

Revealing the Name:

An Investigation of the Divine Character through a Conversation Analysis
of the Dialogues between God and Moses in the Book of Exodus

Mark Paul Arnold

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Abstract

YHWH's statement to Moses, אֶהְיֶה אִשְׁרָאֵל אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה, has been much discussed by biblical scholars and theologians. For much of the last century this discussion related to matters of etymology or history of religion, or the precise grammar of the text. However, recently there has been renewed interest in understanding the statement in its present context as part of the book of Exodus, and in particular its role in the call of Moses. My thesis seeks to deepen understanding of the implications of this statement through a close reading of the dialogues between Moses and YHWH.

My close reading of individual dialogues involves three steps: first investigation of the way in which the narrator portrays the actions of the characters, then the manner in which the narrator portrays individual speech of the characters and finally the way in which an analysis of the dialogues utilising principles from the socio-linguistic field of Conversation Analysis adds to an understanding of the characters.

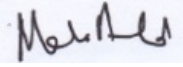
Through this close reading I show that the phrase אֶהְיֶה אִשְׁרָאֵל אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה is best understood as linking the meaning of the name YHWH to the verb "to be" and in particular God's promise to "be with" Moses in 3:12. The phrase affirms both YHWH's presence with Moses and his freedom to be present in the manner he chooses and the implications of this affirmation of presence and freedom are worked out more fully in the narrative of Exodus.

In the thesis my reading of the dialogues in Exodus 3-4 shows that YHWH transforms Moses into the means by which YHWH delivers his people from Egypt and also by which YHWH is present with his people. My examination of the dialogues in Exodus 5-7 demonstrates that YHWH's plans are accomplished by his speech which re-designates and reshapes those with and about whom he is speaking. My analysis of Exodus 19-24 finds that the dialogues demonstrate YHWH's freedom to be present as he chooses to different people at different points. Exodus 32:7-33:11 gives further meaning and significance to the divine name in terms of YHWH's withdrawal in response to the idolatry of the people. From the final section of dialogue, Exodus 33:12-34:35, I show that the intercession of Moses is critical to the demonstration of YHWH's mercy and compassion. My analysis of each of these dialogues demonstrates that a key means by which YHWH is present to his people is in and through Moses.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other educational institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

Signed 

Date 9 May 2016

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It remains to thank my wife Roz, and children, Matthew (7), Jonathan (4) & Ruth (2) for their support, encouragement and entertainment during the course of my studies. It has been a joy to see our children learning and growing during this time, and our hope and prayer is that they will grow to know more and more of the God of compassion and mercy revealed in the Exodus narrative. I thank Roz for her demonstration of love in being an unstinting source of joy, support and encouragement in our life together, and in particular in the process of working on this thesis.

And supremely I offer heartfelt thanks to the one who is indeed: יהוה יהוה אל רחום וחנון

On Names:

“I am not going to tell you my name, not yet at any rate.”

A queer half-knowing, half-humorous look came with a green flicker into his eyes.

‘For one thing it would take a long while:
my name is growing all the time,
and I've lived a very long, long time;
so my name is like a story.

Real names tell you the story of things they belong to in my language.’”

Treebeard in: JRR Tolkein, *The Two Towers*, *Lord of the Rings*.

Abbreviations & Notes

Abbreviations follow those in the SBL Handbook of Style (1999 edition).

For ease of reference I have not abbreviated journals that are not listed in SBL Handbook of Style.

All translations offered in the analysis of the dialogues are my own. I have generally sought to render the Hebrew into reasonably idiomatic English, although I have kept more literal renderings where these are important to note in the analysis.

I have used YHWH for the divine name (see p25-26 for further explanation), although I have kept Yahweh or YHWH in quotations from others.

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Introduction

For much of the last century scholarly discussion of YHWH's statement to Moses

אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה has related to matters of etymology, or history of religion, or the precise grammar of the text.¹ However, recently there has been renewed interest in understanding the statement in its present context as part of the book of Exodus, and in particular its role in the call of Moses.² In this thesis I seek to deepen our understanding through a close reading of the dialogues between Moses and YHWH.

The history of the interpretation of Exodus 3:13-15 from the early 1900s until the present day will be surveyed. I will show that the phrase אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה is best understood as

¹ See, amongst many: Raymond Abba, "Divine Name Yahweh," *JBL* 80, no. 4 (1961): 320–28; Bertil Albrektson, "On the Syntax of 'Hyh 'Shr 'Hyh in Exodus 3:14," in *Words and Meanings, Essays Presented to David Winton Thomas*, ed. Peter R. Ackroyd and Barnabas Lindars (Cambridge: University Press, 1968), 15–28; William Foxwell Albright, "Further Observations on the Name *Yahweh* and Its Modifications in Proper Names," *JBL* 44, no. 1-2 (1925): 158–62; R. Michael Allen, "Exodus 3 after the Hellenization Thesis," *JTI* 3, no. 2 (2009): 179–96; Nissim Amzallag, "Yahweh, the Canaanite God of Metallurgy?" *JSOT* 33, no. 4 (2009): 387–404; William R. Arnold, "The Divine Name in Exodus iii.14," *JBL* 24, no. 2 (1905): 107–65; Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Midianite-Kenite Hypothesis Revisited and the Origins of Judah," *JSOT* 33, no. 2 (2008): 131–53; Frank Moore Cross, "Yahweh and the God of the Patriarchs," *HTR* 55, no. 4 (1962): 225–59; Shelomo Dov Goitein, "YHWH the Passionate : The Monotheistic Meaning and Origin of the Name YHWH," *VT* 6, no. 1 (1956): 1–9; James Philip Hyatt, "Yahweh as 'the God of My Father,'" *VT* 5, no. 2 (1955): 130–36; Johannes Lindblom, "Noch Einmal Die Deutung Des Jahwe-Nahmens in Ex. 3,14," *ASTI* 3 (1964): 4–15; Jack R. Lundbom, "God's Use of the Idem per Idem to Terminate Debate," *HTR* 71, no. 3-4 (1978): 193–201; E C B. MacLaurin, "YHWH : The Origin of the Tetragrammaton," *VT* 12, no. 4 (1962): 439–63; Julian Obermann, "The Divine Name YHWH in the Light of Recent Discoveries," *JBL* 68, no. 4 (1949): 301–23; Graham S. Ogden, "Idem per Idem : Its Use and Meaning," *JSOT*, no. 53 (1992): 107–20; Randall J. Pannell, "I Would Be Who I Would Be! A Proposal for Reading Exodus 3:11-14," *BBR* 16, no. 2 (2006): 351–53; E. Schild, "On Exodus 3:14 - 'I Am That I Am,'" *VT* 4, no. 3 (1954): 296–302; Roland de Vaux, "The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH," in *Proclamation and Presence*, ed. John I. Durham and J.R. Porter (Richmond, Va: John Knox Pr, 1970), 48–75; Ronald F. Youngblood, "A New Occurrence of the Divine Name 'I Am,'" *JETS* 15, no. 3 (1972): 144–52; David Noel Freedman, "Name of the God of Moses," *JBL* 79, no. 2 (1960): 151–56.

² See in particular: Dennis J. McCarthy, "Exod 3:14 : History, Philology and Theology," *CBQ* 40, no. 3 (1978): 311–22; R. W. L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 13–27; a comprehensive study of the issues is offered by: Cornelis den Hertog, *The Other Face of God: "I Am That I Am" Reconsidered* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012); particularly suggestive for our narrative purposes is: Jean-Pierre Sonnet, "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh (Exodus 3:14): God's 'Narrative Identity' among Suspense, Curiosity, and Surprise," *Poetics Today* 31, no. 2 (2010): 331–51; arguing for a meaning that is known at the Crossing of the Sea is: Christopher R. Seitz, "The Call of Moses and the 'Revelation' of the Divine Name : Source-Critical Logic and Its Legacy," in *Theological Exegesis*, ed. Christopher R. Seitz and Kathryn Greene-McCreight (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 145–61.

linking the meaning of the name YHWH to the verb “to be” and in particular God’s promise to “be with” Moses in 3:12. The phrase affirms both YHWH’s presence with Moses and his freedom to be present in the manner he chooses. The indefinite nature of the phrase and its use at this point in the dialogue invite the reader to read the continuing narrative to see how this will be developed.

I will then review different approaches to understanding the portrayal of God in the biblical narrative and how methods derived from socio-linguistic studies can assist a close reading of the narrative of dialogues. This close reading of individual dialogues will proceed by means of three steps: an investigation first of the way in which the narrator portrays the actions of the characters, then of the manner in which the narrator portrays individual speech of the characters and finally of how an analysis of the portrayal of the dialogues adds to an understanding of the characters.

Chapter 3 will focus on Exodus 3-4, where YHWH, through the dialogue with Moses, transforms Moses into the means by which YHWH delivers his people from Egypt and by which YHWH is present with his people. I will demonstrate how the second half of Exodus 4 completes this process, and therefore how these chapters function as a unit.

Chapter 4 will be an analysis of Exodus 5-7, where YHWH is portrayed through his speech as one whose presence for his people is manifested at the time of his choosing in order that his people and their enemies might recognise that “I am YHWH”. This is a public recognition of YHWH’s statement in Exodus 3:14. YHWH acts to enable Moses to confront Pharaoh, by designating him god to Pharaoh. YHWH accomplishes these plans through his speech, which re-designates and reshapes those with and about whom he is speaking.

In chapter 5 I will examine Exodus 19-24, which is somewhat different to other sections of dialogue in that there is no sustained conversation between Moses and YHWH. Nonetheless it demonstrates the fulfilment of themes in Exodus 3-7, and provides important background for Exodus 32-34, as well as adding useful information regarding YHWH's presence.

Furthermore, the revelation of YHWH in Exodus 20:3-7 is important for the understanding of Exodus 32-34. I will show that many of the complexities of the text arise from the different ways in which YHWH manifests himself.

Chapter 6 will show that YHWH's dialogue with Moses in Exodus 32:7-33:11 gives further meaning and significance to the divine name in terms of YHWH's response to the idolatry of the people. YHWH's freedom to be present as he chooses is demonstrated by his threat to withdraw from the people, and his determination to punish at the time of his choosing.

In chapter 7 the final section of dialogue, Exodus 33:12-34:35, will be examined and I will show that the intercession of Moses is critical to the demonstration of YHWH's mercy and compassion. Despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that YHWH is a "jealous" God, he will show mercy and compassion to an idolatrous people. This section finishes by affirming that YHWH is present to Israel in and through Moses, and that because of YHWH's grace and forgiveness to an idolatrous people the covenant is confirmed.

Thus the consideration of these texts will demonstrate that Moses' questions, criticisms and objections in the dialogues prompt YHWH into revealing more of his ways and character, to affirm both that he will punish sin and that he will be gracious and merciful. At the same time YHWH's responses function to re-orientate Moses from the mistaken or incomplete perspective revealed in his questions by deepening his understanding of an aspect of divine character and then re-directing him with new instructions for the next

stage of his mission and learning. Each of YHWH's self-disclosures can be seen as an expansion of his original declaration of his name in Exodus 3:14. Therefore, within Exodus, while there are developments and tensions in the portrayal of YHWH's character, there is a fundamental unity of portrayal based around the tension between YHWH's freedom and his presence with his people.

One final note is needed to explain that not every single line of dialogue between Moses and YHWH in Exodus will be examined. My focus is limited to the scenes where Moses in some sense argues with YHWH, so I will not deal in detail with the wilderness episodes where Moses either directly acts in obedience to YHWH's commands (Exodus 14 and 16), or brings the appeal of the people to YHWH, before acting in obedience once more to YHWH's commands (Exodus 17). These clearly have some importance for the portrayal of the relationship between Moses and YHWH, but as they seem to portray Moses' fulfilling his role as mediator in a reasonably straightforward way my focus will be on the more complex passages where Moses' role is introduced (Exodus 3-4, 5-7) and the direct encounters with YHWH at Sinai where the status of the people is placed at risk (Exodus 19-24, 32-34). Furthermore I will not deal in detail with the tabernacle instructions and construction, although it is important that these are all conveyed to the reader through the speech of YHWH to Moses.

