, regarding YHWH's appearance to Moses through the burning bush.

Section III: C and C' (Exodus 3:11–4:31 and 19–24:11)

Textual Notes

The third section of the literary structure of Exodus, C (Exod 3:11–4:31) and C' (Exod 19–24:11), develops in three distinct parts: (1) Moses' approach to the mountain of God and Israel's approach to the mountain of God (both including

⁴⁸⁹ Childs, *Exodus*, 306, 312–13.

⁴⁹⁰ Because Dozeman has a different source-critical approach, he does allow for the possibility of the two narratives being seen together. See Dozeman, *Exodus*, 393.

theophanies); (2) the dialogue between Moses and God both the first (plan to deliver people) and the second time (Decalogue and *mishpatim*) he goes up the mountain;

Table 4. C and C' textual notes

C. God Remembers His Covenant (3:1–4:31)	C'. The Book of the Covenant (19–24:11)
• Moses comes to Horeb (with the flock of Jethro) (3:1)	• Moses comes to Sinai (with the flock of God) (19:1-2)
• God “ <i>called to him from the bush</i> ” (3:4)	• God “ <i>called to him from the mountain</i> ” (19:3)
• God: “I have come down” (3:8)	• God: “I have bore you on eagles’ wings” (19:4a)
• The cry of the people was “ <i>brought to me</i> ” (3:9)	• Israel I “ <i>brought to myself</i> ” (19:4b)
• Moses commissioned (3:10)	• Moses commissioned (19:6)
• Moses questions God (3:11)	• Moses obeys God (19:7)
• Sign: Israel will worship Me on this mountain (3:12)	• Israel prepares to worship God at the mountain (19:7-25)
• God reveals His name “I AM” (3:13-15)	• God reveals His character “I AM”: Decalogue and <i>Mishpatim</i> (20–23:19)
• Promised signs of God’s Presence (3:16–4:17)	• Promised sign of the Angel’s Presence (23:20-33)
• Moses makes preparations to depart (4:18-23)	• Moses makes preparations to go up (24:1-4a)
• Covenant neglected: <i>cutting</i> foreskin and <i>blood</i> (4:24-26)	• Covenant established: <i>cutting</i> covenant and <i>blood</i> (24:4b-8)
• Moses, Aaron, and Elders worship God (4:27-31)	• Moses, Aaron, and Elders worship God (24:9-11)

(3) Moses’ preparation to return to Egypt with a scene of covenant and

worship, and Moses' preparation to go up the mountain as God instructed along with a second scene of covenant and worship. Several other interesting links between C and C' relating to Moses and Israel are significant here. In both episodes, Exod 3:4 and 19:3, God calls Moses. In the first instance, God calls from the midst of a small bush (as Elohim): וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹהִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּבְיָהּ. In the second instance—and the only time God has called him since that first instance—God calls Moses from the mountain itself (as YHWH): וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו יְהוָה מִן־הַהָר. While in Exod 3:9 God tells Moses that the cry of the people was “brought” to him (בְּצַעֲקַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּאָה אֵלַי), the first thing brought to God himself after that is the Israelites themselves, in Exod 19:4b (וַאֲבָא וְאַתְּכֶם אֵלַי). This first scene in C and C' ends with the sign of the worship of God at the same mountain—mentioned in passing—in Exod 3:12 and the preparations for the people to worship God at the mountain in Exod 19:7-25.

The second scene is largely composed of divine speeches. While in C God presents Moses with the knowledge of his name (Exod 3:13-15), along with signs of his future care and commitment to Israel (Exod 3:16–4:17), in C' God reveals his character by giving Israel, through Moses, the Decalogue (Exod 20:1-17), a series of commands (Exod 20:22–23:19), and the promise of his care and presence through his angel (Exod 23:20-33). The relation between narrative and law and possible reasons for the differences between C and C' will be pursued in the next section, dealing with how scholars understand this dynamic in the text.

The final scene in the third section of the literary structure deals with preparations. While in C Moses prepares to return to Egypt to confront Pharaoh

after speaking with God on the mountain (Exod 4:18-23),⁴⁹¹ in C' Moses prepares himself to go up the mountain to confront God (Exod 24:1-4a). The text of Exodus not only presents a contrast between Moses as a leader and God as a leader, but a contrast between God as king and Pharaoh as king. This section begins the comparison.

What follows in C is one of the most complicated sections of the book (Exod 4:24-26). Moses is faced with an angel seeking his death, and Zipporah acts quickly to intervene for her husband by cutting (כרת) the foreskin of their child. The mention of blood (דם) in this scene is also important. Scholars generally point out the unusual appearance of this episode in the narrative, and this is why the events in C' might provide insight into the resolution of the many problems the text presents the reader. As in C, the text of C' presents the reader with the “cutting” (כרת) of a covenant (Exod 24:8), and the mention of blood (דם). Before Moses goes to Egypt to confront Pharaoh, he neglects the covenant marked by circumcision, in a scene filled with blood. Before Moses goes up to meet God, he establishes a covenant with the elders, in a scene also marked by blood.

God-Human Relation Notes

One of the main issues touching upon the God-human relation in this section was addressed in the introduction of this study: how the interpretation of the Hebrew

⁴⁹¹ For more on this particular text in Exod 4, see Athena E. Gorospe, *Narrative and Identity: An Ethical Reading of Exodus 4* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

Bible hinges upon the understanding of what happened in the “Sinai event.”⁴⁹² The general idea is that if something in the descriptions of the book of Exodus did happen in history, it happened in the Sinai narratives with God revealing himself to the Israelite people. This revelation of God to Israel resulted in the creation of what is termed the “book of the Covenant.”⁴⁹³

Some scholars observe that the event of Sinai is traditionally understood “as the exclusive and normative model for subsequent revelation in Judaism”⁴⁹⁴ and that this conception is a “longstanding”⁴⁹⁵ presupposition. While this perception has never been questioned, this long held presupposition is starting to be overcome in scholarly writings.⁴⁹⁶ So far, this study has aimed at expanding this movement of noticing important divine-human events beyond Sinai. Although the depiction of the

⁴⁹² In the introduction I presented this issue through the work of Langdon B. Gilkey. At this stage, as I move into the text, examples closer to biblical studies are in order. For more on this particular issue, see Sommer, “Revelation at Sinai.”

⁴⁹³ For specific studies on this section in particular, see: Martin Ravndal Hauge, *The Descent from the Mountain: Narrative Patterns in Exodus 19–40* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); Thomas B. Dozeman, *God on the Mountain: A Study of Redaction, Theology and Canon in Exodus 19–24* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989). For the relation of revelation, narrative, and law, see Nanette Stahl, *Law and Liminality in the Bible* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 51–73.

⁴⁹⁴ George J. Brooke, Hindy Najman, and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, introduction to *The Significance of Sinai: Traditions about Sinai and Divine Revelation in Judaism and Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), ix.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Some even conclude that some events outside of Exodus were more important than the Sinai event, affirming that “the Mosaic discourse in year 40 [in the book of Deuteronomy] is more important than the Sinai/Horeb event.” Ibid.

God-human relation is pivotal at the Sinai event, it is not the only significant instance of divine action/revelation in the book of Exodus that deserves serious consideration.⁴⁹⁷ After all, the Sinai event follows another Sinai event between God and Moses in Exod 3.

With these issues in mind, a few themes within the context of C and C' relating to the God-human relation must be taken into consideration at this stage: (1) the Sinai event and law, and (2) the Sinai event and revelation.

The Sinai event and law

Because the textual depiction of the God-human dynamic centered at the Sinai event creates the Book of the Covenant,⁴⁹⁸ the first issue to appear in scholarly considerations is the relation between the Sinai event and law.⁴⁹⁹ The general premise within scholarship—already mentioned in passing when this study dealt with the issue of history—is that God did not reveal himself in history to Israel at Sinai.

Although this is what the text says, this is not what actually happened. Von Rad

⁴⁹⁷ Although I agree with the movement beyond Sinai, I must emphasize yet again that I do not share the historical-critical inclinations or source-critical motivations of these scholars. Instead, I intend to uncover how other instances of divine revelation are just as important as Sinai. This partial conclusion is based on how the literary structure of the book of Exodus presents the focus of the author going beyond just the Sinai event.

⁴⁹⁸ Stahl describes these critical moments between God and humanity as “liminal moments,” and argues that the appearance of law within the biblical narratives indicates a significant transition. See Stahl, *Law and Liminality*, 12–13.

⁴⁹⁹ For more on this see Baruch J. Schwartz, “The Priestly Account of the Theophany and Lawgiving at Sinai,” in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to*

summarizes the idea well as he writes that nowhere “else in Old Testament is there to be found such a huge presentation of traditions, made up of so many strands, and attached to one single event (the revelation at Sinai).”⁵⁰⁰ So the question is: where does the idea of law come from, if God did not actually speak to Israel in the wilderness as the text indicates?

Marc Zvi Brettler phrases it well as he says that the “problems involved with the narrative description of revelation, and the connections between the narrative and the law, seem truly intractable.”⁵⁰¹ The question remains: how “did it happen that Israel’s laws came to be attributed to the authorship of a deity, YHWH himself?”⁵⁰² Unfortunately, the answers given to the question do not stem from any textual, theological, or even philosophical understanding, but are generally formed through a source-critical analysis of the text within its ANE background (in the parameters set forth by the presuppositions delineated earlier).⁵⁰³

Manahem Haran, ed. M. V. Fox et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 104–34.

⁵⁰⁰ Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: The Theology of Israel’s Historical Traditions*, Vol. 1 (London: SCM, 1975), 187.

⁵⁰¹ Marc Zvi Brettler, “‘Fire, Cloud, and Deep Darkness’ (Deuteronomy 5:22): Deuteronomy’s Recasting of Revelation,” in *The Significance of Sinai: Traditions about Sinai and Divine Revelation in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. George J. Brooke, Hindy Najman, and Loren T. Stuckenbruck (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 16.

⁵⁰² James L. Kugel, “Some Unanticipated Consequences of the Sinai Revelation: A Religion of Laws,” in *The Significance of Sinai: Traditions about Sinai and Divine Revelation in Judaism and Christianity*, ed. George J. Brooke, Hindy Najman, and Loren T. Stuckenbruck (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 4.

⁵⁰³ Dozeman argues that the source-critical approach to Exod 19–24 has undergone significant changes since Wellhausen. Dozeman writes that the old

James L. Kugel, for instance, proposes that the origin of the idea of “divine law” came “not at some conclave at the foot of Mt. Sinai, but in the hill country of ancient Canaan, as different tribes and ethnic groups in Canaan sought to pull themselves together, through a common code of conduct and a common deity, into some sort of tribal coalition.”⁵⁰⁴ In other words, the discussion moves from law in the context of a possible divine revelation—common in pre-critical interpretations but not present in current exegetical discussions—to law as a cultural product of

approach emphasized how redactors were “passive tridents, whose primary aim was to preserve tradition, rather than creative theologians who critically transformed tradition.” Dozeman, *God on the Mountain*, 2. Among those who subscribe to this old approach are Wellhausen, Gressmann, and Von Rad. Dozeman and others propose a more positive perspective of the work of the redactors. Yet these new solutions still function under the philosophical parameters set forth by the documentary hypothesis. For instance, Perlitt argues that what the redactors did was a creative endeavor, the turning of an account of theophany into that of legislation. See L. Perlitt, *Bundestheologie in Alten Testament*, Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 36 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969), 156–238. Another significant contribution to those who argue for the human creation of the covenant code is found in David P. Wright, *Inventing God’s Law: How the Covenant Code of the Bible Used and Revised the Laws of Hammurabi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). The change from a negative to a positive assessment of the role of the redactors still functions under the umbrella of extrabiblical assumptions leading to the idea that the text is a collection of writings from different authors, in different periods, with different worldviews and agendas. Dozeman proposes a model of interpretation that traces the growth of the Sinai narrative in three stages: pre-exilic Mountain of God tradition, a late pre-exilic/exilic deuteronomic redaction, and finally an exilic/early post-exilic priestly redaction. Again, the dynamic changes, but the platform remains the same.