Chapter 1

Approaching Exodus 3:13-15

1.1. INTRODUCTION: EXODUS 3:13-15

In order to understand the narrative portrayal of the explanation of the name YHWH it is essential to understand Exodus 3:13-15 where YHWH himself is shown explaining his name. In this chapter I will argue that the best way to understand אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה is as an explanation of the name YHWH that demands attention to the full narrative context, in particular the dialogue between YHWH and Moses. Previous attempts to explain the phrase over the last century in terms of etymology, history and grammar will be reviewed. In the light of this review my study will demonstrate that the most convincing analysis of אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה is that it is an *idem per idem* construction which demands that the reader reflect on the wider narrative in order to appreciate the implications of YHWH's answer.

1.2. UNDERSTANDING אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה

I will review the approach of those who have sought the meaning of this phrase in terms of the etymology of YHWH, or as a divine name in itself, or as a divine name plus explanation. Following this it is important to consider the various different approaches that have led some to translate the phrase as: "I am he who is". I will consider the way in which the analysis of אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה as an *idem per idem* construction affects how the reader understands it. Finally I will consider the importance of the question Moses asks, and show that an analysis of the dialogue between Moses and YHWH has potential to increase our understanding of the name.

1.2.1. The Etymology of YHWH

In the middle of the 20th century the meaning of the name YHWH was sought in the historical origins of the name, and therefore of the phrase in 3:14a, in the ANE cultural world of Israel. I will review some of the key concepts that arose from the suggestion that **היה** should be read in Exodus 3:14a as a *Hiphil* form of the verb, with the nuance of “to create”, and two other proposals for the origin of the name YHWH. From a narrative perspective it is important to review these proposals and understand where they have implications for my study.

1.2.1.1. A *Hiphil* Form of **היה**

William Albright argued that the name YHWH is attested in Mesopotamia and Palestine from the period, including the name of a place belonging to nomadic Semites at the time of Rameses II.³ Frank Cross gave some examples of Amorite names in the Mari texts which had the form “*yahwi-N*” and, arguing that the verb form in these must be causative, suggested the meaning “the god *N* creates”. From this he argued that the name YHWH is derived from an abbreviated form of similar sentences used in cultic formulae, citing a number of Semitic parallels.⁴

Cross suggested (following Haupt) that **אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּהּ** was originally read as a third person *Hiphil* (emending **א** to **י**) giving the phrase “*yahwe asher yahwe*”. If an older form of the relative pronoun in Ugaritic was used (du) then this would be parallel to statements about El in Ugaritic literature.⁵ It is therefore possible that originally a similar phrase

³ See William Foxwell Albright, review of B. N. Wambacq, O. Praem, *L'épithète Divine Jahvé Seba'ôt: étude Philologique, Historique et Exégetique*, *JBL* 67, no. 4 (1948): 377–81, p380.

⁴ Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1973), 63.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 69; an alternative suggestion for a *Hiphil* participle had been made by Obermann on an analogy to ancient Phoenician inscriptions, suggesting that Yahweh is a participle form meaning “he who sustains”. He argued that in 3:14a the **אֲשֶׁר** clause is in apposition to the first verb, giving the meaning “I sustain, I am he who sustains”: Obermann, “The Divine Name YHWH in the Light of Recent Discoveries”, 323; however this

existed, “El who creates”, and that *yahwe* has been substituted when YHWH became the principal cult name, to mean YHWH is “he who creates”.⁶

David Freedman had the same basic understanding of the name of YHWH, but modified Albright’s (and Haupt’s) understanding of 3:14.⁷ He read the verbs as *Hiphil* forms but did not see any need to emend the first to a third person. Instead he argued that the form of the sentence as an *idem per idem* gives the verbal action additional emphasis (cf Exod. 16:23; 33:19). He therefore translated Exodus 3:14 as “I create what I create”, meaning “I am the creator”, and Exodus 33:19 by analogy as “I am the gracious one, I am the compassionate one”.⁸ Freedman understood Exodus 34:6, with its repetition of YHWH, as J’s name formulation in the third person, meaning “the compassionate and gracious God creates what he creates”.⁹

A further argument for suggesting that the verbs in 3:14 were also originally *Hiphil* comes from the general scholarly consensus that the divine name was pronounced Yahweh.¹⁰ Appealing as this might be key arguments against the *Hiphil* position were made by Roland de Vaux. He suggested that the Amorite names referenced by Cross in support of the *Hiphil* position, and by others in support of the use of the name YHWH outside of Israel, could be better translated as “gives life” rather than “YHWH”.¹¹ For de Vaux it was most likely that *hwy* is an archaic form of *hyh*, meaning that the simplest solution, avoiding all

has not been generally followed, and was refuted by Godfrey Rolles Driver, “Reflections on Recent Articles,” *JBL* 73, no. 3 (1954): 125–36.

⁶ Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 69–70.

⁷ Freedman, “Name.”

⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ This pronunciation can be derived from the shorted form *yah*, and also from the Greek transcriptions Ιαουε (Clement of Alexandria) and Ιαβε (which Theodoret of Cyrus claimed was the Samaritan pronunciation): Abba, “Divine Name Yahweh,” 320. It should be noted that the Greek references are post biblical. Both de Vaux and Abba note the Elephantine Papyri alternative form, which may be evidence of a slightly different pronunciation, although de Vaux still considers Yahweh more likely.

¹¹ Vaux, “The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH,” 55; see also Abba who argues against attestations of the name of Yahweh outside of Israel: Abba, “Divine Name Yahweh,” 321.

need for emendations, is that YHWH is derived from a word meaning “he is”.¹² De Vaux argued that the MT needs to be explained and analysed rather than any emended or corrected version.¹³ Even if his argument for the derivation of the name YHWH itself is not correct, this final point is an important one for our discussion.

Ultimately few scholars have persisted in understanding אֱ־יָ־הִיָּה אֱ־שָׁ־רַ אֱ־יָ־הִיָּה as a *Hiphil* phrase. There is nowhere else in the OT where the *Hiphil* of הִיָּה is used,¹⁴ and the phrase has a clear verbal link to 3:12.¹⁵ A *Hiphil* form of אֱ־יָ־הִיָּה in 3:12 would be most naturally translated “I create/sustain” but this would be rather obscure when followed by “with you”. The verb הִיָּה is therefore clearly a *Qal* verb in 3:12, and this increases the plausibility of reading הִיָּה in 3:14 as a *Qal* verb also.

Therefore, even if the scholarly consensus pronunciation of YHWH as Yahweh is correct this does not provide any certainty that this pronunciation of YHWH would have provided any resonances to a hypothetical *Hiphil* form of *hyh*.¹⁶ Rather, as I shall observe below (1.2.1.3.) a number of scholars have convincingly suggested that the name of YHWH in the current text is presented as being linked to the *Qal* form of *hyh* in a form of wordplay.¹⁷

¹² Vaux, “The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH,” 63.

¹³ Vaux, “The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH,” 64.

¹⁴ Abba, “Divine Name Yahweh,” 325.

¹⁵ Vaux, “The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH,” 66.

¹⁶ In view of the lack of evidence for any *Hiphil* form of the verb “to be” in Biblical Hebrew it is even possible to suggest that the Ya prefix in Yahweh could relate to an older (*Qal*) verb form all together, which later became a Yi prefix in Biblical Hebrew, with a shift from the *a* vowel to an *i* vowel. See discussion in: Yigal Bloch, “Linguistics to Text Criticism”, *HS* 48 (2007), 141-170 p143, and also de Vaux, “The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH”, 62.

¹⁷ This lack of a necessary etymological link between YHWH and the verb “to be” together with the fact that any evidence we have for the original pronunciation of YHWH is indirect and relatively late, means that I do not think we can definitively settle the question of the pronunciation of YHWH. In the light of this, together with a desire to respect the long tradition of not pronouncing the divine name I have used the form YHWH to refer to the divine name, rather than Yahweh.

1.2.1.2. An Old Name Infused with a New Significance

Shelemo Goitein argued for a meaning of the verb *hwy* as “to be jealous” or “to love”, which exists in Arabic, and suggested this as the root for YHWH, with 3:14 meaning “I love who I love”.¹⁸ However, as de Vaux pointed out the verb is not used elsewhere in Biblical Hebrew, and although there is a rare substantive from this root with the meaning “desire” this only occurs three times, all of them pejoratively.¹⁹

A different etymological approach was taken by Sigmund Mowinckel who viewed Exodus 3:13-15 as essentially belonging to the J source.²⁰ He considered Moses’ question “what is his name?” a genuine one. Moses lived in a world with many spiritual beings, not all of whom were benevolent, so the name of the God addressing him was vital.²¹ Mowinckel argued that the name YHWH would have been known to a wide range of north Sinaitic tribes, so the name on its own would not be sufficient to legitimise the vision or Moses; a deeper meaning, revealed by God himself, was needed.²² The etymology offered in 3:14 for the name YHWH is a “popular” one based on the concept that to an ancient Hebrew the verb *הָיָה* does not merely convey existence but “active being”.²³ Mowinckel therefore argued that the phrase carried a meaning something like: “I am the God who really acts”.²⁴ Originally, Mowinckel argues, partly from analogy with Arabic, the name YHWH derives from a devotional or ecstatic cry “O he!”²⁵

¹⁸ Goitein, “YHWH the Passionate.”

¹⁹ Vaux, “The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH,” 59.

²⁰ Sigmund Olaf Plytt Mowinckel, “The Name of the God of Moses,” *HUCA* 32 (1961): 121–33. This was slightly unusual as Exodus 3:13-15 was usually understood to be from the Elohist source as his account of the first revelation of the name to Israel. See for example: Arnold, “The Divine Name in Exodus iii.14”, 107; Driver, *The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version*, xiviii; Noth, *Exodus*, 43–45;

²¹ Mowinckel, “The Name of the God of Moses,” 124.

²² *Ibid.*, 125–126.

²³ *Ibid.*, 127.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 131–133.

De Vaux, however, took issue with Mowinckel's theory of the derivation of YHWH's name and thought that a derivation from a verb was more likely.²⁶ For the purposes of my study Mowinckel's hypothesis regarding the original derivation of the name has little immediate relevance, but his point about the popular etymology is an important one to which I will return. His suggestion regarding the meaning of the phrase as focused on the activity of God reflects a near consensus among critical scholars, certainly in the middle of the last century.

1.2.1.3. Wordplay on the *Qal* of יהיה

None of the proposals surveyed thus far regarding the origins of the name YHWH has been found conclusive. Ultimately the theories of these commentators, while of historical interest regarding the origins of the name YHWH, have not seemed to progress an understanding of the text of Exodus itself. Rather it was increasingly observed that, whatever the prehistory of the text, the name of YHWH in the current text is presented as being linked to the *Qal* form of יהיה to one degree or another, in the sort of wordplay associated with other biblical names where the association is based upon sound rather than necessarily strict etymology.²⁷

This association is one with important implications for this study. Graham Davies understands Exodus 3:14 as an exegesis of the divine name in the following verse, noting that the explanation preceding the name is a common order in the OT.²⁸ After giving some of the options for the imperfect of יהיה (a recurrent or continuing action or state, or past

²⁶ Vaux, "The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH," 57-59.

²⁷ J Gerald Janzen, "What's in a Name: Yahweh in Exodus 3 and the Wider Biblical Context," *Int* 33, no. 3 (1979): 227-39; Barry J. Beitzel, "Exodus 3:14 and the Divine Name: A Case of Biblical Paronomasia," *TJ* 1, no. 1 (1980): 5-20; Georg Fischer, *Jahwe Unser Gott: Sprache, Aufbau Und Erzähltechnik in Der Berufung Des Mose (Ex 3-4)*, *Orbis biblicus et orientalis* 91 (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg, 1989), 147.

²⁸ Graham I. Davies, "The Exegesis of the Divine Name in Exodus," in *The God of Israel*, ed. Gordon, Robert P (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 139-156, p. 149.

tense in poetry) he argues that the verbs in v14 should be understood in the light of v12 as future, using that verse to “unpack the significance of the Exodus tradition for the name Yahweh itself.”²⁹

He also notes that *הָיָה* can also carry a sense of “stay” or “remain”, so that by itself it can express the idea of presence even without the “with you” of v12.³⁰ He also suggests that the attention drawn to presence by these verses fits with the development of the theme later in the book of Exodus.³¹ Appealing as this interpretation is, one cautionary note is that the references cited for “stay” or “remain” (Jer. 32:5 and Ps. 89:37) have additional words which provide an additional nuance of “presence” in combination with the verb *הָיָה* (Jer. 32:5 “he will be *there*”, Ps. 89:37 “his seed will be *forever*”) which is not obviously present in 14a. It is arguable that 14b may provide something of this nuance when associated with the verb “to send” in the context of Moses’ mission. I will examine this further below after examination of 14a.

1.2.2. EXODUS 3:14 CONTAINING THE GIVING OF A NAME

Here I will examine the possibilities that 14a, *אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה*, gives us a name for God, or that 14b is an announcement of a divine name: *אֶהְיֶה*.

1.2.2.1. *אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה* as a Name of God

This is asserted by Christopher Seitz: “God’s name is actually ‘*ehyeh aser ehyeh*’, the most personal revelation of God’s own character, and as such is not a proper name in the strict sense, but a name appropriate to God’s own character as God”.³² Seitz suggests that

²⁹ Ibid., 151.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Seitz, “The Call of Moses and the ‘Revelation’ of the Divine Name,” 145–61, p154.

“God’s ‘name’ consists of a disclosure of purpose; it ‘means’ something approaching ‘in the manner that I am, or will be, I am who I am’”.³³ However, while Seitz’s analysis of the meaning of אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ is in line with a number of other possibilities, most commentators do not agree that the phrase itself is a name for God, essentially because it is a complex sentence.³⁴ It is better to see אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ as some sort of explanation of the name, or possibly a way of refusing to give such an explanation, with a determination of its precise function being reliant on an analysis of the wider context.

1.2.2.2. “אֱלֹהֵינוּ because I am”

Another possibility suggested is that אֱלֹהֵינוּ is a name for God, and that אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ is explaining that name: “אֱלֹהֵינוּ because I am”. This is a possibility suggested by Tryggve Mettinger as a plausible option,³⁵ but Cornelis den Hertog finds it wanting because, while he argues that in 3:14b אֱלֹהֵינוּ is a name for God, in 3:14a this would lead to a highly unusual use of the relative clause as a conjunction.³⁶ I will now examine whether this option is likely.

1.2.2.3. 3:14b – אֱלֹהֵינוּ as a Name

Den Hertog argues that אֱלֹהֵינוּ has a function as a name based on a first person form, and as such is almost unique in the Old Testament.³⁷ He suggests that the name is revealed in this form because as a first person form it is usable only by God.³⁸ God cannot be addressed in

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 39; John I. Durham, *Exodus* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), 38.

³⁵ Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *In Search of God: The Meaning and Message of the Everlasting Names* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 34.

³⁶ Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 72 here he cites Robert D. Holmstedt, *The Relative Clause in Biblical Hebrew: A Linguistic Analysis* (diss.; University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2002, pp295-300) who argues that אֱלֹהֵינוּ never functions as a conjunction.

³⁷ Ibid., 54–55.

³⁸ Ibid., 57.

this way, and so knowing the name does not mean power over the person.³⁹ YHWH's commissioning of Moses to go and speak this form to the people, according to den Hertog, highlights that Moses is speaking directly from God.⁴⁰ Den Hertog suggests that this reflects a gap in the language of the Old Testament between words directly from God that reveal him (usually spoken by prophets in the first person) and words to and about him that are spoken by humans.⁴¹ יהוה, den Hertog suggests, is how God names himself, his primary name, while YHWH is the name humans are permitted to use.⁴² Exodus 3:15, according to den Hertog, affirms the importance and permanence of YHWH as the name of God, a name that does not and cannot change for a new appearance.⁴³

The major difficulty with seeing the יהוה of 3:14b as a name is that it is never clearly used as a name elsewhere in the Old Testament. Two possible exceptions have been identified: Hosea 1:9, and Psalm 50:21, but den Hertog himself argues that neither Hosea 1:9 nor Psalm 50:21 refer to יהוה as a divine name because in both cases יהוה makes perfect sense read as a standard verb.⁴⁴ While this issue does not prevent den Hertog from taking יהוה as a name, he does not fully explain why at this critical juncture a name for YHWH would be used which is never referred to again. For this reason it seems preferable, with Moberly, to see 14b as an “anticipatory explication of God’s name through a play on the verb *hayah*.”⁴⁵ This approach is similar to that of Seitz above, who suggests that the יהוה of 3:14b may

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 58.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 58–59.

⁴⁴ On Hosea 1:9 see: Anthony Phillips and Lucy Phillips, “The Origin of ‘I Am’ in Exodus 3.14,” *JSOT*, no. 78 (1998): 81–84; on Psalm 50 see: Youngblood, “A New Occurrence of the Divine Name ‘I Am’”; against both see: Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 152.

⁴⁵ Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 22.

link back to 3:12 and thus continue to affirm that the divine name involves the divine presence with his people.⁴⁶

In the study thus far I have shown that the phrase in 3:14 has been understood as an explanation of the name based around a word play on the verb “to be”. Attempts to read the phrase as a name in and of itself have not been found convincing. I therefore now turn to investigations based on the grammar of the verse and will assess how useful these are in terms of better understanding how the verse functions as an explanation of the divine name.

1.2.3. אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה “I am he who is”

I will first examine an interpretation suggested in the modern era by Schild, who argued that the conventional translations of the verse have missed an important point of syntax.⁴⁷ He argued that when “the governing substantive is the subject of the relative clause and is, in the main clause, equated with or defined as, a personal pronoun, then the predicate of the relative clause agrees with that personal pronoun.”⁴⁸ He gave examples and then further argued that this rule still applies when the relative clause itself expresses a substantival idea, citing 1 Chronicles 21:17 as an example of this (וְאֲנִי־הוּא אֲשֶׁר־חָטְאָתִי) “I am the one who has sinned”).⁴⁹ Therefore he argued, by analogy Exodus 3:14a should be translated “I am he who is”, so that God’s answer to Moses is an affirmation of his reality.⁵⁰

However, Bertil Albrektson pointed out that Schild’s examples do not fully prove his point, and in particular that the suggested parallel with 1 Chronicles 21:17 is not a true

⁴⁶ Seitz, “The Call of Moses and the ‘Revelation’ of the Divine Name.”

⁴⁷ Schild, “On Exodus 3.”

⁴⁸ Ibid., 298.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 300.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 301; see also: Lindblom, “Noch Einmal Die Deutung Des Jahwe-Nahmens in Ex. 3,14,” 9.

parallel because it begins with a pronoun and a nominal clause, while Exodus 3:14a is verbal.⁵¹ To translate “the one who” for the relative clause one would need the first half of the sentence to have a noun or pronoun with which the verb of the relative clause would agree.⁵² De Vaux from a different angle concluded that the expression in Exodus 3:14a is equivalent to יהוה יהי ‘I am Yahweh’.⁵³ His translation for the expression was “I am he who exists”.⁵⁴

Thus both de Vaux and Schild reached a translation that apparently agreed with the LXX’s ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν. However they did not interpret “I am he who exists” in the philosophical sense of divine aseity that has sometimes been associated with reflection on the LXX translation.⁵⁵ De Vaux traced some of the references to the divine name in the “Elohistic tradition” in Exodus (and also in Hosea) and suggested that the meaning of the translation is that YHWH is the only real “Existing One”, transcendent and mysterious, yet active in the history of his people and to be recognised by his people as the only God and only saviour.⁵⁶

Brevard Childs noted Schild’s article but accepted Albrektson’s conclusions.⁵⁷ In his overview of the history of understandings of the divine name Mettinger also listed “I am he who is” as one of his preferred options.⁵⁸ Dennis McCarthy suggested that, while

⁵¹ Albrektson, “On the Syntax of ’Hyh ’Shr ’Hyh in Exodus 3:14,” 23

⁵² Ibid., 24.

⁵³ De Vaux noted that יהוה יהי is the predicate of יהוה and that many relative clauses are the equivalent of a participle. He argued that, “in a different context, Hebrew would use the personal pronoun אני followed by a participle” but that the participle form of יהוה is never used; and יהוה has taken the place of אני, because of the wordplay involving יהוה in an etymology of Yahweh, and that the relative clause could be “replaced” by the divine name (“whose purpose it is to explain”). Vaux, “The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH,” 70-71

⁵⁴ Ibid., 71.

⁵⁵ But see den Hertog’s recent work, which suggests that the LXX actually reflects the “effective presence of God on behalf of his people in trouble” Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 222; On the other hand for a twentieth century defence of the connection of aseity from the Hebrew text see: Edward J. Young, “Call of Moses,” *WTJ* 30, no. 1 (1967): 1–23.

⁵⁶ Vaux, “The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH,” 71-75

⁵⁷ Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary* (London : S.C.M. Press, 1974), 50.

⁵⁸ Mettinger, *In Search of God*, 34.

Albrektson may be technically right, it may be that normal syntax has been altered by the desire to emphasise the connection between יהוה and Yahweh by repetition of יהוה.⁵⁹ He goes on to argue that the concept of a great division between the Greek philosophical-theological concept of “static being”, allegedly held by Church Fathers, and the Hebrew idea that “to be” is linked to activity is a largely overstated division. For McCarthy the text of Exodus 3:13-15 means to emphasise that “Yahweh *is* above all others and this means active and helping, for being and acting effectively were not separated.”⁶⁰ He draws on a number of pre-Reformation theologians and spiritual writers to emphasise his point, citing Augustine, Anselm, Bernard and Bonaventure (amongst others) and concluding “thus the church did *not* substitute a static ‘Greek’ for an active ‘Hebrew’ notion of God in theology or spirituality”.⁶¹

This point has also been made by Andrea Saner who, in a recent thesis, seeks to utilise Augustine’s readings of the text for a theological reading. She concludes one section of her discussion by arguing that in the book of Exodus: “knowing God cannot simply be reduced to knowing God’s deeds but rather knowing God must include human attention to God’s ‘I’, and appropriate response.”⁶² My study’s close reading of the dialogues between YHWH and Moses will demonstrate how intimately YHWH’s revelation of his nature and activity are intertwined.

Den Hertog broadly agrees with Albrektson’s critique of Schild’s and Lindblom’s position, seeing clear differences between the 1 Chronicles 21:17 example and Exodus 3:14: an absence of personal pronouns and an absence of previous narrative reference to the being

⁵⁹ McCarthy, “Exod 3,” 316.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 317 emphasis original.

⁶¹ Ibid., 318 emphasis original.

⁶² Andrea Dalton. Saner, “YHWH, the Trinity, and the Literal Sense : Theological Interpretation of Exodus 3:13-15” (Durham University, 2013), 164.

of God (1 Chronicles 21 has a prior reference to David's sin). These differences mean that such an interpretation is, for den Hertog, improbable and that alternatives should be investigated.⁶³ I will now analyse these alternative possibilities.

1.3. אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה - THE *IDEM PER IDEM* CONSTRUCTION

This brings us to a key syntactical feature to consider, the nature of the sentence as an *idem per idem* construction. Various attempts have been made to analyse this construction and similar constructions within the Old Testament in order to understand what the syntax of the construction can say about its meaning. The number of total verses which include an *idem per idem* construction is not large, and most commentators agree that the following verses fall into the category: Gen. 43:14; Exod. 3:14, 4:13, 33:19; 1 Sam. 23:13; 2 Sam. 15:20; 1 Kings 8:63; 2 Kings 8:1; Ezek. 12:25, 36:20; Est. 4:16. Two verses in Deuteronomy are also sometimes included.⁶⁴ With this limited number of examples an analysis of all examples is possible, but this has not led to a consensus regarding the meaning. A number of different possibilities have been suggested for the meaning of the clause which I will examine in turn.

1.3.1. Certainty and Control

One of the simpler categorisations was that made by William Arnold, who divided the construction according to verb forms in the relative clause. He suggested that where the construction had a perfect verb in the relative clause it was used to indicate the subject's necessary, although unknown, fate (Genesis 43:14, Esther 4:16), but that when the imperfect was used in the relative clause this indicated the subject's absolute control of his own action (Exod. 4:13, 16:23, 33:19; 1 Sam. 23:13, 2 Kgs. 8:1, Ezekiel 12:25, where in

⁶³ Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 72–80.