⁵⁰⁴ Kugel, “Some Unanticipated Consequences,” 5. Von Rad also negates the historicity of the event as he writes that “this narrative sequence does not derive directly from historical events, but is probably the ‘festival legend’ belonging to a major cultic celebration, the old festival of the renewal of the covenant.” See Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 189.

Hebrews in Canaan during the “period of the Judges.”⁵⁰⁵

With this movement from divine action/revelation to human product, the nature and function of law within Exodus are established upon extrabiblical parameters. In short, divine law becomes human law: that is, a human creation to establish the idea that the divine-human relation is only possible through the keeping of law. Kugel concludes:

The religion of laws, although never envisaged as such when God first spoke at Sinai, turned out to be no less an effective way of keeping the deity at arm’s length. He was way up there, and we humans were way down here; what connected us was not direct contact but a set of clearly established ground rules—or, one might say, a set of clearly visible electric wires along which the current of divine-human relations was to flow.⁵⁰⁶

The problem here is that, for Kugel and others, there is no electricity in the wire; there is no real connection between humanity and God because such a reality is dismissed via the presuppositions of historical criticism. Once the origin of divine law is established as human, the reality of covenant and law and their relation to the narrative of Exodus becomes not only intractable textually and historically, but unrealistic theologically and philosophically. The historical-critical outlook determines what is and is not realistic in the text, and with this basic structure in place, the apparent contradictions and differences within the text are used to continuously support the critical structure, never to challenge it.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁵ Kugel, “Some Unanticipated Consequences,” 5.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁰⁷ Whenever an apparent contradiction is found within the text, the immediate procedure is to consider the source-critical aspect of the contradiction. Rarely do scholars attempt to find alternate ways of understanding these

Before I continue unpacking the presuppositions that shape the understanding of the event of Sinai, it is important to point out that the critical use of myth in the robes of history to communicate an idea (in this case, the idea of law) is inherently Platonic. Critical scholars, through the use of the documentary hypothesis, project upon the text—and the authors of the text—their own biases. They assume, a priori, that the text with its reconstructed history devoid of divine action is a means to communicate a message (be it from the J, D, E, or P source). This movement is Platonic at its root, since Plato as an idealist began his description of reality with a myth that would communicate an already set system of ideas. The myth is used to carry the system. In this classical framework, any possibility of the text communicating actual historical events is denied in favor of the message or idea they are trying to communicate through the fabrication of historical myth. The idea to be conveyed precedes myth and consequently history.⁵⁰⁸ So, the use of the documentary hypothesis, the idea of sources with agendas, and the fabrication of myth/history to communicate theological viewpoints are, at their roots, Platonic.⁵⁰⁹

These extrabiblical premises, then, limit the creation of law to some human

contradictions (which vary in many ways) outside the source-critical approach. This study will attempt to find alternate ways of dealing with the portions of Exodus that have been considered problematic.

⁵⁰⁸ I am thankful for the classes I took with Jacques B. Doukhan, who constantly pointed out the dependence of critical scholarship upon classical literature that assumed a Platonic foundation.

⁵⁰⁹ This same mindset is found in the positivist philosophy of Descartes, where the idea/thinking precedes existence/history. So, in the documentary hypothesis, Platonic and Cartesian philosophical frameworks harmonize.

production that would grant authority to the priests who serve the God of the law, as well as their “divinely given” agendas. This perspective entirely subverts what the text is attempting to convey. Stahl is correct in assessing that “in their concise presentation in the Decalogue, the laws are a distillation of the entire legal corpus of the Bible, and they emblemize—in their iconic inscription on the tablets—the importance of law in their relationship between God and Israel.”⁵¹⁰ To reduce the law and its theological weight to ideas conveyed by myth, as an ahistorical human fabrication, is to miss the richness of what the law implies for the divine-human relation.

When evaluating the textual flow indicated by the literary structure of Exodus, the reader can see how the text transitions into law only in C'. The point of Moses' meeting with God in C is related to the Exodus of the people from Egypt. In this instance, God speaks to Moses and acts for Israel. In C', the sign given to Moses finds its fulfillment, and God's intention is to not only act for the people, but speak to them directly. The experience of Moses anticipates that of the people. Although the people cannot stand the direct revelation of God and Moses has to resume his role as intercessor, the appearance of law here indicates a change in the dynamic of the book. Now that they are delivered from Egypt, God will expound on how they will be delivered from their bondage to sin. Yet, as indicated previously, God will not act without parameters: he will continue to act through covenant. Cassuto correctly observes that the Ten Words function in the narrative as an introduction to the

⁵¹⁰ Stahl, *Law and Liminality*, 54.

covenant:

The Ten Words are not the substance of the covenant, nor its conditions, but the introduction to it. Before the particulars and terms of the covenant are conveyed by the intermediary, God himself makes a prefatory declaration that establishes the basic principles on which the covenant will be founded.⁵¹¹

In this sense, there is no distinction between narrative and law. What leads up to the law is a series of divine actions in favor of the people depicted in narrative form. The law is the climax and new starting point for more divine actions based on grace. The appearance of law throughout the book indicates the conditions under which God will act for the people. Here, they anticipate the way God will deliver the people from their sin. Writing about Deuteronomy, Daniel Block is correct in observing that the law is a “gift of grace to guide the redeemed in the way of righteousness, leading to life.”⁵¹² This idea will continue in the subsequent sections dealing with the construction of the sanctuary.

The Sinai event and revelation

So far, I have outlined how the interpretation of the Sinai event affects the interpretation of Exodus in the context of the creation of law (either as revelation or human product). A second question that presents itself in this section of the book of Exodus considers the relation between the Sinai event and revelation.

The source-critical understanding that within Exodus there is a conflict of

⁵¹¹ Cassuto, *Exodus*, 239.

⁵¹² Daniel I. Block, *The Gospel According to Moses: Theological and Ethical Reflections on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 4.

worldviews or philosophies, especially as it pertains to the God-human relation, also stems from conceptions of the relation between revelation and text. Above I have shown that for historical critics, the “electric wire” between God and humanity is a law that is human, not divine. There was no divine revelation (promulgation) of law, just the creation of laws that provided a means of connection between humanity and an elusive god. Others, especially within the Jewish tradition, understand that divine revelation did take place, yet without any content. The biblical text is a reporting of this contentless revelation, but not revelation in itself.⁵¹³

Sommer, for example, writes about the Sinai event as he attempts to harmonize the texts of the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy and asserts that the revelation at Sinai “imparted specific content; it was not only an overwhelming event,”⁵¹⁴ and that the people heard a voice “articulating sounds in order to communicate meaning.”⁵¹⁵ However, even though this seems an appropriate evaluation of the biblical text, Sommer concludes, based on internal inconsistencies within Exodus as well as between Exodus and Deuteronomy, that the people “heard no words, just as they saw no form, because there were no words to hear.”⁵¹⁶ Because of this assessment and lack of ontological import as well as cognitive communication in the Sinai event, Sommer indicates that the Torah and all the writings within

⁵¹³ Sommer, “Revelation at Sinai,” 424.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 433.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 445.

Jewish tradition are “tradition, commentary, and reflection.”⁵¹⁷

In addition to this assessment, Sommer underscores, following a timeless conception of Being, that in reality there are two Torahs: a phenomenal Torah (the Torah of Moses) and a noumenal Torah (the Torah of God). The latter, he explains, “cannot be limited by rational categories of time and space.”⁵¹⁸ So, as one can notice, even the perspectives that come as close as possible to what the text is presenting are not exempt from extrabiblical philosophical presuppositions that shape them.

The biblical text leaves no space for a differentiation between a revelation in space and time and a meaning beyond time. In C, Exod 3:3 presents Moses approaching the burning bush and calling it a “marvelous sight” (אַתִּי־הַמְרָאָה הַגִּדֹל). Moses is unaware of the presence of God. Visible manifestations by themselves are not enough for Moses to be sure of divine presence. What allows Moses to understand that he is indeed in the presence of God is divine speech. Once God speaks, Moses realizes he is in the presence of God. This divine longing to communicate with humanity is also attested in C’, but as indicated earlier, the people respond negatively to this divine approximation.

Yet the text leaves no room for contestation: the realm of the heavens is not in another dimension, but close enough that people can hear the voice of God. Exodus 20:22 says, “You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven” (אַתֶּם רָאִיתֶם כִּי מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם דִּבַּרְתִּי עִמָּכֶם). Any other evaluation of this dynamic forces the text to

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 448.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

say something it is not presenting about how God relates to humanity according to the perspective of the author of Exodus.

Section IV: D and D' (Exodus 5–7:2a and 24:12–32:30)

Textual Notes

The fourth section of the literary structure of Exodus, D (Exod 5–7:2a) and D' (Exod 24:12–32:30), develops in what can be summarized as two main scenes: (1) God's command to Pharaoh in D and God's command to Israel in D', and (2) Pharaoh's disobedience in D and Israel's disobedience in D'.

Table 5. D and D' textual notes

D. Pharaoh's Building Project without <i>Shabbat</i>: God's Command and Pharaoh's Disobedience (Part I) (5–7:2a)	D'. God's Building Project with <i>Shabbat</i>: God's Command and People's Disobedience/Obedience (Part I) (24:12–32:30)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses in the presence of Pharaoh (5:1–5) • God's command : "Let my people go" (5:1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses in the presence of God (24:12–18) • God's command: "Let them make me a sanctuary" (25:1–31:18) • The "Lord spoke to Moses" (7x) dividing God's building project into seven sections, with the last section about the <i>Shabbat</i> (25:1–31:18), paralleling the six days of creation followed by the <i>Shabbat</i> (cf. Gen 11:–2:4a) <p style="margin-left: 20px;">Section 1 (25:1–30:10) Section 2 (30:11–16) Section 3 (30:17–21) Section 4 (30:22–23) Section 5 (30:34–38) Section 6 (31:1–11) Section 7: <i>Shabbat</i> (31:12–18)</p>

Table 5—Continued

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pharaoh’s response (disobedience): “who is the Lord, I <i>do not know</i> the Lord, I will not let Israel go” (5:2–3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People’s response (disobedience): “Come make us a god who will go before us, and as of Moses we <i>do not know</i> what has become of him” (32:1–2)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pharaoh’s building project involves seven commands and seven verbs (or verb pairs), beginning with Pharaoh’s rejection of the Shabbat (5:4–9) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People’s building project initiated and divine reaction (32:3–10)
<p>Command 1: Shabbat is denied (5:4–5) Command 2: “give/add” (yasaph) (5:7a) Command 3: “go” and “gather” (halak and qashash) (5:7b) Command 4: “lay/put” (sim) (5:8a) Command 5: “diminish” (raga’) (5:8b) Command 6: “let be heavier” (kabad) (5:9a) Command 7: “pay attention” (sha`ah) (5:9b)</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pharaoh says to Israelites: “Go and work” (5:18) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Israelites “rose up to play” (32:6)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses questions God: “Why (lamah) have You brought trouble on this people?” (5:22-23) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses questions God: “Why (lamah) does Your wrath burn hot against Your people?” (32:11)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God speaks: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Covenant (by the Lord I did not make myself known) (6:1-8) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses speaks: Abraham, Isaac, Israel, and Covenant (32:13)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses speaks and people do not hear (6:9a) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses speaks and God hears (32:14)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Israel’s “cruel bondage” to Pharaoh (6:9b) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Israel “breaks loose” (para’) in debauchery and bondage to sin (32:25)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary of God’s command to Israel and Pharaoh through Moses and Aaron (6:12–13) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credentials (family history) of God’s spokespersons to Israel and Pharaoh (6:14–27) 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict between Moses and God: Moses as God, Aaron as Prophet - (6:28–7:1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict between Moses and Aaron: Calf as god, Aaron as Prophet (32:15–30)

Yet within these commands one notices a contrast between God as a leader of the people and Pharaoh as a leader of the people. In D' the commands of God relating to the sanctuary extend from Exod 25–31 with no interruption. In these chapters, God lays out the plan for the construction of the sanctuary in seven different stages, as seen in Table 5. The commands of God relating to the construction of the sanctuary, then, follow the creation rhythm of seven ending with rest or *נָפְשׁוּ*. God's "building project" has the purpose of God dwelling with people, and its construction is not forced, but voluntary (Exod 25:2), and includes rest (Exod 31:12-18).