⁶⁴ See the overview in: Ogden, "Idem per Idem"; see also discussion in den Hertog, who adds in some further additional examples: Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 83–85.

each case he translates using the word “choose”).⁶⁵ This analysis has not been generally followed, perhaps because a number of Arnold’s examples seem to invite further questioning.⁶⁶

1.3.2. Indefiniteness

More often cited is S.R. Driver’s definition of the idea of the *idem per idem* as one where “the means or desire to be more explicit does not exist.”⁶⁷ He translated אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה “I will be who I will be” and suggested that this implied both that YHWH’s nature “can be defined only in terms of itself” and that he exists actively in history, as revealed and known to Israel.⁶⁸ Both Arnold and Driver also laid stress on translating the verb הָיָה not in terms of simple existence (“be”) but rather in terms of becoming or happening. Noth understood Exodus 3:14 as expressing an indefiniteness that cannot be defined more closely, while still leaving open the possibility of definiteness to come, suggesting it could mean something like “I am whatever I mean to be”.⁶⁹ Thus for both Driver and Martin Noth there is more than a hint that YHWH’s answer is designed to preserve YHWH’s freedom. Likewise Georg Fischer concludes that: “*Durch v14a bewahrt Jahwe seine Freiheit*”.⁷⁰

1.3.3. Emphasis

Freedman understood the construction differently, suggesting that the second verb serves as a predicate, which like a cognate accusative emphasises the action, citing Exodus 16:23.⁷¹ Thus he suggests that the function of the *idem per idem* construction is to emphasise the verbal action, rather than any particular emphasis on “wilfulness or arbitrary

⁶⁵ Arnold, “The Divine Name in Exodus iii.14.”

⁶⁶ For example: he cites 1 Samuel 23:13 and 2 Kgs 8:1, but in their narrative contexts these convey the nuance of possibility rather than control “go where you can” rather than “go where you choose”.

⁶⁷ S. R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version: With Introduction and Notes*, Cambridge Bible for schools and colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 363.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁹ Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, trans. J. S. Bowden (London: S.C.M.Press, 1962), 44–45.

⁷⁰ Fischer, *Jahwe Unser Gott*, 162; see also: Rainer Albertz, *Exodus 1-18*, Zürcher Bibelkommentare (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2012), 84-87.

⁷¹ Freedman, “Name,” 153.

free choice”.⁷² Freedman also suggested that the verbs in 3:14 are more correctly understood as reflecting a *Hiphil* original, and thus concluded that 3:14 should be “I create what I create”, meaning “I am the creator”.⁷³ If Freedman’s analysis is followed, then YHWH’s answer is a more straightforward affirmation of who he is. If the *Qal* stem is preferred, “I am who I am” means “I am the one who is”, a translation I have already noted above by another route, and favoured by Durham as an affirmation of God’s essential active presence.⁷⁴ Likewise Theodoor Vriezen saw the phrase as an affirmation to Moses of the divine presence with him.⁷⁵

1.3.4. Termination of discussion

A different understanding again was developed by Jack Lundbom by an analysis of other passages involving an *idem per idem*. He listed 10 passages (Gen. 43:14; Exod. 4:13; 16:23; 3:14; 33:19; 1 Sam. 23:13, 2 Sam. 15:20, 2 Kgs. 8:1; Ezek. 12:25; Esther 4:16) and sought to show that the main rhetorical function of an *idem per idem* clause is to terminate the debate.⁷⁶ This conclusion relies on his analysis that Exodus 3:15 is a secondary addition, and that Exodus 33:19 is the beginning of the conclusion of the dialogue, with Exodus 34:1 marking the beginning of a new event.⁷⁷ Ultimately he concluded that in Exodus 3:14 God both gives and withholds his name from Moses.⁷⁸

1.3.5. Totality or Intensification

A more developed analysis is that of Graham Ogden, who identifies a total of 16 cases, and categorises them according to syntax as follows:

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Durham, *Exodus*, 39.

⁷⁵ “Ich bin, der Ich bin” heißt Ich bin da, wie denn auch sei; es ist die Zusicherung Gottes, daß Er immer gegenwärtig ist. Mose meint die Kenntnis des Namens Gottes nötig zu haben zu Legitimierung seines Auftretens, aber Gott sagt ihm: Ich bin ja da! Th. C. Vriezen, “’Ehje ’Aser ’Ehje,” in *Festschrift Alfred Bertholet*, ed. Walter Baumgartner (Tübingen: Mohr, 1950), 498–512.

⁷⁶ Lundbom, “God’s Use of the Idem per Idem to Terminate Debate,” 195–6

⁷⁷ cf. Davies, “The Exegesis of the Divine Name in Exodus,” 151 n38.

⁷⁸ Lundbom, “God’s Use of the Idem per Idem to Terminate Debate,” 199–200.

| Imperative co-ordinated with imperfect in subordinate clause | Imperfect matched with same imperfect | Imperfect consecutive followed by plain imperfect in subordinate clause | Imperfect consecutive matched with a perfect form in the predicate | Perfect consecutive followed by imperfect in predicate | Perfect followed by perfect | Matching participles |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|--|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Exod. 4:13 | Exod. 3:14 | 1 Sam. 23:13 | Deut. 1.46 | Exod 33.19 x2 | Gen. 43:14 | 2 Sam. 15.20 |
| Exod. 16:23 x2 | Ezek. 12:25 | | Deut. 9:25 | | Est. 4.16 | |
| 2 Kgs 8:1 | | | 1 Kgs 8.63 | | | |
| | | | Ezek. 36.20 | | | |

Each case is examined to understand the context in which the particular *idem per idem* is found and a summary given.⁷⁹

Ogden suggests that under the first category Exodus 4:13 and 2 Kings 8:1 have somewhat similar ideas, “send anyone else but me” and “go anywhere else but here”, while the examples in Exodus 16 express, according to Ogden, that the action of cooking (whether by baking or boiling) must be completed.⁸⁰

Under the second examples Ogden tentatively suggests “I will be everything that I will be” for Exodus 3:14a, while in Ezekiel 12 he sees the emphasis placed on the idea that everything Yahweh says will come to pass.⁸¹

Under the third section he sees 1 Samuel 23:13 as similar to the 2 Kings 8:1 example, while in the fourth the examples from Deuteronomy contain an emphasis on the duration of the stay and that of 1 Kings 8:63 serves to focus attention on the offerings.⁸² Ogden

⁷⁹ Ogden, “Idem per Idem,” 109

⁸⁰ Ibid., 110-111.

⁸¹ Ibid., 111-112.

⁸² Ibid., 113-115.

defends the inclusion of Ezekiel 36:20 in this list, suggesting that the second verb should be of the same form as the first, and that in this case it expresses the idea of totality (“throughout these foreign nations”).⁸³

The fifth category Ogden sees as similar to Exodus 16:23 and Ezekiel 12:25, with a stress on the broad and total extent of the action while the sixth category (Gen. 43:14, Est. 4:16) suggests courageous determination on a resolved course of action that has a possible undesired outcome.⁸⁴

Finally he suggests the construction in 2 Samuel 15:20 indicates that David could potentially go anywhere, at least anywhere where he can escape his pursuers.⁸⁵

Following this analysis he draws the following conclusions: where the subordinate clause is the predicate of the main clause the form focuses on the object in an expression of totality or intensity (Exod. 4:13, 16:23, 33:19; Deut. 1:46, 9:25; 1 Sam. 23:13; 2 Sam. 15:20; 1 Kgs. 8:63; 2 Kgs 8:1; Ezek. 12:25); where the subordinate clause is preceded by an adverbial phrase the emphasis is on the fullest extent of that adverbial phrase (1 Sam. 23:13; 2 Sam. 15:20; 2 Kgs 8:1; Ezek. 36:20; Deut. 1:46, 9:25; Exod. 4:13); in a conditional clause the speaker is making an emphatic declaration of intent (Est. 4:16; Gen. 43:14); terminating an argument or adding emphasis are at best only partial explanations; and the idiom does not necessarily indicate freedom of choice.⁸⁶

Broadly speaking Ogden’s emphasis is on intensification, either in terms of the totality of the object or in terms of the emphatic declaration of intent. I will show in the following

⁸³ Ibid., 115.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 115-118.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 118.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 119.

section however that room should be left for the concept of indeterminacy. Even if his understanding of Exodus 3:14a is correct it remains a somewhat mysterious saying. Therefore I need to examine in more detail the location of Exodus 3:14 in order to ascertain its meaning.

1.3.6. Re-orientation: Indefiniteness or Intensification

A somewhat different approach is provided by den Hertog, who examines in great detail the role of the *idem per idem* as part of a wider study, ultimately concluding that in Exodus 3:14 the *idem per idem* construction has the effect of re-orientating Moses. Following Vriezen he identifies two types of *idem per idem* clause: one where the subordinate clause follows the main clause, signifying indefiniteness; and one where the subordinate clause precedes the main clause, signifying intensification.⁸⁷ Given the importance of speech including the *idem per idem* construction for our study (not only Exodus 3:14a, but also 4:14 and 33:19) it is necessary to spend some time reviewing and evaluating den Hertog's work.

1.3.6.1. Classification

He seeks to demonstrate this division from the examples of the construction in the Old Testament. Rather than simply listing each example and assessing its category he begins by working from the most straightforward and building his case from those. He begins with 1 Samuel 15:20, 1 Samuel 23:13 and 2 Kings 8:1, which all relate to a situation where the point of departure is clear but the route is not, and concludes that these examples all have an "indefinite" nuance.⁸⁸ He considers some alternative examples which also fit the *idem per idem* category, some of which were not previously considered by Ogden.

⁸⁷ Cornelis den Hertog, "The Prophetic Dimension of the Divine Name: On Exodus 3:14a and Its Context," *CBQ* 64, no. 2 (2002): 213–28; Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 83; Vriezen, "'Ehje 'Aser 'Ehje."

⁸⁸ Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 83–4.

The first of these is Jeremiah 15:2, where the question “where shall we go?” is answered by a series of clauses which all take the same form as “אֲשֶׁר לְמָוֶת לְמָוֶת”. Den Hertog considers that this implies a fate which is certain, there is no escape, and therefore places this into the “intensification” category.⁸⁹ He argues that the difference in nuance results from the difference in the order of the clause, and gives a number of other examples to demonstrate his point: 2 Kings 25:14 (Jeremiah 52:19), Exodus 16:23, Genesis 43:14 and Esther 4:16.⁹⁰ He argues that while the nature of the clause is different from case to case, it is the case that

in all the instances the relative clause precedes the main subject and indicates what will be talked about ... ; nevertheless, by repeating only the predicate of the relative clause, the main clause only underlines a feature of what has already been said: the action signified by the verb or the construction indicated by the noun. It is on this basis that the construction can be used to indicate that alternatives cannot, need not or should not be considered.⁹¹

Den Hertog returns to consider further categories of the main clause followed by a relative: Exodus 33:19, Hosea 9:14 (assuming that the *הוּא* functions as a relative pronoun), Ezekiel 12:25 and Exodus 4:13. He notes that, while Exodus 33:19 and Ezekiel 12:25 are very often taken as emphatic, and thus proving a breakdown in den Hertog’s suggested categorisation, the indefinite sense should not be ruled out so quickly because:

in the sentences concerned, the relative construction suggests that a complement (object, adjunct or nominal predicate) will be specified; however, because the relative clause essentially describes this complement in terms of what has already been said its content remains in fact undefined. That is why this construction can be and is indeed used to signify indefiniteness, notably the indefiniteness of the complement. Concerning the complement, the sentence construction indicates that it is impossible, needless or undesirable to be more specific.⁹²

Den Hertog goes on to refine his theory: cases where the main clause precedes the relative clause, but which have a noun functioning as the head of the relative clause, often convey the impression of a multitude (Deut. 29:15 “we passed through what you passed through”,

⁸⁹ Ibid., 84.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 85.

⁹¹ Ibid., 85–86.

⁹² Ibid., 86–87.

or 1 Kgs 8:63 “Solomon offered the offering of peace sacrifices which he offered”).⁹³ He lists two examples (1 Samuel 20:26 and Sirach 44:9) with a different clause connector (פֶּי and פֶּאֶשֶׁר) which lead to an emphatic sense. However none of these refinements change his basic conclusion that Exodus 3:14 fits into the “indefiniteness” category.⁹⁴

Den Hertog returns to his discussion of the translation “I am he who is” and noting that while it is a possible translation, it would be unparalleled.⁹⁵ “I will be who I will be” also does not have strict parallels, but its particularity can be explained because it is reasonable to take the second verb in the same sense as the first where there is no other marker distinguishing them.⁹⁶ Den Hertog further suggests that in the context of the request for the name the relative pronoun takes an identifying sense rather than a predicational one, thus the subject is here identified more closely, and yet indefinitely. In order then to translate the phrase properly a clear understanding of the verb “to be” is required, and it is this he goes on to discuss.