Pharaoh's response to God's command to let go of the people is negative. He questions the very existence of God and initiates a "building project" of his own. Like God's building project, Pharaoh's project also contains seven stages indicated by seven verbs and verb pairs. It is the very reversal of any creative act that respects life. In the course of these commands of forced labor upon the people, Pharaoh denies any possibility of rest/ceasing to labor or *נָפְשׁוּ* (in Exod 5:5 Pharaoh asks, "You would have them *cease* from their labor?"). In the idea of a building project marked by a rhythm of seven and an emphasis on rest or lack thereof, the contrast between Pharaoh and God is set.

Yet as Pharaoh responds negatively to God's command in D, the people in D' also reject the principles of God's commands that they heard from the mountain. Ignorant of the dialogue between God and Moses relating to a building project taking place on the mountain, the people initiate a rebellious building project of their own:

the construction of the golden calf.⁵¹⁹ Like Pharaoh in Exod 5:2 saying, “I do not know the Lord” (אֲנִי לֹא יָדָעְתִּי אֱלֹהִים), the people express themselves in Exod 32:1b by saying, “We do not know what has become of him [Moses]” (אֲנִי לֹא יָדָעְתִּי מִהְיָאָה אֵלֶיךָ). The similarities between Pharaoh and the people here are significant. The contrast between their experiences will be evaluated in the next section on E and E’.

God-Human Relation Notes

The history of interpretation of Exod 25–31 is as vast as it is complex.⁵²⁰ Yet the main issue that relates to the God-human relation within D and D’ is the construction of the sanctuary and consequently, the conception of sacred space.⁵²¹ Biblical scholars normally evaluate the text and its history without giving heed to the reality it points to. If the author/redactor were allowed to speak without the

⁵¹⁹ This connection between the two building projects has been noted by other scholars such as Terrence Fretheim. See Fretheim, *Exodus*, 267.

⁵²⁰ Jews and Christians have attempted to make sense of this portion of Exodus in different ways. Scott M. Langston writes that “Christians used these chapters to exalt the church, Jews to glorify Torah.” Langston, *Exodus through the Centuries*, 227. For more see Childs, *Exodus*, 547–50.

⁵²¹ Daniel C. Timmer recognizes that there are several noteworthy issues surrounding the text of Exod 25–40: “sacred space, sacred time, divine presence, and creation.” Daniel C. Timmer, *Creation, Tabernacle, and Sabbath: The Sabbath Frame of Exodus 31:12–17; 35:1–3 in Exegetical and Theological Perspective* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 32. Definitions of sacred space also carry within themselves philosophical assumptions. The common conception among scholars can be summarized in the idea that sacred spaces are “religious centers at which the heavenly and earthly meet, sites that act as bridges between the human and divine worlds. They are locations at which the divine ruptures through the mundane and reveals itself to humans.” Ron Eduard Hassner, *War on Sacred Ground* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 22. For more on this particular theological issue see John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2003).

suspicion of a predetermined agenda, what would the description say about God, humanity, and their relation? Traditionally, the description of the text is not enough, and an interpretative inference must be made to make sense of the description in the reality of the reader.

As indicated earlier, the interpretative task is descriptive. Yet when scholars do speak of what the text is attempting to convey, when they jump to the inference of “what it means” in regards to sacred space,⁵²² the works of two authors appear as common references: Mircea Eliade’s *The Sacred and the Profane*⁵²³ and R. E. Clements’s *God and Temple*.⁵²⁴ Daniel C. Timmer writes that “any discussion of sacred space must take account of the work of Mircea Eliade, which has been no less influential in biblical studies than in anthropology.”⁵²⁵ In regard to the influence of Clements, some key works in the interpretation of Exodus and Old Testament

⁵²² Here I imply scholars dealing with the book of Exodus or Torah. For a thorough analysis of temples and divine presence in the context of the God-human relation in the Ancient Near East see Michael B. Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings: Temples and Divine Presence in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Amélie Kuhrt, SBLWAW Supplement Series 3 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013).

⁵²³ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959).

⁵²⁴ R. E. Clements, *God and Temple* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965).

⁵²⁵ Timmer, *Creation, Tabernacle, and Sabbath*, 32. This does not imply that scholars unanimously follow the work of Eliade. For other perspectives of sacred space see J. Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); S. Japhet, “Some Biblical Concepts of Sacred Place,” in *Sacred Space: Shrine, City, Land*, ed. B. Z. Kedar and R. J. Z. Werblowsky (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 55–72.

theology support his writings.⁵²⁶

The works of Eliade and Clements are quite influential when biblical scholars attempt to articulate the understanding of sacred space in the text. The philosophical assumptions that form these works will be the focus of this section, since they directly affect the subsequent interpretation of the Hebrew text. In addition, I will attempt to show how the ideas proposed by Eliade and Clements are found within interpretations of Exod 25:8.

Sacred space in the work of Mircea Eliade and R. E. Clements

Eliade sees manifestations of the divine as “hierophanies”⁵²⁷ and writes: “the sacred always manifests itself as a reality of a wholly different order from ‘natural’ realities.”⁵²⁸ This supernatural revelation is depicted by Eliade as “a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural ‘profane’ world.”⁵²⁹ It is this distinction between the sacred and the profane that allows Eliade

⁵²⁶ Dozeman writes that “Clements argued that the center of ancient Israelite religious is Yaweh dwelling in a sacred cultic site,” and adds that “the more recent work of J. Milgrom on the complex theologies of the sacred and the profane . . . reinforce the insight of Clements, alerting us to the important role of the sanctuary in Exodus.” Dozeman, *Exodus*, 5. Kaiser also relies on the work of Clements to write about divine presence and the sacred in Exod 25:8. See Kaiser, *Old Testament Theology*, 120.

⁵²⁷ Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 11.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*

to categorize differences in spaces as modes of being.⁵³⁰ These introductory insights assume a dualistic conception of reality that stems from the dualistic conception of the world found in the writings of Plato.

For Plato, the idea of the sacred and the profane is expounded in the articulation of the concept of the holy, which is quite similar to Eliade's distinction of sacred and profane. Commenting on Plato, Thomas L. Pangle writes:

The "sacred" (*hieron*) is what is filled with the divine presence, what the gods reserve to themselves; the "pious" (*hosion*) is what they allocate to, or require of, humans. Hence, a temple and the space around it, the place of the god, is called "sacred" (*hieron*) rather than "pious" (*hosion*); the rest of the city is "pious" or "profane" (*hosion*), but not "sacred" (*hieron*).⁵³¹

Other scholars also see the relation between the work of Eliade and the principles of Plato. Among them is John Daniel Dadosky, who writes:

Eliade, in the fashion of the idealist tradition which goes back to Plato, views the world dualistically: there is appearance, and there is reality. Reality is unchanging, eternal, sacred, and as a consequence meaningful. Appearance is inconstant, ephemeral, profane and therefore, meaningless.⁵³²

It is this philosophical orientation, then, that provides the context for Eliade to write:

"When the sacred manifests itself in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the

⁵³⁰ For example, when speaking about the difference between the church and a common street, Eliade writes: "The threshold that separates the two spaces also indicates the distance between two modes of being, the profane and the religious." *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵³¹ Plato and Thomas L. Pangle, *The Laws of Plato* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 518.

⁵³² John Daniel Dadosky, *The Structure of Religious Knowing: Encountering the Sacred in Eliade and Lonergan* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), 105. Dadosky also mentions the places in Eliade's work where Eliade himself recognizes his debt to Plato.

homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of absolute reality, opposed to the non reality of the vast surrounding expanse.”⁵³³

In addition to the Platonic conception of the world, the manner in which Eliade articulates hierophanies indicates a panentheistic perception of reality.⁵³⁴ In describing the manifestation of the sacred, Eliade argues that “by manifesting the sacred, any object becomes *something else*, yet it continues to remain itself, for it continues to participate in its surrounding cosmic milieu.”⁵³⁵ In other words, “for those who have a religious experience all nature is capable of revealing itself as cosmic sacrality . . . the cosmos in its entirety can become a hierophany.”⁵³⁶ This idea of the sacred supernatural manifesting itself within the natural is the basis for panentheistic conceptions of the world and has implications toward how God relates to humanity. If the temple is understood according to the terms and philosophical principles Eliade sets forth, then it represents “an opening in the upward direction and ensures communication with the world of the gods.”⁵³⁷ This conception subverts the textual presentation of the temple that supports a downward movement from God in heaven to people.

⁵³³ Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 21.

⁵³⁴ Panentheism, in short, is “the incarnational presence of the divine in embodied reality.” Jane Erricker, Cathy Ota, and Clive Erricker, *Spiritual Education: Cultural, Religious, and Social Differences*, New Perspectives for the 21st Century (Brighton, England: Sussex Academic Press, 2001), 96.

⁵³⁵ Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 12.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 25–26.

An evaluation of the text as it presents itself to the reader indicates—beginning with the voice from the heavens that is heard in the world—a proximity between heaven and earth without the essential dichotomy between sacred and profane that stems from a Platonic conception of reality. In the Hebrew text of Exodus, the object of sanctification provides insight into the discussion, since space (Exod 3:5), time (Exod 16:23; 20:11), people (13:2), and even God himself can be objects of sanctification (if Num 20:12 is taken into consideration). Thus, a proper evaluation of how the text presents the idea of sacredness without the extrabiblical philosophical principles that shape current studies of the issue is necessary.⁵³⁸

After examining the basic premises within Eliade's understanding of sacred space—premises that influence the interpretation of Exodus—I will turn my attention to the work of Clements, which is also commonly referenced in the scholarly understanding of sacred space. While Eliade's work is indebted to Platonic cosmology, the work of Clements centers on ANE reconstructions to articulate the understanding of sacred space. Clements writes: "To obtain an understanding of the immediate background of Israel's religion, with its ideas of divine presence, it is instructive to examine closely the ideas of the divine dwelling-places which were current in Canaanite mythology."⁵³⁹ Furthermore, he states that "the religion of Canaan undoubtedly formed a strong and persistent influence upon the Israelite

⁵³⁸ Perhaps such a study would begin by rejecting the Platonic assumption that the world or matter is evil, or profane. The world is good, and within this good world the divine manifests itself. Sacredness cannot be defined in contrast to the profane, but with the biblical assumption that creation is good.

tribes, and its sanctuaries provided an environment of vigorous religious activity which the Israelites could hardly ignore.”⁵⁴⁰

To evaluate the text in the context of the ANE is not problematic. Yet how and to what extent these sources are used to explain the text could become problematic. To deny the significance of the ANE context in the formation of the book of Exodus is naive. Yet to assert that the main sources from which to understand the significance and theology of the sanctuary and sacred space are extrabiblical ANE sources is to depart from the pointers in the text itself. One representative of those who see this intimate relation between the ANE theological import and the biblical temple is John H. Walton. For Walton, the ANE sources provide the key to understand the nature and function of the temple. Walton writes:

When Israel was instructed to build the tabernacle, and thus define sacred space, ancient Near Eastern concepts were behind the entire undertaking, and they gave shape to the theology of sacred space. The orientation toward the east, the centering of the most important objects, the creation of zones of increasing sacredness, the ideas about what materials would be most appropriate to sacred space, and the rules for access to sacred space—all these draw heavily from the ancient Near East and comprise the theology of the temple.⁵⁴¹

In this sense, what determines the meaning of the temple, its nature and function, is both the text and a deep correlation of ANE sources.

⁵³⁹ Clements, *God and Temple*, 4.

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁴¹ John H. Walton, “Ancient Near Eastern Background Studies,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer et al. (London: SPCK, 2005), 42. For an example of a more balanced relation between ANE sources and the textual pointers within the text in the context of ritual, see Roy

Sacred space in the interpretation of Exodus

The work of Eliade and Clements provides at least two ways to understand sacred space: through a Platonic cosmology with possible panentheistic implications, and through a close relation between ANE sources and the text. These two approaches are commonly seen in commentaries on the book of Exodus.