1.3.6.2. The verb “to be”

Den Hertog discusses the nature of the verb “to be” in terms of tense, aspect and modality in this verse unit. He outlines three main options: future, often defended by reference to 3:12, although den Hertog feels that this link needs to be established rather than merely asserted because the function of the verb in 3:12a is different to that in 3:14 and furthermore suggests that to assert “I will be something in the time to come” is at odds with the context of promise and instructions, making for an odd transition to 3:14b.⁹⁷ The second option den Hertog suggests is the present tense, “I am who I am”, a frequent choice that is not always justified, although it would also be possible to give a habitual emphasis:

⁹³ Ibid., 87.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 89.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 91.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 91–92.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 96–97.

“I am wont to be what I am wont to be”. The present tense could be understood as an affirmation of presence, although there are no obvious indicators to go on, or the statement could be an evasion.⁹⁸ The third option den Hertog presents is one expressing modality: “I would be who I would be” with a cohortative nuance, and den Hertog also notes that it is possible that the first $\text{וְיֵשְׁבֻ$ could be modal, while the second could be future.⁹⁹ He also suggests that other examples of the *idem per idem* have a modal flavour, for example 1 Samuel 23:13 “they went wherever they could go”, and that modality and indefiniteness are related.¹⁰⁰

1.3.6.3. The statement in the context of Exodus 3:13-15

Den Hertog argues that to understand what “indefiniteness” might imply in this instance it is necessary to understand the nature of Exodus 3:14a as a response to Moses’ question in 3:13. Den Hertog outlines three possible options: if the verbs are future orientated, then the answer may be focusing on Moses’ underlying desire for certainty rather than providing a direct answer to his question; the statement has been considered as a refusal to answer, although in the “final form” of the text this is problematic given 3:15; or the statement may be the answer to the underlying problem of how Moses’ sending can be seen as legitimate.¹⁰¹ He looks at the discourse function of other *idem per idem* cases where the main clause comes first, which have an intriguingly high proportion involving God, either as the speaker, or as one being addressed and exhorted to a particular action.¹⁰²

Den Hertog is unconvinced by Lundbom’s argument that the *idem per idem* construction is always a means of closing debate and instead wishes to hold to his own argument that the syntax of the construction when the relative clause follows the main clause implies

⁹⁸ Ibid., 97–100.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 101–104.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 104.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 106–107.

¹⁰² Ibid., 108.

indefiniteness. Den Hertog regards this “indefiniteness” as reflecting the inability or unwillingness of the speaker to be more precise, and suggests that this indefiniteness “affects the speaker, the listener or both of them”, and “this suggests that the *idem per idem* instances involved can be distinguished according to their grammatical person”.¹⁰³ He revisits his previous examples to focus more fully on their function within their respective discourses.

1.3.6.4. *Idem per idem* in discourse: Re-orientation

Den Hertog begins by discussing a relatively clear case which involves humans (rather than God), namely 2 Samuel 15:20, where David is fleeing Absalom and explains to Ittai that his own fate is rather uncertain: “I [am] going where I [am] going”.¹⁰⁴ Here, den Hertog argues from the context of 1 Samuel, David is not exercising authority or freedom of choice, and the continued conversation demonstrates he is not closing the debate, rather it is in David’s uncertain fate that the indefiniteness of the *idem per idem* construction takes its shape.¹⁰⁵ This is more convincing than Arnold’s “I will go where I choose to go” that was noted above.

Having established this he analyses Exodus 33:19, where he argues the phrases form part of a redirection of Moses’ question, before answering it in 33:20-23, once the goodness of God has been firmly established.¹⁰⁶ Den Hertog suggests that the *idem per idem* here does not convey the arbitrariness that might be assumed if the statements were isolated; rather, in the context of the revelation of YHWH’s goodness, and the repeated words that Moses

¹⁰³ Ibid., 109.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 109–110.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 110.

has found grace in the eyes of YHWH, and YHWH's statement that Moses has found favour, the statements:

make explicit the implications of God's promise in the given situation. Therefore the indefiniteness of the *idem per idem* construction works towards underlining the surprising nature of YHWH's acting: he is willing to be gracious and compassionate although the opposite could be expected.¹⁰⁷

It is hard to see on this explanation why den Hertog does not place this text in the intensification category. However, a consideration of the wider context of Exodus 33 suggests that the statement retains an air of indefiniteness as it remains that YHWH grants mercy and compassion according to his character, and not automatically.¹⁰⁸

In Ezekiel 12:25, there are according to den Hertog, complicating factors in that the statement is introduced with the initial words "I am YHWH" and contains an additional noun, added to explain the content of the speaking and is thus subordinated to another turn of phrase.¹⁰⁹ The *idem per idem* clause here indicates that any prophetic word will be fulfilled, no matter what the word might be.¹¹⁰ Therefore den Hertog concludes this fulfils a different rhetorical situation to Exodus 33:19 and 2 Samuel 15:20.¹¹¹

He suggests that Exodus 3:14a is most comparable to Exodus 33:19 and 2 Samuel 15:20 because all three form an argument in themselves, they are the final or only argument in a series and they counter existing thinking in a radical way; they are not aimed at closing the debate, but rather at re-orientating the addressee.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ See discussion in: R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32-34*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 22 (Sheffield: JSOT Pr, 1983), 78; and also discussion in: R. W. L. Moberly, "How May We Speak of God? A Reconsideration of the Nature of Biblical Theology," *TynBul* 53, no. 2 (2002): 177-202, especially 198-199.

¹⁰⁹ Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 111.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 112.

Finally den Hertog sets Exodus 3:14a in the context of the dialogue in Exodus 3 and 4. He sees 3:14-15 as following a similar pattern to 4:10, where YHWH's answer is preceded by a fundamental expression of who YHWH is before Moses' objection is met more fully, and also suggests that this is similar to Exodus 33:19-23.¹¹³ In the context of the dialogue den Hertog sees Exodus 4:13 as particularly interesting. In itself, den Hertog suggests, Moses' statement "send by the hand [whom] you may send" could include himself and be a form of acceptance, which would be in line with other prophetic call accounts. However, den Hertog points out, the context shows that Moses is seeking to reopen the dialogue, perhaps picking up on God's ability in 4:11-12 to say "send by the hand of the one you can send", and that by patterning his response on God's self-disclosure in 3:14, Moses is seeking to re-orientate God.¹¹⁴

Den Hertog concludes firstly that Exodus 3:14a has an indefinite sense, which implies that too much can be made of the use of the same verb in Exodus 3:12, since it is here used in a different context; next he sees the response as shifting the issue away from that of the divine name towards that of who God is; the shift in person from Moses speaking of God in the third person, to YHWH responding in the first person also suggests a re-orientation of perspective.¹¹⁵ Den Hertog suggests that this re-orientation is required because Moses' question in 3:13 reveals a problem of how the "God of your fathers" can send someone, when no-one has previously been sent to other people with a message.¹¹⁶ YHWH's response "points to his otherness, indicates through the indefiniteness and the potentiated modality ... of the statement that he exceeds the representations of Moses and the Israelites."¹¹⁷ Den Hertog suggests that the similarly structured *idem per idem* clauses in 2 Samuel 15:20 and Exodus 33:19 along with the question-responses in the theophanies in

¹¹³ Ibid., 113-4.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 116.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 121.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 122.

Judges 13 and Genesis 32 suggest that there is a “re-orientating response” category within dialogue in the Old Testament.¹¹⁸ I will evaluate the usefulness of den Hertog for my study in conjunction with one final contribution.

1.3.7. Initiating Narrative

A useful approach to the *idem per idem* construction is proposed by Jean-Pierre Sonnet in which he reads אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה through the lens of Sternberg’s narrative categories of suspense, curiosity and surprise. Sonnet understands אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה as itself a name of God, and that the *idem per idem* in this case functions to “initiate narrative”.¹¹⁹ He seeks to show that the phrase אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה has “a subtle affinity” with Sternberg’s markers of narrative: suspense, curiosity and surprise.¹²⁰

Under the heading of suspense he suggests that this construction preserves the freedom of God, and yet assures that God is present and that the divine name carries benevolence.¹²¹ Sonnet suggests that divine assistance is assured, yet unpredictable, and it is this tension of providence and unpredictability that “constitutes the heart of suspense when it comes to the Biblical God”.¹²² The narrator provokes our curiosity by the possibility that אֶהְיֶה emphasises iterative or habitual action which bridges the gap between the ancestors and now, suggesting that God will reassert himself in history as he did in the patriarchal past, and invites the reader to observe how this will be.¹²³ Surprise features when rather than “YHWH” God answers Moses’ question with אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה. Sonnet suggests that Moses’ silence in the face of God’s repeated speech may be caused by his surprise at the “oddity

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Jean-Pierre Sonnet, “*Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh* (Exodus 3)”, 333–334.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 334.

¹²¹ Ibid., 336.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid., 338.

and uniqueness” of God’s first person name which Moses and the reader hear, but Israel do not.¹²⁴

For Sonnet the *idem per idem* opens the door to surprises to come; YHWH is self-determined, and often in ways surprising to the reader.¹²⁵ Sonnet concludes his discussion of surprise by citing Exodus 33:19 and 34:5-7 as examples of this surprise, when in the light of Israel’s sin YHWH’s mercy is stressed before his justice, in an inversion of the order in Exodus 20: “God, we now understand, is free to rank his attributes in the way he chooses”.¹²⁶ Ultimately “the name revealed in Exodus 3 has equated the revelation of God’s character with its and his dramatic manifestation throughout Exodus”.¹²⁷

1.3.8. Conclusions regarding the role of the *idem per idem*

For the purposes of this study den Hertog’s comprehensive and exhaustive findings contain critical challenges to conclusions drawn by previous scholars. His exegesis of the key texts is solid, although it will be important to investigate more fully the context of Exodus 33:19 and its role in the discourse in particular. Den Hertog himself suggests that “only a further study of question-response pairs in the Hebrew Bible and related texts can make clear what the relevance of the re-orientating responses category proposed here is.”¹²⁸ One contribution of the study of the dialogues between Moses and YHWH will be to support and clarify how den Hertog’s category of “re-orientation” is used in this context.

One aspect of his argument that needs some adjustment is his assertion that the indefinite sense of *הָיָה* in 3:14a implies that, even though in 3:12 this verb carries the sense of divine

¹²⁴ Ibid., 340–342.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 344.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 345.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 347.

¹²⁸ Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 122.

presence it does not in 3:14 because it is now used in a different context.¹²⁹ I noted above that Davies argues strongly that the verb “to be” carries in 3:14 a sense of “presence”, and this fits coherently with den Hertog’s other conclusions here. The indefinite nature of the idiom should not rule this out because it is reasonable to suggest an interpretation along the lines of “I will be present as I will be present”. YHWH’s statement provides both an affirmation of presence, and an affirmation that YHWH is free to be present in the way that new situations may demand.¹³⁰

His insistence on avoiding quick recourse to known categories like “freedom of choice” or “emphasis” in the context of the discussion is important, as is his insistence that an indeterminate emphasis does not necessarily mean a refusal to answer or avoidance, but rather that YHWH is free to reveal himself in new ways as new situations demand. This need not mean YHWH is arbitrary in his freedom but, in the context of this study, I will argue that how YHWH uses his freedom is something to be uncovered by a careful examination of the narrative.

This careful examination can also be aided by Sonnet’s approach. While he may not be quite accurate to describe אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה as a name (for reasons examined at the start of the discussion of Exodus 3:14) his description of its role as an “initiator of narrative” has fruitful potential. Certainly to read in this way requires close attention to the unfolding narrative, especially in order to explain in what way YHWH can be said to be “free to rank his attributes in the way he chooses.”¹³¹ When Exodus 20 and 34 are studied in closer detail I will argue that the re-ordering of attributes in these texts does not necessarily indicate a revision of YHWH’s ranking of his attributes.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 121.