Signs of a Platonic understanding of the world influencing the interpretation of Exodus can be traced as early as the formation of the LXX. The subjective influence upon the text as it relates to the interpretation of words and concepts is also known as theological *tendenz*, or theological tendency. Staffan Olofsson defines this theological influence or “exegesis” of the translator as the “interpretation of a phrase or a term in the Hebrew that is at variance with the literal meaning.”⁵⁴² This tendency in interpretation—one that was highly influenced by the effects of Hellenization on culture and thinking—can be noticed in the interpretation of the verb שָׁכַן (“to dwell”) in the book of Exodus by LXX translators. Since the idea of the divine God dwelling with man is difficult to harmonize with a Platonic conception of the world, translators intentionally changed the meaning of the word in order to fit their conceptions of reality. Table 6 illustrates the point.

Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

⁵⁴² Staffan Olofsson, *God Is My Rock: A Study of Translation Technique and Theological Exegesis in the Septuagint* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1990), 2.

Table 6. Translations of שִׁכַן

Text	MT	LXX	English Translation of MT	English Translation of LXX
Exod 24:16	וַיִּשְׁכַּן כְּבוֹד־יְהוָה עַל־הָרִ סִינַי	καὶ κατέβη ἡ δόξα τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος τὸ Σιναι	And the glory of the Lord <i>dwelt</i> on mount Sinai.	And the glory of God <i>came down</i> upon mount Sinai.
Exod 25:8	וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשִׁכְנָתִי בְּתוֹכְכֶם	καὶ ποιήσεις μοι ἁγίασμα, καὶ ὀφθήσομαι ἐν ὑμῖν	And they will build for me a sanctuary, so that I may <i> dwell</i> in their midst.	And you will make me a sanctuary and I will <i> appear</i> among you.
Exod 29:45	וְשִׁכְנָתִי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	καὶ ἐπικληθήσομαι ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραηλ	And I will <i> dwell</i> in the midst of the children of Israel.	And I will be <i> called upon</i> among the children of Israel.
Exod 29:46	וַיְדַעוּ כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְשִׁכְנִי בְּתוֹכְכֶם	καὶ γνώσονται ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι κύριος ὁ θεὸς αὐτῶν ὁ ἐξαγαγὼν αὐτοὺς ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου ἐπικληθῆναι αὐτοῖς	And they will know that I am the Lord their God who brought them from the land of Egypt so that I will <i> dwell</i> in their midst.	And they will know that I am the Lord their God who brought them forth out of the land of Egypt to be <i> called upon</i> by them.
Exod 40:35	וְלֹא־יָכַל מֹשֶׁה לְבוֹא אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד כִּי־ שָׁכַן עָלָיו הָעָנָן	καὶ οὐκ ἠδυνάσθη Μωυσῆς εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν σκηνὴν τοῦ μαρτυρίου, ὅτι ἐπεσκίαζεν ἐπ' αὐτὴν ἡ νεφέλη	And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of meeting because the cloud <i> dwelt</i> over it.	And Moses was not able to enter into the tabernacle of testimony because the cloud <i> overshadowed</i> it.

Moisés Silva illustrates the context of LXX translators well as he writes that “in making linguistic decisions, translators had no choice but to rely upon the exegetical traditions of their day,”⁵⁴³ namely, the Alexandrian method of exegesis.⁵⁴⁴ Modern interpreters of Exodus do not break from the philosophical categories that create a dichotomy between sacred and profane in the articulation of sacred space in the context of the ANE background. In commentaries on Exodus, the idea of the tabernacle as the actual dwelling of God is undermined by both philosophical commitments and reliance upon ANE sources as a key to understand it.

Dozeman and Jacob Milgrom follow the insights of Eliade in this manner. Dozeman writes that the “descent of God into the tabernacle and the approach of the priestly representatives into the tent of meeting bridge the gap between the sacred and the profane, which was not possible during the original theophany on Mount Sinai.”⁵⁴⁵ Jacob Milgrom follows a similar dynamic in asserting that the entrance of God and the entrance of humans are different based on the same categories.⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴³ Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000), 92.

⁵⁴⁴ For more on the historical roots and Platonic philosophy of Alexandrian exegesis, see David S. Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation Then and Now: Contemporary Hermeneutics in the Light of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992); Maren R. Niehoff, *Jewish Exegesis and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁵⁴⁵ Dozeman, *Exodus*, 599. Such an idea bypasses the theophany at Sinai in Exod 3, and the reality that Mount Sinai also has grades of holiness, like the sanctuary.

⁵⁴⁶ Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2085.

Apart from the explicit use of an ontological dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, other scholars opt to deny the literalness of the Sinai theophanies or the idea of an actual divine dwelling in a place. As indicated in the previous chapters, the negation of any literal component in the description of the theophany leading to a spiritualized or analogical reading of the text also stems from a timeless conception of Being that stems from a Platonic ontology. As an example, Sarna writes that “the sanctuary is not meant to be understood literally as God’s abode.”⁵⁴⁷ Meyers shares a similar perspective, as she writes that the “idea of the tabernacle as a dwelling may be more metaphoric than literal”⁵⁴⁸ and concludes that it “does not necessarily mean that God was believed to be literally or physically present in it.”⁵⁴⁹ These conclusions, again, do not stem from what the text presents in itself, but from methodological commitments that assume extrabiblical philosophical categories.

Section V: E and E’ (Exodus 7:2-13 and 24:12–32:31–36:7)

Textual Notes

The fifth section of the literary structure of Exodus, E (Exod 7:2–13) and E’ (Exod 32:31–36:7), presents the reader with an apparent repetition of the previous section. As Moses enters Pharaoh’s presence in D and God’s presence in D’, he will do so again in E and E’. The two main scenes in this section, then, are: (1) Moses in

⁵⁴⁷ Sarna, *Exodus*, 158.

⁵⁴⁸ Meyers, *Exodus*, 222.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Table 7. E and E' textual notes

E. Pharaoh's Building Project without <i>Shabbat</i>: God's Command and Pharaoh's Second Disobedience (Part II) (7:2-13)	E'. God's Building Project with <i>Shabbat</i>: God's Command and People's Obedience (Part II) (32:31-36:7)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses and Aaron enter Pharaoh's presence (7:2a) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses intercedes in God's presence (32:31-34)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God's command to let the Israelites go, and prediction of judgments upon Pharaoh for disobedience (7:2b-4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God's command for Israel to remove their ornaments, with Israel under judgment for disobedience (God's presence no longer in their midst); Israel obeys (32:35-33:11)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Egyptians will <i>know</i> that YHWH is the Lord (7:5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses longs to <i>know</i> YHWH more intimately (33:12-17)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God reveals His power to Pharaoh: sign of serpent and renewed chance of obedience (7:6-12) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God reveals His glory/goodness/name to Moses (33:18-34:9)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Covenant re-established and renewed chance of obedience (34:10-36:1)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on God's initiative: "I will do" (34:10)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultic "Decalogue" with emphasis on worship, <i>Shabbat</i>, and sanctuary (34:11-26)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • God commands Moses to write down these words and closing remarks (34:27-28)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses' face shines on the way down (34:29-35)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moses assembles the people and says the commands of God: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>Shabbat</i> (35:1-3) b. Contributions of different materials, spices, and oils (35:4-9) c. Convocation of skillful men (35:10-19)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pharaoh's response (<i>disobedience</i>): heart hardened after second chance to obey (7:13) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People's response (<i>obedience</i>): people bring contribution and are restrained from bringing more (35:20-36:7)
<p>PHARAOH'S DISOBEDIENCE LEADS TO WHAT FOLLOWS: DE-CREATION THROUGH PLAGUES</p>	<p>OBEDIENCE OF PEOPLE LEADS TO WHAT FOLLOWS: RE-CREATION THROUGH TABERNACLE</p>

the presence of Pharaoh and God; and (2) what results from this meeting.

As indicated above, the first scene in E and E' is similar to the beginning of D and D'. In the previous section a command is given to both Pharaoh and Israel, and both Pharaoh and Israel disobey God's commands. In E, Moses appears in the presence of Pharaoh once again, with a renewed chance for obedience. This renewed chance for obedience appears in the repetition of the original command to let the people go in Exod 7:2. In order for Pharaoh and Egypt (Exod 7:5) to know (יָדָעַ) God, the second command is given with a revelation of the power of God through signs (Exod 7:6-12). E ends with Pharaoh's response to the renewed chance for obedience and the signs: disobedience indicated by a hardened heart (Exod 7:13).

Like D', E' begins with Moses in the presence of God once again after the disobedience of the people in the episode of the golden calf. Moses enters the presence of God to intercede for the people, causing God to give the people a renewed chance for obedience. Like Pharaoh, the people also receive a revision of the original command given to them. In this context God reveals himself to Moses, who, unlike the Egyptians, is willing to know (יָדָעַ) God (Exod 33:13). Exodus 34 revises many of the legislative elements seen throughout the book already, along with the ordinances that would provide the people with rest (Exod 34:11-26 and 35:1-3).⁵⁵⁰ Moses assembles the people and speaks as God told him to. The speech that begins

⁵⁵⁰ The discrepancies between E and E' are due to the fact that God's commands to Israel in the context of the covenant were significantly more detailed than God's command to Pharaoh. The revision of the commands seen in E' has no counterpart in E because the context of the God-human relation is different.

in Exod 35 includes a renewed convocation of skillful Israelites who will work on God's building project. Like E, E' ends with a renewed opportunity for obedience. Unlike Pharaoh in D and E, Israel obeys God in E' (Exod 35:20–36:7). The chapter ends with the people willingly obeying the word of God through Moses and contributing to the construction of the sanctuary.

The significance of this section to a possible construction of the God-human relation in the book of Exodus is that Pharaoh's and Israel's responses in E and E' to the commands of God shape what happens next in the book. Pharaoh's disobedience to God's command to liberate the Israelites (implying life) leads into the undoing of creation in F. At the same time, Israel's obedience to the commands of God (also implying life from the seven stages in which the commands were given) leads into the re-creation of the world through the construction of the sanctuary in F'.

God-Human Relation Notes

Since the previous section focused on the scholarly interpretation of sacred space sparked by the text of Exod 25:8, this section will focus on the scholarly interpretation of the dynamic between God and Moses on the mountain in the text of Exod 33:12–34:8.⁵⁵¹ I will begin by assessing something only mentioned indirectly so far: the scholarly interpretation of the notion of God's presence.⁵⁵²

⁵⁵¹ For a few studies on this particular subject see Dozeman, *God on the Mountain*, and Hauge, *Descent from the Mountain*.

⁵⁵² As indicated before, the theme of presence is crucial in the book of Exodus. The book begins with divine absence; then God visits the people, delivers them, and shows signs of presence up until the golden calf incident. This episode creates the

Divine presence: God and Moses on the mountain

Baruch A. Levine is correct in noticing that a “concern with the presence of God and his nearness is a major theme”⁵⁵³ in the Hebrew Bible. A brief look at the literary structure above proves that this is not different in Exodus, especially in the context of chapters 33–34. Childs writes about the divine presence in these chapters, “The most definite thing which one can say is that all these stories revolve about the one theme of God’s presence.”⁵⁵⁴

The concept of God’s presence is introduced—not for the first time in the book, but in this particular section—in Exod 32:34. After the sin of Israel with the golden calf, God tells Moses that he will send an angel to go ahead of the people into the land, as he promised. This information about the angel going with the people yet without divine presence is repeated in Exod 33:2-3, causing the people to mourn in an act of contrition (Exod 33:4-6).⁵⁵⁵ The text pauses to insert a note—that is one of

possibility of divine absence again, but after Moses’ intercession for the people and covenant renewal, the people can enjoy God’s presence again through the construction of the sanctuary. Durham correctly observes—yet without the insight that the book begins with absence—that Exod 33:17 “is at the very center of the composite narrative of Presence-Absence-Presence which provides the theological center of Israel’s struggle to belong to Yahweh.” Durham, *Exodus*, 446.

⁵⁵³ Levine, “On the Presence of God,” 72.