¹³⁰ This suggestion is somewhat similar to Seitz’s proposal above: Seitz, “The Call of Moses and the ‘Revelation’ of the Divine Name.”

¹³¹ Sonnet, “Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh (Exodus 3),” 345.

1.3.9. Beginning a reading strategy: Re-orientation and Initiation

If the concept of initiation of narrative is juxtaposed to den Hertog's concept of a re-ordering function for YHWH's reply in 3:14a then the result is that YHWH's answer to Moses can be seen as a re-ordering of Moses' understanding of both YHWH and his current situation by beginning a new sequence of action. This understanding can be confirmed by the immediate context of Exodus 3 where YHWH proceeds to re-commission Moses and give Moses further detail on the events to come. This provides encouragement both to a narrative reading of Exodus 3-4, and to a continued analysis of the ways in which Moses' dialogues with YHWH produce further revelation regarding God's self.¹³²

1.4. EXODUS 3:13-15: UNITY AND CONTEXT

1.4.1. The Unity of Exodus 3:13-15

The next question to examine is how 3:14-15 functions as a response to Moses' question. Firstly I will consider the logic and composition of YHWH's three-fold response. Those critics looking to identify sources or traditions behind the text have tended to suggest that part or all of 3:13-15 is non-original.¹³³ Noth argued that 3:15 was the original answer because it is the simplest, 3:14a was an explanation, with 3:14b a bridge between the two.¹³⁴ By contrast, Konrad Schmid argues that 3:15 is an addition to explain 3:14, in particular to make up for the absence of the name YHWH in 3:14.¹³⁵

¹³² See Sonnet's discussion on Moses' role as a prophet: Ibid., 346.

¹³³ Noth argued that the threefold introduction to the divine speech in 3:14-15 means that it is probable that the current form is not original: Noth, *Exodus*, 43.

¹³⁴ Noth argued that within the framework of biblical tradition the name YHWH is taken to be derived from the verb "to be" and the divine name therefore meant "He of whom 'I am who I am' is true":Ibid.

¹³⁵ Schmid argues that 3:15 is quoting Psalm 135:13 in order to echo the recital of salvation history in the final book of the Psalter: Konrad Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story: Israel's Dual Origins in the Hebrew Bible*, trans. James Nogalski, Siphut, literature, and theology of the Hebrew scriptures 3 (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 194. It is not necessary to fully agree with Schmid to see that the link between 3:15 and Psalm 135:13 is interesting in itself. Even if the link works in the reverse direction, or indeed if it is not possible to determine the direction of the link it is still instructive to read Exodus 3:15 against the backdrop of similar texts in the Old Testament and see how the same concepts function elsewhere in order to have a better understanding of how the text functions in its narrative context. It will be important to attend to such

Rainer Albertz argues that the design of the final redactor was to create a text which linked the calling of Moses to the revelation of the divine name at the same time as emphasising: “...die bruchlose Kontinuität und völlige Identität zwischen den Göttern der Erzväter und *Jhwh* herausarbeitete”.¹³⁶ Walter Moberly argues that as a unit Exodus 3:13-15 has an “internal coherence” and a “cumulative and repetitive nature” which emphasises its contents; there may or may not be a complex prehistory to the text but it stands now as a “unified and coherent” composition.¹³⁷ Moberly argues that in its present form it emphasises the importance of the occasion and in particular the name of God.¹³⁸ Moberly identifies 5 main parts to the flow of 3:13-15 which focus on the name itself, and its explanation in terms of the verb *הִתְּהַלַּח*.¹³⁹

Den Hertog also considers that while the text may not have been composed “within one hour or a single day” there is not enough evidence within the text itself to give any kind of reconstruction of its origins, and the important question is to see what role the text plays in the narrative.¹⁴⁰ Fischer notes:

*Unsere Erzählung hat sich bisher als eine literarische Komposition erwiesen, die im Ablauf der Verse offenbar eine minutiös fortschreitende Entwicklung zeichnet. Diese Entwicklung zuläuft auf die Offenbarung des Jahwenamens durch Jahwe selbst in v15. 3,14a bedeutet einen Schritt daraufhin und ist in diesem Zusammenhang zu sehen.*¹⁴¹

In addition den Hertog and Moberly both point out that the threefold speech introduction is not unique, and can serve to emphasise and distinguish different parts within a speech in a similar way to “modern use of punctuation and paragraphs”, or to emphasise the “solemn

references as the exegesis of individual texts is pursued and especially important when, as in Psalm 135:13 the immediate context of the reference is to the events of the Exodus.

¹³⁶ Albertz, *Exodus 1-18*, 87.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹³⁸ Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 18.

¹³⁹ These are: the imagined question of Israel concerning God’s name, God’s statement about himself in language anticipating what is to come, an explanation of God’s name in terms of *הִתְּהַלַּח*, the giving of God’s name and a concluding statement on the significance of God’s name: *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁴⁰ Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 32.

¹⁴¹ Fischer, *Jahwe Unser Gott*, 147.

nature of the statement”.¹⁴² Thus the paragraph can be approached as a unity, and understanding sought on that basis.

1.4.2. The relation of 3:13-15 to the remainder of the call narrative

Here I will consider the role which Exodus 3:13-15 plays in the call narrative of Moses. I will first consider the question of whether the text of Exodus 3:13-15 fits as part of the narrative, or whether it sits slightly apart because of its particular concerns and presentation. I have seen above how there have been a variety of different approaches by practitioners of literary criticism towards the composition and prehistory of the text. I will briefly consider here two key approaches, those of Childs and Moberly, which examine how the question of genre relates to interpretation in its current context. Firstly I consider the approach of Childs.

1.4.2.1. Exodus 3:13-15 having a complex prehistory, reframed as part of the larger narrative

In his Exodus commentary Childs sought to move towards a solution to the issue of the relation of these critical verses to the rest of the call narrative. He proceeded initially on the basis of a form critical approach, suggesting that the narrative appears to weave together elements from several key patterns found elsewhere in the Old Testament: (i) a theophanic appearance of the deity, (ii) theophany through an intermediary, (iii) a call pattern and (iv) the form of a child’s question.¹⁴³ Childs argued that none of these perspectives provide a “form” for the request for a name, because while (i) and (ii) usually do provide a name, there is not usually a context of “calling”, while in (iii) there is not usually a name given, and in (iv) the answer to the question does not legitimise the one responding or test validity.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² See: Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 18; and Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 31.

¹⁴³ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 65–66.

¹⁴⁴ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 67.

The solution to the meaning of the question for Childs must be found elsewhere, in a setting where the issue of the name of YHWH became a means by which prophets could be tested. Originally, Childs asserts, the question Moses asks is to be seen as E maintaining both that the name is introduced to Israel through Moses, and that Moses is a true prophet, as confirmed by his announcing God's one true name.¹⁴⁵ However Childs also seeks to site the question in its present context as one of a series of objections to Moses' commission, and he argues that the request for the name is "both a request for information and an explanation of its significance."¹⁴⁶

Childs' argument regarding the original situation of the question as relating to the name as a test of the true prophet does not seem altogether convincing. It is hard to find any other examples in the Old Testament where knowing or bringing God's name became a test of a true prophet, and also there are a number of passages which indicate that God's true name could be used in deceptive ways, e.g. Deuteronomy 18:20, Jeremiah 14:14 and Jeremiah 23:25. This suggests that the true test is the content of what is said in God's name, rather than the name used.

1.4.2.2. Exodus 3:13-15 based on the form of a child's question

By contrast to Childs Moberly argues that 3:13-15 still stands slightly apart from the remainder of the narrative in its current form, and that there are enough elements of the form of a child's question present to make this a useful comparison. He notes that 3:13-22 forms the longest single response to an objection in 3:1-4:17, and that since in 3:16-22 God seeks to end Moses' objections "by returning to the development of his commission and

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 68–9.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 75.

also foreshadowing later developments in the story” 3:13-15 are a “relatively self-contained” unit.¹⁴⁷

Moberly argues that this second objection of Moses is different to his other objections in that it is not about Moses’ difficulties in terms of personal inadequacy (as 3:11 and 4:10), or overcoming a reluctance to take him seriously (as 4:1) but rather about Moses’ ignorance if he happens to be asked the name of God, a question which Moberly sees as “somewhat surprising... the question and answer of 3:13-15 both have an unusually abstract theological character”.¹⁴⁸

Instead, Moses’ question, Moberly argues, is couched in a similar form to that of a “child’s question” in a catechetical context (Exod. 12:26-27, 13:14:15; Deut. 6:20-25; Josh. 4:6-7, 21-23).¹⁴⁹ These questions are “hypothetical, at a time subsequent to the story”, they are “based on the word *mah* (“what is the meaning of ...?”), they are in the context of the story of the origin of an important feature of Israel’s religious tradition and they contain, either explicitly or implicitly, the idea of perpetual remembrance.”¹⁵⁰

Moberly outlines the differences between these features and the text of Exodus 3, namely: the text views the people as a whole asking the question not a single child; 3:13 portrays a unique not repeated situation; and there is neither a religious ritual nor a short recital of YHWH’s actions on behalf of Israel in response. Despite these differences, Moberly argues, Exodus 3:13-15 can function in a similar way to the “child’s question” in the narrative.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ R. W. L Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosiac Yahwism*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 16–17.

¹⁴⁸ Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 19.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

As such it stands as a key teaching text, “giving Israel’s account of how Israel knows the name of God.”¹⁵²

Moberly asserts that as such, while the text is presented in the context of Moses’ initial encounter with God, it “retains a somewhat artificial feel, since its genre sets it apart from the rest of the dialogue between Moses and God”.¹⁵³ Moberly therefore emphasises that the text must be understood in its context as belonging to, yet standing out from, the narrative of Moses’ objections. In contrast to Childs he argues that the idea that the Israelites might have had a problem with the identity of the deity sending Moses if the name YHWH was not originally familiar to them is “a conceptual problem alien to the Exodus writer”, and indeed to the Old Testament where there is never the need to establish that the deity speaking is Israel’s God rather than a foreign god.¹⁵⁴

I will suggest below, when Moses’ question is examined in more detail, that Moberly’s point here is overstated and that there are times when there is, at least from the perspective of the characters being narrated, exactly this need. Den Hertog makes a criticism of Moberly’s position on the basis that it implies that Exodus 3:13-15 functions only on the level of narrator to reader, rather than making sense in their present context of a dialogue between Moses and YHWH; den Hertog suggests that such solutions can only be a last resort if there is no other way to understand the text.¹⁵⁵ This criticism of den Hertog has some force. It is plausible that the remainder of the narrative could also be described as “narrative theology”, at each point the speeches of YHWH are long by comparison with those of Moses, and include a number of different aspects of YHWH’s character shown in

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 63.

¹⁵⁵ Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 64–65.

his actions. When Exodus 3-4 is examined in more detail it will be noted that it is not obvious from the text that Exodus 3:13-15 is set apart from the rest of the narrative.

1.4.3. Conclusions for a Reading Strategy

After reviewing some of the discussion surrounding Exodus 3:13-15 and agreeing that it makes sense to read the verses as having a fundamental unity, I have concluded with Childs and den Hertog that it should be read as a part of the wider calling narrative, at the same narrative level. This enables us to move on to the next stage of our discussion, where in order to confirm if an understanding of the phrase אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה as a re-orientating response makes sense I will consider how YHWH's answer to Moses fits into the narrative sequence of 3:13-15. If YHWH's answer serves to re-orientate Moses it is necessary to ask *from* what Moses is re-orientated and *to* what he is re-orientated. I will begin by an analysis of the meaning of Moses' question.

1.5. THE MEANING OF MOSES' QUESTION

1.5.1. Overview of the options

There have been a vast number of different proposals for the significance of the question, and these have most recently been outlined by den Hertog, who categorises the options firstly by possible reasons for a name to be requested, and also by various different options as to the backgrounds for these reasons.¹⁵⁶ Den Hertog reminds us that Exodus 3:13-15 contains three levels of communication: that between Moses and God, the imagined future conversation between Moses and the people, and the narrator with the reader.¹⁵⁷ As the various options for the meaning of the question are considered it is important to keep these levels in mind.

¹⁵⁶ See discussion in: Ibid., 59–65. My own analysis below builds on the work of den Hertog.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 64.