⁵⁵⁴ Childs, *Exodus*, 585. Dozeman sees two main themes: the divine guidance in the wilderness and the revelation of God at the mountain. Dozeman, *Exodus*, 717. And Noth sees that the central theme in the section is the presence of God in the midst of the people. See Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 253.

⁵⁵⁵ Dozeman argues that the stripping away of jewelry here indicates a possible divorce between God and the people. Dozeman, *Exodus*, 722–23.

the major issues in the interpretation of this text for the majority of scholars—about the tent of meeting, adding the information (Exod 33:11) that God spoke to Moses “face to face” (פָּנִים אֶל-פָּנִים). What follows is the textual presentation of God’s presence in at least three ways: the significance of the presence of God leading the people (Exod 33:12-16), Moses’ request to see the glory (כְּבוֹד) of God (Exod 33:17–18), and God’s response to Moses’ request by revealing His name (שֵׁם) and actions for Israel (Exod 33:19–34:8).

Childs observes that there are at least two ways in which this text is interpreted.⁵⁵⁶ The first emphasizes that what is being revealed is the essence of God,⁵⁵⁷ while the second emphasizes that what is being revealed are the attributes of God. Sarna—favoring the former—writes that the glory (כְּבוֹד) “often signifies God’s self-manifestation, some outward, visible sign of His essential presence,”⁵⁵⁸ that is, not the disclosure of the divine essence itself, but only a sign. This interpretation of the text inevitably assumes the impossibility of grasping any essential element of God’s being in time or history. What humanity perceives are only signs of something beyond human experience. This partial rendering of meaning implies an analogical

⁵⁵⁶ Normally what organizes the interpretative context for these passages are the abundant source-critical considerations. I could observe these considerations as other signs of the influence of extrabiblical assumptions operating in biblical interpretation. But since I have already pointed this out before, I will focus on the two alternatives proposed by Childs.

⁵⁵⁷ Childs writes that the “classic Jewish and Christian commentators of the medieval period were fully agreed that no mortal man can see the essence of God and live.” Childs, *Exodus*, 598.

⁵⁵⁸ Sarna, *Exodus*, 213–14.

reading of the text that stems from a timeless conception of reality (*analogia entis*).

Childs correctly equates the attributes of God proclaimed in the text with his essential nature: that is, the only way to know the essence of God is through his attributes.⁵⁵⁹ These insights in the text provide a fascinating window into any ontological discussion of the divine nature. Again, the text enforces the reality that there is no dichotomy between the appearance and acts of God and his essence and nature. In this sense, the text creates a condition in which any timeless conception of Being—that implies the manifestation of God’s presence through fire, glory, and name as “signs” of a timeless reality—becomes incompatible with the text itself. What the text indicates once again is the unified perspective of God’s nature and actions in the context of his movement with the people in history and time. There is no dichotomy between appearance and reality; the appearance is the reality. God’s actions for the people are a window into his being.

Another point about divine presence must be made here. The breaking of the covenant in Exod 32 implies that the people no longer adhere to the stipulations that allow God to be present among them and act for them, leading God to present them with the threat of absence. Durham correctly observes, in regard to the significance of divine presence, that “the people had somehow not realized this until they were under the prospect of Yahweh’s Absence; then it became all too terribly clear, and they were overwhelmed by bitter grief.”⁵⁶⁰ To break the covenant implies living

⁵⁵⁹ Childs, *Exodus*, 596.

⁵⁶⁰ Durham, *Exodus*, 447.

without the presence of a God who is present and acts in and through the covenant relationship. Anxiety about the divine absence in their bondage in Egypt would turn into anxiety about the divine absence in their bondage to sin. So, once again, in the narrative the significance of divine presence is attested in a situation where divine absence is a real possibility.

To conclude this brief evaluation of the scholarly interpretation of divine presence, it is significant to point out that the influence of extrabiblical presuppositions in biblical interpretation does not imply that biblical scholars are constantly aware of them in their work. As noted in this section, several biblical scholars are able to grasp what the text is saying without inferring any extrabiblical categories to interpret it. Yet this volatile interpretative environment only enhances the fact that philosophical presuppositions within exegetical methods and within the presuppositional frameworks of biblical scholars are unaccounted for in the process of interpretation.

Section VI: F and F' (Exodus 7:14–12:32 and 36:8–40:33)

Textual Notes

The sixth section of the literary structure of Exodus, F (Exod 7:14–12:32) and F' (Exod 36:8–40:33), presents the reader with at least two different scenes: (1) the result of Pharaoh's second disobedience (de-creation through the plagues) and the result of Israel's obedience (re-creation through the construction of the sanctuary); and (2) the specifications for the Passover (symbol of Israel's deliverance from Egypt) and the specifications for the construction of the sanctuary (symbol of Israel's

Table 8. F and F' textual notes

F. De-Creation through Plagues (which include other commands in the context of disobedience) and Preparation for Deliverance from Egypt (7:14–12:32)	F'. Re-Creation through Tabernacle (which include other commands in the context of obedience) and Preparation for Deliverance from Sin (36:8–40:33)
• <i>Plague 1</i> (Water into Blood) (7:14-25)	• <i>Construction Step 1</i> - Curtains (36:8-19)
• <i>Plague 2</i> (Frogs) (8:1-15)	• <i>Construction Step 2</i> - Boards, Sockets, and Veil (36:20-38)
• <i>Plague 3</i> (Insects) (8:16-19)	• <i>Construction Step 3</i> - The Ark (37:1-9)
• <i>Plague 4</i> (Flies) (8:20-32)	• <i>Construction Step 4</i> - The Table (37:10-16)
• <i>Plague 5</i> (Cattle Die) (9:1-7)	• <i>Construction Step 5</i> - The Lampstand (37:17-24)
• <i>Plague 6</i> (Boils) (9:8-12)	• <i>Construction Step 6</i> - The Altar of Incense (37:25-29)
• <i>Plague 7</i> (Hail) (9:13-35)	• <i>Construction Step 7</i> - The Altar of Burnt Offering (38:1-7)
• <i>Plague 8</i> (Locusts) (10:1-20)	• <i>Construction Step 8</i> - The Laver of Bronze (38:8)
• <i>Plague 9</i> (Darkness) (10:21-29)	• <i>Construction Step 9</i> - The Court Items (38:9-20)
• Intro to <i>Plague 10</i> (Death of Firstborn) (11)	• <i>Construction Step 10</i> - The Priestly Garments (39:1-31)
	People finish the work done “according to what the Lord had commanded Moses” / Moses evaluates the work and <i>blesses</i> them (39:32-43)
• God details the procedure for the Passover (symbol of people’s deliverance from Egypt):	• God details the procedure for the erection of the tabernacle (symbol of people’s deliverance from sin):
a. God speaks in the land of Egypt (Pharaoh’s Land) (12:1)	a. God speaks in the desert (No Man’s Land) (40:1)
b. First month of the year (<i>hakhodesh</i>) (12:2)	b. First day of month (<i>hakhodesh</i>) (40:2)
c. Passover instructions (12:2-27a)	c. Tabernacle instructions (40:2-16)

Table 8—Continued

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The people worship and do according to what “<i>the Lord had commanded Moses</i>” (12:27b-28) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place of worship established and Moses does according to what “<i>the Lord commanded Moses</i>” in seven-day pattern: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pillars, sockets, and tent (40:17-19) 2. Ark of the Testimony (40:20-21) 3. Table and bread (40:22-23) 4. Lampstand and light (40:24-25) 5. Altar of incense (40:26-27) 6. Veil and altar of burnt offering with sacrifice (40:28-29) 7. Laver of bronze and washing (40:30-32)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conclusion: <i>Plague 10</i> (Death of Firstborn): Pharaoh evaluates the finished work of God, obeys, and asks for <i>blessing</i> (12:29-32) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conclusion: Moses <i>finishes</i> the work, erects the court and hangs up veil for gateway: “thus Moses <i>finished</i> the work” (40:33)

deliverance from sin).

In F’ a different dynamic takes place. In contrast to Pharaoh, Israel obeys God’s commands at the end of section E’. The people freely give from what they have, and the stage is set for the construction of the sanctuary. Because of the people’s obedience, the narrative moves into a scene of re-creation. The relation between the construction of the sanctuary and the creation has been noted by several scholars.⁵⁶¹ Already at the beginning of section D’ the reader is able to attest that, like

⁵⁶¹ See Peter J. Leithart, “Making and Mis-Making: Poiesis in Exodus 25–40,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2, no. 3 (November 2000): 313; Joseph Blenkinsopp, “The Structure of P,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1976): 275–92; Peter J. Kearney, “Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Ex 25–40,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89 (1977): 375–87; Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 213–14; Joshua Berman, *The Temple: Its Symbolism and Meaning Then and Now* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1995), 14–15; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 269–71.

the creation, the plan to construct the sanctuary unfolds in seven sections ending with *shabbat* (Exod 25:1–31:18),⁵⁶² and this same seven-stage pattern is seen in the inauguration of the sanctuary in Exod 40:17-32.⁵⁶³ In F', paralleling the undoing of creation in F, the construction of the sanctuary takes place in ten different stages. Just as in F creation was undone in ten steps because of disobedience, in F', because of Israel's obedience, it takes ten steps to re-create the cosmos in a wilderness setting.

In addition to these parallels, at the end of the undoing of creation in F (Exod 12:32) Pharaoh asks for a blessing (ברך), and at the end of the redoing of creation in F' Moses blesses (ברך) the people (Exod 39:43).

The second scene in this text is marked by specifications for the Passover in F, and for the erection of the sanctuary in F'. This parallel emphasizes one of the main thematic elements in the book: the Exodus from Egypt and God's plan to liberate the

⁵⁶² Although I am emphasizing the element of creation in the construction of the sanctuary, I am aware that it is not the only thematic element that emerges from its presentation in the text. Myung Soo Suh focuses on the military nature of the sanctuary and writes that in the construction of the tabernacle “the Israelites form a cultic-military community in the wilderness.” Myung Soo Suh, *The Tabernacle in the Narrative of Israel from the Exodus to the Conquest* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 1.

⁵⁶³ It is significant to note another parallel between Exodus and the creation account here. It is common knowledge that the creation account in Gen 1 is organized in a parallel form emphasizing the forming and filling dynamic of creation. While the first three days of creation gave form to what had no form, the second set of three days filled that which now had form. In Exodus, Bezalel gives form to the sanctuary in ten different stages (Exod 36:8–39:31), and Moses walks into the sanctuary and fills it with the elements it needs to function (Exod 40:17–32). The understanding of the plagues as a war against the deities of Egypt would fit in well with such a perspective. One should also keep in mind that the creation account—as noted by other scholars—also serves as a polemic against the deities of Egypt, so the elements of creation and war/polemic are not mutually exclusive.

people from sin through the sanctuary. In both F (Exod 12:2) and F' (Exod 40:2), the expression “the first day” is used (שִׁבְעִיּוֹת), shedding even more light on the relation between both sections. Ten plagues lead to the demarcation of “the first day” of the year, and the ten steps in the construction of the sanctuary lead to the demarcation of the “first day” of the month. As indicated earlier, F ends with the conclusion of God’s work of de-creation in the death of the firstborn of Egypt (Exod 12:29-32), and F' ends with the final touches upon the sanctuary and the blessing of Moses upon the people (Exod 40:33).

God-Human Relation Notes

There are at least two issues that touch upon the God-human relation in F and F': (1) the way scholars interpret and explain the plagues, and (2) the divine movement in the Passover.