I will begin the analysis by considering the context of the question Moses asks. This question is posed as though on the lips of the people, but reflects Moses' perspective on what will happen when he returns to Egypt in terms of an imagined future conversation with the people. As will be noted in the study of Exodus 3-4 Moses has already given the expected "who am I?" response to a call and received a reassurance of God's presence. However, Moses is unsatisfied and proposes a scenario by which he returns to the people of Israel with the news that "the God of your fathers has sent me to you". This statement will provoke the question "what is his name?" This imagined future question prompts Moses to ask God "what shall I say?"

Before completing my analysis of the meaning of the question I will first lay out the options for the meaning of Moses' question which have been considered by different scholars. I will discuss the meaning of his question from Moses' perspective, beginning with the possibilities that present themselves if Moses does not know the name YHWH.

1. His question regarding the name is one focused on the sound of the name itself; either he:
 - a. believes that the Israelites do not know the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and in his mind may be the concept that they will need to know this name in order to worship God rightly.¹⁵⁸ Under this option they do not know the name
 - i. because they have never known it,¹⁵⁹
 - ii. or because they have known and since forgotten it.¹⁶⁰
 - b. believes that the Israelites may know the name and therefore will want to ensure that he does know the name in order to test the idea that God has truly appeared to him.¹⁶¹
 - c. believes that when the name is revealed to him, something of its significance will also be unveiled.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 60–61.

¹⁵⁹ This is the classic position of the documentary hypothesis, and also more recently in their different ways (see below) of Wenham and Moberly. Ibid.; Gordon J. Wenham, "The Religion of the Patriarchs," in *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, ed. A R Millard and D J Wiseman (Leicester: IVP, 1980); Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 25.

¹⁶⁰ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), 37.

¹⁶¹ Seitz, "The Call of Moses and the 'Revelation' of the Divine Name," 152-3

- d. understands that having a divine name revealed to him has the potential to substantiate his claim to be sent by God, perhaps because knowledge of the name implies a special relationship with God.¹⁶³
2. Alternatively, he thinks that the name may have some kind of magical potential, either:
 - a. he assumes the people will want to know the name in order to be able to use it magically (under the influence of their Egyptian background).¹⁶⁴
 - b. he wants to be able to use the name magically himself, perhaps because of a belief that there may be a secret divine name with particular powers.¹⁶⁵

These options have not, however, always been found convincing and it has also been argued that the name could well have been known by Moses, and that the question means something more. In this case the possible options include:

1. The question “what is his name?” is equivalent to asking for further information regarding the significance of the name, either along the lines of:
 - a. “what new revelation do you bring of God?”¹⁶⁶
 - b. “will he live up to his name?”¹⁶⁷ or “what can he do?”¹⁶⁸ in the context of Israel’s plight.
2. He wants to be sure that it is really YHWH speaking to him.¹⁶⁹
3. He wants to know, and believes the people will want to know, which of the divine titles used in Genesis is appropriate to be used in this context.¹⁷⁰
4. He believes the people do not know the name at all. The narrative evidence for this is limited, but is at least a theoretical possibility under the Midianite hypothesis.

There are two further options that do not depend on knowing whether or not Moses knows the name. The first of these is that Moses’ question may be a question designed simply to show that he is not qualified for the mission. In this case the question would not be sincere, but simply an attempt at evading his mission. This possibility should not be

¹⁶² Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 75.

¹⁶³ Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, trans. Johan Rebel and Sierd Woudstra, vol. 1, 4 vols., Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Kampen: Kok Publishing House, 1993), 366; Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 64.

¹⁶⁴ Buber, Martin, *Kingship of God* (orig. 1932; trans. R Scheimann; London: Allen & Unwin, 1967), p105 in Cornelis den Hertog, *The Other Face of God: ‘I Am That I Am’ Reconsidered* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 62.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁶⁶ J.A. Motyer, *The Revelation of the Divine Name* (Tyndale, 1959), http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/article_revelation_motyer.html.

¹⁶⁷ Benno Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus*, trans. Walter Jacob and Yaakov Elman (Hoboken, New Jersey: Ktav, 1992), 70.

¹⁶⁸ Durham, *Exodus*, 38.

¹⁶⁹ Mowinckel, “The Name of the God of Moses,” 123-124.

¹⁷⁰ Moshe Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, Second Edition. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), 80.

rejected outright, although it should be noted that each of Moses' objections in the narrative do have some actual plausibility, so even if this is an accurate assessment of Moses' motivation, the question may still reflect an actual understanding of what the understanding of the Israelites and of Moses was regarding the divine name.

The final possible understanding is that Moses may believe, or may believe that the people believe, that a new action of YHWH will mean a new revelation of a new name. The new action of YHWH could be either:

1. The plan to deliver Israel from Egypt¹⁷¹
2. The sending of Moses with a message from YHWH to deliver the people¹⁷²

In this case the question would mean "what new name is appropriate to this new mission".

If the set of options that regard Moses as already knowing the divine name are to be regarded as realistic, then the proposition that the meaning of "מִהַ־שְׁמוֹ" is, or at least can be, "what is the meaning of the name?" rather than simply "what is the name?" needs to be established. Benno Jacob argued that the question "מִהַ־שְׁמוֹ" is seeking a better understanding of God, and that this emphasis on understanding is supported by Moses' follow up question "what shall I say?" Jacob cites Joshua 7:8-9 and Genesis 44:16 as examples that demonstrate that this question carries a sense of helplessness requiring a full statement in response and not a mere word.¹⁷³

A similar understanding is also proposed by John Durham, supported by reference to the wider context of Exodus. Durham argues for Moses' question being focused on the meaning of the name because "Moses himself was satisfied by the identification 'the God

¹⁷¹ Terence E Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation, a Bible commentary for teaching and preaching (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 63; Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 65.

¹⁷² This is the view den Hertog argues for in: Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 69.

¹⁷³ Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, 67.

of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' ... and the clear assumption of this whole narrative is that such an identification would be understandable also to the Israelites in bondage there."¹⁷⁴ The backdrop of chapters 1-3 with their emphasis on the suffering of Israel in bondage to the Egyptians, Durham argues, provides the context of Moses' question, and requires also that the question be interpreted in terms of the significance in Hebrew of the name of God in terms of his character and reputation.¹⁷⁵ Thus the question for Durham is effectively "what can this God do?", and he sees God's answer in 14a giving support to this interpretation because "it is an assertion of authority, a confession of an essential reality, and thus an entirely appropriate response to the question Moses raises."¹⁷⁶

Martin Buber proposed, and Alec Motyer investigated further, the uses of the question "מָה" in order to demonstrate that "מָה־שֵׁמוֹ" should normally be interpreted as "what is the meaning of his name?", and that a request simply for the name would more often use מָה, as in Judges 13:17.¹⁷⁷ Den Hertog argues against their conclusions because in Genesis 32:28 the answer to מָה is "Jacob", and Proverbs 30:4 where the expected answer is "no-one".¹⁷⁸

Motyer by contrast argued that Genesis 32:28 must be about more than a simple request for a name because the question occurs in a conversation where a new name is about to be given to Jacob. He also suggests there is more going on than a simple request for a name in Proverbs 30:4 because previous questions have been of the "who" variety.¹⁷⁹ In the case of Genesis 32:28, however, the mysterious wrestler asks Jacob his name precisely so that it can be changed. Even if the mysterious wrestler is assumed to know Jacob's name the

¹⁷⁴ Durham, *Exodus*, 37.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Motyer, *The Revelation of the Divine Name*; See also: Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, 67.

¹⁷⁸ Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 37.

¹⁷⁹ Motyer, *The Revelation of the Divine Name*.

question appears designed to simply get Jacob to say the name. Proverbs 30:4 also lends further weight to den Hertog's case that the request is one for a name, because the parallelism works in favour of suggesting that "what is his name?" is functionally equivalent to "who is he?"

Thus it is most likely that Moses' question demonstrates that he did not know the name YHWH, or at least did not know that it was the name YHWH which was appropriate for this situation. There are various possible reasons put forward for this lack of knowledge. Of these options the background in Egyptian magic, while possible, does not seem to have any justification within the text itself. The options suggesting that the question only has regard for the significance of the name seem ultimately to be somewhat forced. However that need not, as Moberly points out, preclude a concern for the meaning of the name, and it is likely that, whatever the intention of the question may be, YHWH's answer is both explanation and name.¹⁸⁰

This leaves three key options to consider:

1. Exodus 3:13-15 as the provision and explanation of a completely new name for God, with all reference to YHWH in Genesis being anachronisms (whether deliberate or not).
2. Exodus 3:13-15 as Moses' request to know the name which the Israelites do know, but which he does not.
3. Exodus 3:13-15 as Moses' request to know the name which has been long forgotten by the Israelites.

¹⁸⁰ Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 22–24.

1.5.2. Moses' Question as Reflecting a Request for a Completely New Name

This position is as old as the classic source critical model which understood Exodus 3 as E's account of the revelation of the name YHWH.¹⁸¹ Moberly argues that the text suggests that Moses does not already know the name, and that the Israelites did not know the name either. He points out that God introduces himself to Moses as "the God of your father" and that Moses expects to go to Israel and say: "The God of your fathers has sent me".

Moberly concludes that this is the title by which both Moses and Israel knew of God at that point.¹⁸² After analysing the way in which the narrator emphasises the role of Moses, Moberly goes on to suggest that the narrator has brought together a series of "firsts" that combined reinforce the impression of a new beginning focused on YHWH as a new name for God.¹⁸³

Moberly differs from the classical source critical position because he analyses Exodus 6 as a reassurance in the face of setbacks rather than a separate call narrative.¹⁸⁴ Further Moberly does not think the name YHWH was originally used in any of the patriarchal narratives, instead the name YHWH appears in these narratives because these stories have been told and retold from the perspective of Mosaic Yahwism.¹⁸⁵

Moberly argues that the practical difficulties faced by Moses in introducing the name to the Hebrews are not the concern of the writer of the text because the purpose of the text of Exod. 3:13-15 is to demonstrate that Israel came to know YHWH in the context of his

¹⁸¹ See for example: Driver, *The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version*, xix, 23.

¹⁸² Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 24.

¹⁸³ Moberly's "firsts" are: Moses' first encounter with God, Moses given unique access to the mind of God, Moses sent by God to speak in God's name, first reference to the mountain of God, first use of holiness in conjunction with God, first commissioning of a prophet, first formal encounter (imagined) of the people with the name of YHWH: *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 36; in this he was preceded by Wenham, who reached similar conclusions regarding the Genesis text in: Wenham, "The Religion of the Patriarchs"; From a different perspective Schmid concurs, seeing this as evidence that the Exodus and Ancestors traditions were separate prior to P: Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, e.g. 175-6.

sending of Moses to deliver them from Egypt.¹⁸⁶ For Moberly the “supposition that the people of Israel might perhaps have a problem about the identity of the deity who sent Moses if that deity’s name were not already familiar to them introduces a conceptual possibility surely alien to the Exodus writer”.¹⁸⁷ Moberly argues such a discernment of the identity of the deity speaking is foreign to the Old Testament, not because there is never a need to discern true and false prophecy, but because discernment concerns whether Israel’s God is speaking as opposed to the prophets own imagination, rather than whether a false god is speaking.¹⁸⁸

However, from the perspective of the Israelites, and of Moses, at this critical and early point in the nation’s history, there is a clear need to understand which of the gods around them is actually speaking to them. This was argued by Mowinckel, who made the point that the Israelite elders cannot be expected to recognise Moses, and will need some degree of confirmation.¹⁸⁹

Such a reading of Exodus 3 resonates with Deuteronomy 18:15-22, which discusses the prophet like Moses who will be raised up for the Israelites. In the context of that

¹⁸⁶ Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 65; A degree of artificiality in the scenario is also detected by Albertz, who argues that the scenario would make more sense if Moses was to go back and say “YHWH has sent me”, to which the Israelites would reply “who is YHWH?”, and Moses would then reply “the God of your fathers”; however, to make the theological point that YHWH’s appearance to Moses is the culmination of the appearances of God to the patriarchs the order is as it stands: Albertz, *Exodus 1-18*, 84.