Divine action: plagues and Passover

The section of the plagues beginning in Exod 7:8 is traditionally taken as a proper example “on which to demonstrate the role of sources.”⁵⁶⁴ Yet Childs recognizes the insufficiency of source- or form-critical analysis to penetrate the meaning of the encounter before Moses and the king as he writes, “It is apparent that the essential problem with which we began is not ultimately form-critical in nature,

⁵⁶⁴ Childs, *Exodus*, 130. Among those who see a unified structure in this section is Cassuto, *Exodus*, 92.

but profoundly theological.”⁵⁶⁵ As noted so far, God reveals his nature through his acts within the covenant toward Moses and Israel. The plagues should not be seen as separate from this general idea, for they also reveal the character of a God who responds to evil through action.⁵⁶⁶

Yet in this theological setting, the extrabiblical assumptions within the presuppositional frameworks of biblical scholars shift their perception of the textual indicators of a theological explanation of the plagues. The focus is turned to the exegetical elements that would justify the possibility of a natural cause for the plagues.⁵⁶⁷ For example, Pharaoh’s lack of response to the first plague (Exod 7:14-25) is interpreted as a “slight exegetical basis for seeing some relation between the tradition of the first plague and the natural seasonal reddening of the Nile.”⁵⁶⁸

Lawrence Boadt agrees and adds that the “first nine plagues all have natural

⁵⁶⁵ Childs, *Exodus*, 149.

⁵⁶⁶ The actions of God for Israel and for Egypt also carry the intent to impart knowledge of God, a knowledge that is sometimes obeyed and sometimes rejected. Dru Johnson points out that “in Exodus, we are able to clearly distinguish knowing and error from each along several lines: knowers who refuse to listen to the authenticated authority and knows who listen yet fail to embody the authority’s instructions to the degree required.” Johnson, *Biblical Knowing*, 65. What this study shows so far is that different human reactions to God’s commands lead to different divine actions toward humanity and the land. Obedience leads to life; disobedience leads to the advancement of death. Once again the flow of the narrative shows its dependence upon the creation and fall narratives. For more on the emphasis of knowing in Exodus, see Blackburn, *God Who Makes Himself*.

⁵⁶⁷ Fretheim is one scholar who goes beyond the natural/supernatural debate and proposes that the plagues represent a *hypernatural* situation where nature is presented in excess. See Fretheim, *Exodus*, 109.

⁵⁶⁸ Childs, *Exodus*, 154.

explanation in conditions found even today in Egypt.”⁵⁶⁹ Sarna follows this lead and asserts that while the possibility of natural causes has been proposed by several scholars, the “entire account has a didactic and theological purpose, not a historiographic one.”⁵⁷⁰ The idea that the “J and E authors are responsible for eight plagues, and P has added two others”⁵⁷¹ as well as the possibility of natural causes takes away any realistic reading of the text,⁵⁷² and inevitably affects the text’s theological portrayal of a God of war who acts against the forces of evil in the world.⁵⁷³

Regarding God’s involvement in the Passover, much can be said. F and F’ begin with an emphasis on time. While the Passover marks the beginning of all months (Exod 12:2), the tabernacle is to be set up on the first day of the first month (Exod 40:2). God’s involvement in and appointment of periods of time in the text is—as noted several times in this study—incompatible with the timeless conception

⁵⁶⁹ Lawrence Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1984), 167. One of the main proposals for the natural development of the plagues is seen in Greta Hort, “The Plagues of Egypt,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 69 (1957): 84–103; 70 (1958): 48–59.

⁵⁷⁰ Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 76–77.

⁵⁷¹ Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament*, 167.

⁵⁷² The obvious issue that arises when the natural theory is proposed is that without “God’s intervention Moses and Aaron could not have foreseen the coming of these disasters with such precision.” Herbert Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 161.

⁵⁷³ For more see Thomas B. Dozeman, *God at War*, 15–24.

of God entertained in theological writings.⁵⁷⁴ Yet apart from the evident compatibility between God and time/history, another issue deserves attention at this stage.

So far I have touched upon conceptions of divine presence and sacred space in the context of sanctuary and ritual.⁵⁷⁵ The focus of this section will be on at least

⁵⁷⁴On the actions of God in history, Neil B. MacDonald correctly observes that “*Von Rad’s insight that Israel’s foundational experience of YHWH was of a soteriological identity implied a historical experience of YHWH acting in their life then and there . . .* If one looks at Augustine through Anselm and Aquinas to Calvin, one sees that all of them presuppose a God acting from eternity predestinating all that was to happen in human history from eternity. *If Von Rad is right this cannot be the appropriate hermeneutical category for the locus of divine action in the life of Israel.*” MacDonald adds, in the context of Exodus, that the “Exodus narrative is quite clear that God speaks to Israel and Moses in particular then and there; the narrative-agent that is God is not speaking from eternity.” MacDonald, *Metaphysics and the God of Israel*, xiii, xiv. Although MacDonald is right in his observations concerning the actions of God in history as portrayed by the text, his solution to make sense of these explicit assertions assumes the same philosophical assumptions he criticizes. MacDonald writes: “I argue that the witness of the Old Testament, and Old Testament narrative in particular, is that YHWH is essentially a judging yet desisting forbearing self. But this God may remain an essentially fictional self, condemned to remain within the literary confines of the narrative unless we can find some way for this God to break into historical reality.” *Ibid.*, xiv. The dichotomy between the reality presented in the text and history—as noted before—co-appears with a timeless interpretation of Being: the same framework that allows Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin to construct their theology.

⁵⁷⁵ Because sacred space was dealt with earlier in the context of sanctuary and ritual, in this study the idea of place will be distinguished from it. Craig G. Bartholomew argues that “place is part of our lived, everyday experience, whereas space, especially in our modern world, is a theoretical concept and as such an abstraction *from* the lived experience of place.” Craig G. Bartholomew, *Where Mortals Dwell: A Christian View of Place for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 3. Whether the text supports these distinctions or not is a question for further studies. What can be noted at this time is that there is one distinction between the presence of God in the context of what scholars call sacred space and in place: in the sanctuary, God intends to “dwell” (שכן) with Israel by his own initiative (and not by any ritualistic invocation the people might perform), but the divine presence in common

one example of how extrabiblical assumptions influence the scholarly interpretation of God and place. The *rationale* of divine involvement in the event of the Passover (Exod 12:12-13) is expressed by the text through the imagery that God would “go through the land of Egypt” (עֲבַרְתִּי בְּאֶרֶץ־מִצְרַיִם) but would “pass over” (וַפָּסַחְתִּי עֲלֵיכֶם) those who chose the appointed plan of escape (Exod 12:3-11). As in the beginning of the book, the location of divine presence is significant for the Passover to take place.

Because of the extrabiblical conception of a timeless God—a conception that permeates critical and uncritical commentaries of both Christian and Jewish origin—scholars vary in their interpretation of how God moves through places. Sarna, for instance, to justify the textual portrayal of God’s movement, interprets the “moving through” the land as an “anthropomorphism, or ascription to God of human activity, in order to make His active Presence in history more vividly and dramatically perceived.”⁵⁷⁶ In other words, because God cannot move in space/place due to philosophical commitments established a priori, the way to justify the language of the text is through the inference that God is “made” historical by the writer through anthropomorphism. The language of the text is made compatible with the reality of the reader via the assumption of a biblical writer who “makes” God historical.

places never implies dwelling. In Exod 12, God “moves through” (עֲבַר) the land. The former carries the imagery of Bedouin living; the latter, warfare. See Dozeman, *Exodus*, 269.

⁵⁷⁶ Sarna, *Exodus*, 56.

Section VII: G and G' (Exodus 12:32–13 and 36:8–40:34–38)

Textual Notes

The seventh and final section of the literary structure of Exodus, G (Exod 12:32–13) and G' (Exod 40:34–38), presents the reader with the transitional point of the parallel-panel structure in G and with the conclusion of the book in G'.

Table 9. G and G' textual notes

G. Exodus from Egypt (God with People) (12:33–13)	G'. Exodus from Sin (God with People) (40:34–38)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exodus from Egypt: in haste, silver and gold, geographical note (Rameses to Succoth), mixed multitude, and dateline (430 years) (12:33–41) • Passover instructions (12:42–51) • God asks for the consecration of firstborn (13:1–2) • Moses speaks of feast of unleavened bread (13:3–10) • Moses speaks of consecration of firstborn (13:11–16) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Israel continues to <i>journey (nasa`)</i> in the wilderness (40:37) • God leads the people onward in a <i>pillar of cloud and fire</i> (40:34–38)

One of the interesting features of G is the presentation of additional information concerning the Passover and laws concerning the consecration of the firstborn (Exod 12:42–13:16). In G' there is no counterpart to these laws. The idea is that while the physical deliverance from Egypt is anticipated and celebrated through the Passover feast, the final Exodus from sin is never accomplished in G'. The

construction of the sanctuary functions as a temporary means to resolve the problem of sin and grant the people the privilege of living under the shadow of YHWH. This is why both sections end with the same imagery.

G ends with Israel “journeying” (נסע) into the wilderness under the protection of the cloud (נִפְּרָה) and the fire (שֹׁרֵף) (Exod 13:17-22). G’ ends with the continuation of this journey (נסע) and the continual protection of YHWH through the cloud (נִפְּרָה) and the fire (שֹׁרֵף) (Exod 40:37-38). The journey continues; the spiritual Exodus from sin is much longer than the physical Exodus from Egypt. Yet the people can trust that the God who acts through covenant will continue guiding them on.

God-Human Relation Notes

The final section dealing with how extrabiblical conceptions of the God-human relation influence the interpretation of the God-human relation in Exodus will focus on the obvious element in this section: the interpretation of the fire and cloud as indicators of divine presence.

Divine presence: cloud and fire

Because of these extrabiblical conceptions, any literal or univocal reading of the narrative implies, to say the least, a great degree of naiveté. Sarna explicitly addresses the conception that drives the majority of interpretations regarding the cloud and fire as personifications of the divine:

The God of the Hebrew Bible is a Being who transcends the limits of time and space, and thus surpasses human imagining. Hence, God’s indwelling Presence in the world is symbolized, however inadequately, by the mysterious, intangible,

incorporeal elements of fire and cloud. . . . this should always be understood as figurative language.⁵⁷⁷

With this basic premise in mind, one can see at least two ways in which the pillars of cloud and fire are interpreted: through a dismissal of the supernatural via source-critical and literary arguments; or through arguments related to possible natural causes.

Fretheim writes concerning these unrealistic imageries that the “combination of various sources provides a kaleidoscope of images: divine messengers, pillars of fire and cloud,”⁵⁷⁸ and these elements are present in the narrative due to “liturgical interests and powerful storytelling skills.”⁵⁷⁹ Fretheim summarizes his point by insisting that “trying to sort it [these depictions of God] out in literal fashion, or suggesting that Israel considered the detail to correspond precisely to reality, is like retouching Renoir’s paintings to make them look like photographs.”⁵⁸⁰ In this light, the narratives—along with their depictions of God—must be appreciated as works of literature with no correspondence to reality.⁵⁸¹ Such an inference does not come from

⁵⁷⁷ Sarna, *Exodus*, 70.

⁵⁷⁸ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 158.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸¹ M. F. Unger is correct in assessing the situation in Old Testament scholarship in the following way: “The critical theory has been deliberately fabricated and foisted in Old Testament scholarship to explain away the supernatural, whether in revelation, miracle or fulfilled prophecy. This is its fundamental error.” M. F. Unger, *Introductory Guide to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1951), 271.

any textual unusualness, but from the categories that prevent any possible literal reading of God's actions through fire or cloud, in a world where pillars of cloud and fire do not guide people.

Yet, as with other texts depicting the supernatural, in addition to the source-critical or literary dismissal of the supernatural is the explanation of the phenomena of the cloud and fire through natural causes. As C. Houtman puts it, "unwilling to consider it a product of pure fantasy, they search for the origin of this imagery."⁵⁸² Among these is Noth, who explains the pillar of cloud and fire by way of natural causes in the following manner: "The phenomenon of the pillars of cloud and fire presumably goes back to observation of an active volcano, to which allusion is without a doubt made in the account of the events on Sinai."⁵⁸³

Once again, whether in source-critical/literary arguments or arguments pertaining to natural causes, a timeless conception of reality implies that God is beyond the realm of space and time, so these images must be taken into consideration only if understood as figurative. In other words, the dichotomy created by a timeless conception of reality between what appears and what is causes the interpretation of what appears to be merely figurative, since it is distinct from reality itself.

⁵⁸² C. Houtman, *Exodus*, Vol. 2 (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok, 1996), 255. For other examples of the imagery as fantasy or as a literary feature, see Laura Feldt, *The Fantastic in Religious Narrative from Exodus to Elisha* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 105.

⁵⁸³ Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, 109.

Summary

This section attempted to trace the influence of extrabiblical conceptions upon the interpretation of the God-human relation presented by the text itself. The chapter began by providing the reader with a fresh assessment of the literary structure of the book, showing the possible intention of the author/final redactor in organizing the material in a parallel-panel structure. From this seven-part structure, issues pertaining to the God-human relation were uncovered and the extrabiblical influences upon the interpretation of the text laid out. These delimitations and conceptions are not final, but provide the ground for the descriptive analysis of the God human relation to take place, with an emphasis on the effect of presuppositions upon interpretation.

Extrabiblical conceptions of the God-human relation influence interpretation in varied ways. From a reliance upon the documentary hypothesis and its dissection of the text to the use of analogical language to explain the supernatural elements in the text, scholars, through method and their own presuppositional frameworks, are bound to a conception of the God-human relation that is, many times, foreign to the text.

Table 10 provides an overview of how textual depictions of the God-human relation are reinterpreted through extrabiblical categories. The first column points out the issues observed in each of the seven sections; the second column pinpoints the actual assumption that guides the interpretation of the particular issues mentioned; the third column shows the means by which the assumption operates in interpretation; and the final column depicts the effects of such assumptions upon the

interpretation of the text.

Table 10. Effects of extrabiblical assumptions on interpretations of the God-human relation

Textual Issues	Assumption	Means of Application	Effect
<i>The Relation Between Genesis and Exodus</i>	a. Impossibility of unified conception of divine action between Genesis and Exodus.	a. Documentary hypothesis.	a. The text does not present a unified depiction of a single author, but the worldview of several authors. God's actions reflect the worldview of the source it is assigned to.
<i>The Relation Between Hebrew Faith and History</i>	a. Timeless conception of reality (nature x supernature).	a. Dichotomy between Hebrew faith and history.	a. The text does not provide a depiction of real historical events, only the recounting of faith of an uncertain sequence of unknown events.
<i>Divine Action: Egypt and Wilderness</i>	a. No connection between the emphasis on covenant and divine action in different sections of the book. b. Ontology precedes theology.	a. Documentary hypothesis. b. Philosophical principles (established via method or individual convictions) precede theological enquiry and shapes it.	a. Impossibility of a unified perspective of the actions of God for the people in the book. b. The location of God is shaped by an ontology foreign to the textual depiction of divine action.
<i>Israel's Rebellion: Wilderness</i>	a. Distinction between sections of the book.	a. Documentary hypothesis.	a. Israel's questioning of divine presence unrelated to the battle of the Amalakites.
<i>Sinai and Law</i>	a. Law has no divine origin.	a. ANE, historical criticism, and documentary hypothesis.	a. Law is understood as cultural product with no correspondence to reality.
<i>Sinai and Revelation</i>	a. Impossibility of divine communication between God and humanity (timeless conception of God).	a. Phenomenal and Noumenal Torah and parallel studies with Deuteronomy.	a. The people heard no voice and the actual events that resulted in the Law are untraceable. Textual depiction of the events is incomplete.

Table 10—Continued

<i>Sacred Space</i>	<p>a. Platonic/timeless conception of reality.</p> <p>b. Worldview of the ANE.</p>	<p>a. Eliade and the appropriation of sacred and profane language. And the use of Alexandrian hermeneutics to determine the veracity of biblical language.</p> <p>b. Clements and the reliance on ANE sources to reconstruct the intention of the biblical author.</p>	<p>a. Biblical conceptions of divine presence and ritual understood in terms of sacred and profane along with the assumptions they carry. The translation of biblical words into words that would carry a Hellenized conception of the world.</p> <p>b. The text does not depict a complex and profound conception of the divine but a primitive account of reality influenced by the sources the Israelites had in their world.</p>
<i>Divine Presence: God and Moses on the Mountain</i>	<p>a. Platonic/timeless conception of reality.</p>	<p>a. Translation and inference.</p>	<p>a. The idea of glory and presence is understood in distinction to the divine essence. A temporal sign of a timeless reality.</p>
<i>Divine Action: Plagues and Passover</i>	<p>a. Impossibility of supernatural actions.</p> <p>b. Impossibility of divine action in the land.</p>	<p>a. Interpretation of plagues through natural causes or myth/fiction.</p> <p>b. Anthropomorphism.</p>	<p>a. Plagues understood as not having occurred as the text depicts and given meaning either through natural explanations of their appearance or through setting them under the context of fiction writing.</p> <p>b. The depictions of God are shaped by the creativity of the writer as they have no correspondence to history or reality.</p>
<i>Divine Presence: Cloud and Fire</i>	<p>a. Platonic/timeless conception of reality.</p>	<p>a. Natural causes or literary fiction in the depiction of divine appearance texts.</p>	<p>a. The cloud and the fire are interpreted either through natural causes or through literary fiction/myth.</p>

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

No exegesis or act of interpretation is presuppositionless. Accordingly, this study addressed the question of the influence of philosophical presuppositions upon the interpretation of the God-human relation in Exodus. Chapter 1 provided a brief introduction to why such analysis is necessary. The chapter explored the neglected issue of presuppositions in exegesis and why Exodus was an appropriate platform upon which to evaluate them. It also presented the purpose and methodological approach of this study, namely, descriptive analysis of the text. Chapter 2 addressed the philosophical issues behind the conception of the God-human relation, namely the notion of ontology (God), the notion of epistemology (human), and the notion of history (relationship). Chapter 3 identified these philosophical conceptions in the foundation of two interpretative traditions: the historical-grammatical and historical-critical methods. Chapter 4 traced the influence of these presuppositions within the interpretation of Exodus in general, and in the context of the notion of the God-human relation in particular.

At this stage I will provide a brief overview and summary of Chapters 2-4 and conclude with some implications this study creates for scholarship as well as life.

The God-Human Relation as Presuppositions

The second chapter of this study was written to introduce the reader to three basic presuppositions that are operative in any act of interpretation. I organized these presuppositions in what this study calls the God-human relation. The presuppositions that make up this structure are ontology (God), epistemology (human), and history (the mode in which the relation takes place).

Epistemology

I began this section by outlining the context in which interpretation takes place, that is, the question of how one attains knowledge and forms meaning. At the center of this discussion was the epistemological notion of the subject-object relationship. Although tentative, the subject-object relation provided a way to see broad historical developments relating to how humanity attains knowledge. Two distinct historical transitions were highlighted in this section. The first transition—one that emphasized an objectivist epistemological perception—focused on the role of the *object* in interpretation as the *subject* took on a passive role. As for the understanding of Being in this period, it was interpreted as timeless and dependent upon a Platonic ontology. The second transition—one that emphasized a subjectivist epistemological perception—was characterized by a change of emphasis from the *object* to the *subject*. By understanding the *subject* differently from its predecessors, postmodernity provided the context for the appearance of a temporal and historical dimension of reality at the level of the *subject*. Yet the full implications of this transition have not yet been integrated into the understanding of Being.

Some preliminary implications for biblical interpretation within these epistemological concerns are in order. Objectivist epistemology created the Platonic distinction between subject and object, leading biblical interpretation into a scientific age where empirical evidence determined truth and the seemingly “primitive” biblical narratives were turned into folklore. The possibility of humanity to apprehend any revelation from God if not denied could only be devised in timeless categories. In the modern period, this distance between humanity and any notion of the divine was extended even more.

Subjectivist epistemology placed the human subject upon a new platform where time, history, and language implied a relative outlook upon reality as a whole, but has yet not extended this temporal ontological flow into the level of the *object*, that is, to the interpretation of Being. The possibility of humanity apprehending any revelation from the divine in history—because this change has not been realized—becomes even more complex. Biblical stories with divine events become records of communities of faith who experienced something that can only be experienced as testimonies of faith, devoid of any ontological import.

Ontology

The second section of this chapter addressed how ontological premises influence interpretation of what a text is and of the God who acts within the text. Emphasis was given to the concept of timelessness and how it carries within itself two basic assumptions that influence interpretation: the dichotomy between things as they appear and things as they are, and the understanding of Being as timeless. The immediate consequence of assuming a timeless conception of Being is the

dichotomized perception of appearance and reality. As indicated in this study, both liberal and conservative scholars assume such an ontology. The examples of Bultmann and Vanhoozer showed how scholars wrestle with this dichotomy in interpretation. While on the one hand Bultmann interpreted the mythological divine acts in the text through a scientific and existential approach, on the other Vanhoozer, explained the divine acts within the parameters of speech-act theory. The ontological conception of timeless Being, then, directly affects not only interpretation, but how scholars perceive God and his actions. This section also provided a few alternative ways to understand and interpret a temporal perspective of Being.

History

The third and final section of this chapter dealt with the locus in which God interacts with humanity: history. It began by noting how, at the turn of the eighteenth century, historians departed from a pre-critical approach to the text and embraced a scientific approach along with its macro-hermeneutical commitments. By the twentieth century, these conceptions were, to some extent, left behind due to the turn to the subject. During this transition, there was an emphasis on the fact that the historian was not exempt from biases and assumptions. History was then perceived as a biased reconstruction of historical events. This period brought forth the approach known as historiography, which in turn was also not exempt from macro-hermeneutical influences.

The analysis of the principle of history also shed light on the implications of scientific presuppositions concerning the nature of history for biblical interpretation in general and the book of Exodus in particular. From this analysis I was able to

outline how the distinction between fact and faith is still prevalent in the interpretation of Exodus. This reality allows for the gap between the assumptions of the interpreter and of the biblical writer/audience to be widened, since the biblical record only points to what the writers believed, exempt of any revelation. In order for biblical scholarship to remain a scientific discipline, these assumptions cannot be left behind.

The uncovering of the presupposition of the God-human relation—a notion operative in the presuppositional frameworks of interpreters—provided the content to be traced throughout the subsequent chapters of this study. Once it was uncovered, this study attempted to trace the presupposition within interpretative traditions (Chapter 3) and within the interpretation of Exodus (Chapter 4).

Presuppositions in Interpretative Traditions

The third chapter of this study, as noted earlier, attempted to trace the philosophical presuppositions concerning the God-human relation within two interpretative methods: the historical-grammatical and historical-critical methods. This analysis examined the formative periods of each method, focusing on representative examples who influenced the methods' conception.

The Historical-Grammatical Method

The analysis of the method was divided into two main parts. The first dealt with the principle of history (as well as the relation between text and meaning) and the second with the principle of ontology. The first section pointed out how in the formative periods of the method, and through the work of Ernesti, the grammatical

method developed with an emphasis upon philology. No role was given to the reader apart from the rigorous application of the philological approach. What this indicates is that the mindset of the time followed classical epistemology, where the subject is passive in the generation of meaning. Although Ernesti understood the grammatical method as one interpretative action—that is, the grammatical is the historical—interpreters after Ernesti understood the method as two interpretative actions—a grammatical as well as a historical. As noted earlier, what this implies is that, in time, the influence of historical criticism grew and immersed itself in a grammatical approach that was volatile enough to incorporate any presupposition into its application. The second section dealt with the principle of ontology. Because the words of the text (*verba*) were signs pointing to a truth or reality within the text (*res*), in the end, the words themselves became disposable. Regardless of the way in which the grammatical method is used, this interpretative context created by Platonic categories of reality remains.

The Historical-Critical Method

The explicit use of philosophical presuppositions within the formation of what is today known as historical criticism began with the work of Spinoza. Spinoza did not create the historical-critical method, but created the necessary principles upon which it would function. Among these principles are: (1) the primacy of reason (as primary source) over the biblical text, ruling out by default any supernatural elements such as divine voices, miracles, and theophanies, as well as any connection between textual depictions of reality and reality itself; (2) the dichotomy between Scripture (ethical piety) and philosophy (truth); (3) the dichotomy between the words

of man (subject to imagination) and the word of God (conceived as the ethical content that passes the validation of reason); (4) the general idea that the text and its history are a wrapping around the ethical essence, or content. In time, these ideas were developed and infused into the general practice of biblical interpretation.

Another representative scholar mentioned in this section was Julius Wellhausen. Wellhausen is an example of those who implemented these ideas into interpretation. Along with Spinoza, Wellhausen attempted to affirm that the presuppositions given to the reader by the text are false and must be corrected by reason through different means. Among the presuppositions that guided the work of Wellhausen are: (1) as it pertains to epistemology, the Cartesian principle of doubt along with its reliance and dependence on human reason (what is presented in the text cannot be accepted at face value); (2) as it pertains to ontology, a timeless conception of Being that inevitably creates a dichotomy between text and reality, as well as the need for a historical-scientific evaluation of the text. In this sense, the interpreted historical principle within the structure of historical criticism is inevitably tied to specific philosophical commitments.

What this brief evaluation attempted to show was that interpretative traditions are not exempt from philosophical commitments, whether the interpreter realizes this or not. The manners in which these philosophical assumptions are implemented into the formation of these methods are as varied as they are effective.

Presuppositions in the Interpretation of Exodus

The fourth and final chapter of this study attempted to trace the influence of presuppositions relating to the God-human relation upon the interpretation of the

God-human relation within the text of Exodus. This descriptive analysis took place through an evaluation of the literary structure of Exodus. Knowing that scholars generally organize the literary contents of Exodus around thematic/theological and geographical markers, this study proposed a fresh evaluation of the intentional organization of the book: a parallel-panel structure that emphasized the leadership of both Moses and God, as well as God's actions for Israel in their deliverance from Egypt and in their deliverance from sin. This new assessment of the literary structure provided the direction for the evaluation of the relation between presuppositions and the God-human relation in the text. From the literary structure of Exodus, at least ten issues relating to the God-human relation were uncovered. A brief summary of the extrabiblical philosophical presuppositions that influence the scholarly interpretations of these issues are in order.

The Relation between Genesis and Exodus

The first issue attempted to show that while the text points to a possible unified continuation—literary and philosophical—between Genesis and Exodus, the assignment of different sources to the ending of Genesis and the beginning of Exodus points in another direction. The philosophical conceptions that lead to the impossibility of a unified conception of God's action as presented in the text enter interpretation via the documentary hypothesis. In the end, under these extrabiblical conceptions within the Documentary Hypothesis, the text is not able to present a unified depiction of God and his acts from one book to the other. Through the Documentary Hypothesis the possibility of a unified conception of God's relation to humanity is exchanged by a fragmented perception of the same notion through the

work of several redactors from different sources and contexts. Under these assumptions, any possibility of divine revelation implying a unified view of his actions in the text, is dismissed.

The Relation between Hebrew Faith and History

The scholarly assumption here is related to the timeless conception of Being that leads to the dichotomization of reality. This distinction between what appears and what is can also be seen in biblical interpretation concerning the issue of history, where there is a radical distance between the written descriptions of the biblical authors concerning what happened (based on faith according to biblical scholars) and the actual historical processes that took place (dictated by reason). The general agreement among scholars is that what happened in history is not what is described in the text, since this primitive description was based either on faith or on the conflicting agendas of redactors from different time periods. The possibility that the biblical author presents a realistic perception of the events—including the supernatural elements—is negated. Scientific and sociological insights are favored, and the biblical text is filtered through them.

Divine Action: Egypt and Wilderness

At least two assumptions appear regarding this particular issue in the interpretation of Exodus: the fragmented perception of divine action from one section of the book to another, as well as the influence of onto-theology—the precedence of extrabiblical conceptions of Being over the textual description—upon interpretation. Because the first issue, concerning the fragmented perception of God's

actions proposed by scholars, is recurrent in this study and has already been pointed out above, I will focus here on the precedence of ontology over theology. Because philosophical concepts are generally foreign to biblical scholars, the presence of philosophical concepts in their work happens via the method of interpretation. Because interpretative methods carry concepts of Being in themselves, these concepts inevitably shape and condition the results of interpretation. In relation to God's actions in Egypt and in the wilderness, the idea of the location of God and the possibility of his actions in history as they are depicted in the text are changed by an ontology not portrayed by the text. Thus, while the text depicts an action of God, the possibility and theological implications of the action are shifted by inferences that change the question of "what it means." The text might say that God acted in this or that way, but what it means is inferred from the assumptions carried into interpretation via method.

Israel's Rebellion: Wilderness

Once again, the issue here is the fragmented perception of the text brought about by the use of the documentary hypothesis. To develop a theology or philosophy of God's actions following the insight of biblical scholars in general would create a problem. In this case, Israel's questioning of the guidance and presence of God in the wilderness would have no relation to the description of the battle of the Amalekites that follows the questioning. Because the relation of human choice, the flow of the narrative, and God's actions are intimately related in Exodus, depending on scholarly insights seems problematic to develop a unified conception of God's relation to humanity, a conception seemingly favored by the arrangement

of the text.

Sinai and Law

The denial of the supernatural that takes place both in the presuppositional frameworks of biblical scholars and in the formation of their methodologies leads to the conclusion that the laws given in the different sections of Exodus and especially at Sinai have no divine origin. This extrabiblical assumption places a filter on the text and infers understanding from outside of it. While the text depicts God speaking to Moses, the elders, and the people in the giving of the law, the scholarly conclusions are reached through different means. A reliance upon ANE sources and the general principles of historical criticism have led to scholars seeing the law as a product of nomadic people, of priests with varied and conflicting agendas, with no correspondence to reality or to the modern-day reader. The historical-critical mindset determines beforehand what can and cannot be realistic in interpretation and in the text, and with this basic structure formed, any difference in viewpoint in the text or any apparent contradiction is used to favor their basic assumptions, never to present a nuanced understanding of God's relation to humanity or even to challenge the assumptions themselves.

Sinai and Revelation

Following the issue above, a timeless conception of Being makes any communication between God and humanity impossible, at least not on the terms the text sets forth. This assumption becomes visible in interpretation when notions such as the phenomenal and noumenal Torah are introduced in scholarship, leading to a

dichotomized conception of revelation and the law itself. The assumption behind the interpretation of Sinai—based on a timeless conception of Being—leads to the idea that Israel could not have heard any voices, and that the actual events that led into the giving of the law are untraceable. The textual depiction of how the law was formed is, according to some scholars, incomplete. The gaps in the narrative created by denial of the supernatural are filled, in interpretation, through inferences influenced by ANE cultural/sociological reconstructions that radically depart from what the text attempts to portray.

Sacred Space

The timeless conception of reality is operative in some scholarly work relating to the notion of sacred space. As noted earlier, a good number of scholars rely upon the work of Eliade in their appropriation of the concepts of sacred and profane. At the same time, a good number of scholars see the worldview presented in the text as strictly related to the ANE context of the writers, as seen in the work of Clements and many others. While this assumption is not completely wrong, the problem arises when the supernatural is excluded and the text has no divine counterpoint justifying its unified perception of reality and God's relation to humanity. The result is that biblical conception of divine presence and ritual are understood in terms of the extrabiblical assumptions within the work of Eliade and others. These ideas place a grid upon the text. This problem was also seen in the LXX, where Alexandrian hermeneutics shaped the very translation of the Hebrew words related to divine presence into words that would be compatible with their worldview. So interpreters shift the worldview of the text—along with its divine insights given through

revelation—to either the worldview of translators who shifted the language to a realistic portrayal of reality as they saw it, or to the worldview of the biblical redactors themselves (primitive and based on ANE reconstructions).

Divine Presence: God and Moses on the Mountain

The texts that point directly to the divine and human relation in Exodus are crucial to trace the influence of presuppositions in their interpretation. The episode of God and Moses on the mountain in Exodus 33–34 is no different. In texts depicting a divine manifestation of power, glory, or presence, the influence of a timeless conception of Being is clearer than in other instances. In this particular context, some scholars' interpretations of the manifestation of the glory of God set forth the idea that the glory and presence in time and before Moses are distinct from the divine essence. What appears in the text is not as it is in reality; the manifestation of the glory is a temporal sign of a timeless reality. These presuppositions can be seen in the biblical interpretations of some scholars. The preeminence of ontology over theology is once again noticeable.

Divine Action: Plagues and Passover

As mentioned earlier, whenever the biblical text depicts explicit supernatural actions of God, the influence of presuppositions is just as explicit. In the context of the textual depiction of the plagues, at least two assumptions are operative: the impossibility of divinely intended supernatural actions as well as the impossibility of divine action in the land. Both of these assumptions are motivated by a timeless conception of Being and a scientific perception of reality. These assumptions lead

some interpreters to interpret the plagues differently from the textual pointers, favoring natural causes or the creation of myths to explain the meaning that the text is attempting to convey. In regard to God's presence in the land during the Passover, because of the same assumptions, scholars point to the use of anthropomorphism to provide intelligibility to the textual descriptions. In this sense, the actions of God are shaped by the creativity of the writers and have no connection to the historical processes themselves or reality as a whole.

Divine Presence: Cloud and Fire

The parallel-panel structure of Exodus ends on both sides with a presentation of divine guidance through the cloud and fire. As in the case of the plagues, these supernatural appearances are explained through the means of natural causes or literary fiction/myth. These explanations are given at the backdrop of an ontology foreign to the biblical text. Because a timeless conception of Being creates a dichotomy between what appears and what is, the analogical understanding of the textual content leads, as pointed out earlier, to unintelligible analogy. The biblical interpreter understands what appears through the description of the text, but because the interpreter has no access to its timeless correspondent, the interpreter resorts to scientific arguments in the flow of history and time to justify its meaning. In the majority of cases, interpreters draw the meanings of supernatural actions such as the plagues, God's presence, and the appearance of cloud and fire from conditions set forth by science, reason, and the reconstructed worldview of ANE people.

Now that a general overview of the ideas set forth by this study has been presented, I would like to end this study by addressing the implications of its findings

for scholarship and life.

Implications for Scholarship and Life

In these concluding lines, I will attempt to outline some implications of this study for scholarship and life, beginning with scholarship. This study traced the philosophical presuppositions relating to the God-human relation (ontology, epistemology, and history) that directly influence interpretation, be it from the interpreter's experience or methodology. What can be perceived within each of the chapters is that while the text is attempting to convey a picture of the God-human relation, the philosophical principles that shape interpretation prevent readers from seeing that presentation as real for different reasons.

This problem raises the old question of the relation between philosophy and the Bible. Because the Bible has been knowingly or unknowingly historically subject to philosophy—and more recently science—its philosophical content and weight is undermined. Yet this study indicates that a healthy movement between philosophy and biblical interpretation should be to: (1) allow philosophy, the human subject, or the biblical text to ask the questions; (2) allow the biblical text, with its own wording, to shape, validate, or reject the philosophical questions themselves. In this way, the control is found in the textual presentation and not in an extrabiblical philosophical scheme applied to the text. This approach assumes that the only reliable source of information, or window into reality itself, is found in the biblical text.

While a proper implementation of this approach would be the object of another project, this study does attest that the text presents a philosophical picture of the God-human relation that is unattainable in much of scholarly interpretation

because of conflicting conceptions of the God-human relation based on extrabiblical categories. Methodologically speaking, interpretation is bound to depart from the text once its conceptions about a particular topic are interpreted through an extrabiblical lens.

This study ends with a question: what would biblical interpretation, or the uncovering of a biblical philosophy, look like if the text had foundational preeminence over the human subject? It is in this intersection of philosophy, text, and interpreter that this study merges into the realm of existence. Choosing to let go or suspend one's conception of reality is more than a methodological task: it is an existential choice. As in the narrative of Exodus, human choice changes the flow of the story. Perhaps the history of biblical interpretation still has a few chapters to go before it makes this leap of faith into the uncharted territory of the philosophy of the Hebrew writers. This philosophy, as mentioned earlier, carries the results of human rational and artistic powers as well as the element that makes biblical philosophy the authoritative source of information: revelation. The author's conception of reality is informed by revelation and developed through reason. To allow the biblical authors to address the philosophical questions of past and contemporary times is the challenge. Yet, for that meal to be served, the tables must first be rearranged and cleaned.

This study concludes, then, with the merging of the academic and existential tasks in one question: what would biblical interpretation, or the uncovering of a biblical philosophy, look like if the text had a foundational preeminence and priority over the presuppositional framework and life of the human interpreter?

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