¹⁸⁷ Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 63.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ “After an absence of several years the fugitive Moses returns, comes to his compatriots, first of all [of course] to their leaders, the chieftains and elders of the clan (3:16) and says: A god — or the God — has sent me to you to lead you out of Egypt, the house of bondage. Moses quite naturally foresees that they will not believe him with these words only. In some way or other he has to legitimize himself and his alleged mandator. In all likelihood their first natural response would be of the same nature as Pharaoh’s answer in 5:2: Which god? We do not know this god! Then Moses may have answered: It was the god of our (your) fathers, cf. 3-6, 13, 15, 16. Again the elders would ask: The god of our fathers, you say! But do you not know his name? Otherwise, how can we believe that it is He who has spoken to you and sent you? There are hundreds of gods, and among them there are also such as might be credited with the intention of deceiving you. Or you may have heard the voice or seen the vision of your own heart.” Mowinckel, “The Name of the God of Moses,” 122. One need follow neither the details of Mowinckel’s conclusions in the remainder of his article regarding a North West Sinai peninsula festival to YHWH for which Moses seeks to gain permission from Pharaoh, nor his arguments over the origin of the name itself in order to benefit from his reading of the narrative in its current form quoted here.

discussion Deuteronomy 18:20 states that either prophets may come speaking what they have not been commanded to speak (their own imaginations) or they may come speaking in the name of other gods. Deuteronomy 13:1-5 has a related concern that a prophet may come performing wonders, even prophesying of events, but leading the people after other gods. This makes Moberly's comment in the context of a discussion regarding Deuteronomy 13:1-5 somewhat problematic: "Other gods may not have their existence denied, but the possibility that they might speak to or within Israel or that they might be confused with YHWH is never entertained by any writer of the Old Testament".¹⁹⁰

However, if the focus remains on the narrative world of the text, the possibility is entirely conceivable that the Israelites could have been led astray by a prophet speaking words believed by the Israelites, and by the prophet, to come from those other gods. While the Old Testament writers may not believe in other gods speaking, Old Testament characters did, and this is the reason why Israelites are warned against people coming in the name of other gods in Deuteronomy 18.

Thus the reader may imagine a situation where Moses could be requesting a name previously unknown to him.¹⁹¹ This would provide a narrative way of supporting Moberly's contention that the question of Exod. 3:13 is about not only about the meaning of the name, but also about the name itself.¹⁹² The text itself could still have the concern, which Moberly argues is at the heart of Exodus 3:13-15, to demonstrate that Israel came to know YHWH in the context of Moses being sent to deliver them from Egypt.¹⁹³ One way of seeing how this might work is provided by Seitz.

¹⁹⁰ Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 63.

¹⁹¹ See Moberly's discussion in: *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁹³ See: *ibid.*, 65.

1.5.3. The Name YHWH Unknown to Moses, but Known to Israel

Seitz argues that the biblical writers do not have an idea of a time when the name was not known.¹⁹⁴ In relation to Exodus 3 he argues that the narrative up to chapter 2, culminating in Moses naming his son, has been concerned to demonstrate Moses' status as a foreigner, raising the question of how Moses would ever have heard of YHWH at all.¹⁹⁵ Seitz points out that as readers of Exodus 3:1-5 we know that YHWH is speaking to Moses, but he does not know this. God proceeds to talk about "my" people, and "their" cry, rather than "your" and "your"; Moses, Seitz suggests, is not yet identified with the people.¹⁹⁶ It is only in 3:12 that the people and Moses are identified together "you (plural) will worship God at this mountain".¹⁹⁷

In this light the request for a name is entirely natural. Moses, at least in his mind, comes to the people as a stranger, and they will not listen to someone who claims to speak for God yet does not know his name.¹⁹⁸ Seitz argues that God's explanation of the name in v14 is an interpretation of its significance, meaning that Moses now knows something that Israel does not know about the name.¹⁹⁹ This has, according to Seitz, three key purposes:

(1) to underscore Moses' special status; even as an outsider he is privy to special knowledge of God, involving attributes to which God's name points; (2) to reveal thereby to the reader something of the meaning of the name with which we are familiar, but only as a proper name as such; (3) to begin to suggest that who God is and has been heretofore is patient of enlargement.²⁰⁰

The close connection in the text of the name of God with the verb "to be" suggests that the divine name should be interpreted as "involving most especially God's presence with

¹⁹⁴ Seitz, "The Call of Moses and the 'Revelation' of the Divine Name," 150.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 151.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 152.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 153.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

Moses and the people in the events of redemption from bondage, and as such the account in 6:2-9 is anticipated.”²⁰¹

Seitz’s supposition that Israel knew the name but Moses did not is, at least as far as Moses is concerned, plausible based on the narrative of Exodus 1-3, where Moses is separated from his parents as a young child, with contact with his mother only when she is employed to nurse him (Exodus 2:1-10). It is important to see that Seitz’s point that YHWH’s expansive answer means that more is now known about YHWH than was before, and that there is more to know of YHWH than has been known up until this point in the narrative.²⁰² For Seitz it is in “in the deliverance out of Egypt and the destruction of his enemies he makes himself fully known as Yahweh.”²⁰³

This is an important point, but it is also important to at least raise the question of whether there may even be more fullness beyond the deliverance out of Egypt and destruction of his enemies. Exodus 3:12 has the sign to Moses that “you (pl.) will worship/serve YHWH on this mountain” while Exodus 3:16-22 mentions the land that is the ultimate goal. Therefore it is reasonable to take the whole period of Exodus from Egypt until Israel reach the Promised Land as a period in which YHWH makes his name known more fully to Israel through Moses.

If Seitz’s modification of Moberly’s position is taken seriously, then the resultant supposition is that Moses did not know the name, but that Israel did know the name of YHWH. The name in this position is therefore being used as essentially a test of Moses’ knowledge. A slightly different position is taken by den Hertog who suggests that Moses’

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² We will see below how YHWH’s initial response in 14a can lead to this conclusion.

²⁰³ Ibid.

question is asked against a background of many different divine names, with one particular name needed to validate the new mission of Moses.²⁰⁴

1.5.4. Moses' Question as asking which Divine Name should be used

Den Hertog begins his understanding of Moses' question by a consideration of other questions and responses about identity asked in theophanies: Genesis 32:20 and Judges 13:17. He argues that both these responses are not the rhetorical evasion that is sometimes thought; rather they are counter questions to aid the addressee become aware of the identity of the divine messenger.²⁰⁵ The implication is that the human should already know the answer and thus have no need to ask, or because the messenger is of such evidently superior rank it is not proper to ask; the question is thus to "correct and re-orientate the human protagonist".²⁰⁶

In Exodus 3:13-15 the situation is rather different. Moses places the question on the lips of the Israelites and there is no doubt over the divine status of the figure.²⁰⁷ Ultimately it will be the way that the question works within the narrative that will determine a final position on the question. Den Hertog points out that the narrative in 3:13-15 has three levels: Moses and God, Moses and the Israelites and the narrator and reader. Because of this, den Hertog suggests, the reader should not assume that Moses is hiding his question behind that of the Israelites; he may have a very real concern that he will be asked just this question.²⁰⁸ Den Hertog argues that the background to Moses' question is found in 2:13-14 where Moses' attempted deliverance is questioned by his own people.²⁰⁹ I have already noted den

²⁰⁴ Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 50.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 35–36.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 36–37.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁰⁹ Hertog cites Matthew Henry as an example of a pre-critical interpreter making a link that modern critics have missed: *Ibid.*, 66.

Hertog's stress on the role of Moses as a prophet, and he argues that since Moses is the first figure in the biblical narrative to be sent as a prophet he would require a way of convincing the Israelites.²¹⁰ Den Hertog sees the הוֹיִה of v14b as a new name, the divine first person counterpart to YHWH, in answer to Moses' request.²¹¹ He sees the background to the need for a name in the ancestral narratives of Genesis:

The multitude of divine names in these narratives indicates that the answer is not self-evident. It is in fact not completely obvious what is only a divine epithet, a byname and what a proper name, at least not on the level of direct discourse. The status of the name YHWH is also not clear, all the more because of its virtual absence from the last part of Genesis. On the other hand, complete ignorance of any divine name is not the most likely context of the request in Exod. 3:13. Against the background of the ancestral narratives it would be more probable to ask for God's most proper name among the many divine names, or alternatively for a new divine name that could cover his present appearance to Moses.²¹²

Thus a reading of the text as part of the larger narrative of the Primary History including Genesis requires that a proper consideration is given to the use of the divine name in Genesis.

1.5.5. The Divine Name in Genesis

According to Exodus 6:3 YHWH revealed himself to the patriarchs as "El Shaddai". There is no explanation given in Genesis regarding the meaning of this divine epithet, and the term is obscure to modern scholarship.²¹³ The fact that El Shaddai could be used as a divine epithet without its meaning being explained suggests that Moberly's contention that it makes no sense to speak of the name YHWH being used before its meaning is revealed may be somewhat overstated. Davies's discussion regarding names of ANE deities is important for our purposes here. Davies demonstrates that while a number of ANE deities did have names that reflected their essence (e.g. Anu or Shamash), for many others this had either been augmented with other characteristics (e.g. how Shamash came to be seen as the god of justice as well as the sun god in Mesopotamia) or been lost all together: "the name

²¹⁰ Ibid., 70.

²¹¹ Ibid., 70–71.

²¹² Ibid., 50.

²¹³ Davies, "The Exegesis of the Divine Name in Exodus," 140.

of the deity apparently conveyed little about its nature or function to those who used it.”²¹⁴ Davies argues that “the name may once have had a clear meaning but by the time the documents which we possess were written it was apparently no longer known or no longer relevant, because of the changes in religious belief or the adoption of a different language, for example.”²¹⁵ Thus the name YHWH could at one stage have been in use without a full understanding (or indeed a different understanding) of its meaning, particularly if, as den Hertog suggests the reader is supposed to understand YHWH as a name once known, but since fallen into disuse.²¹⁶

Moberly’s point that YHWH appears to be used in exactly the same way in Genesis as in Exodus may be a stronger one.²¹⁷ In particular he cites Genesis 15:7 which states:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים לְמַתְּ לֵךְ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת לְרִשְׁתָּהּ:

This matches very closely a statement like Exodus 20:2, with “Ur” replaced by “Egypt” in the formula:

אַנִּי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מִ... .

אַנִּכִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים:

Indeed Gordon Wenham observes that the other 22 times this formula is used in the Pentateuch it refers to Egypt.²¹⁸ Therefore Wenham concludes that this formula is used by the editor(s) of Genesis to make it clear that it was the same God who was responsible for both the departure from Egypt and Abraham being brought out of Ur.²¹⁹

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ See also Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 79–81; Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 37; John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, trans. Charles William Bingham, vol. 1, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1847), www.ccel.org.

²¹⁷ Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 66–67.

²¹⁸ Wenham, “The Religion of the Patriarchs,” 182.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

If Wenham and Moberly are correct to see the usages of YHWH in Genesis as later editorial updates to emphasise the identity of the God of the patriarchs, the reader would still need to understand why these updates appear to be fewer as the narrative goes on, and in particular why the use of YHWH appears to die out completely among the characters by the time the Joseph cycle is reached.²²⁰ One (admittedly speculative) possibility, in support of den Hertog's position, is that the implied reader may be intended to understand Abraham as knowing the name YHWH in the context of being brought out of Ur, but that this usage dies away during Genesis as God's main activity moves from bringing out to that of promise, blessing, and providing. It is the context of the Exodus which provides the full context for YHWH's name to be revealed and explained.

The interpretation of Exodus 6:3 has had some bearing on how Exodus 3 has been interpreted, with some scholars arguing the verse can be interpreted consistently with the belief that the name YHWH was in use in Genesis, while many argue that it demonstrates that the narrator of Exodus 6:3 did not believe the name YHWH was known before Moses.²²¹ For the purposes of the narrative of Exodus 3, however, the question can be set to one side because whether or not Moses' question means "what is your name because I do not know your name?" or "which name should I use to the Israelites out of the names from the stories of their ancestors?" it is still a request which expects to be answered by a name.

²²⁰ See the table in: *Ibid.*, 159.

²²¹ For a defense of the position that Exodus 6:3 does not present YHWH's name as previously unknown see: Motyer, *The Revelation of the Divine Name*; For the contrary position see: Wenham, "The Religion of the Patriarchs"; and most comprehensively see: Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*; by contrast Eslinger argues that the name has been used in Genesis, but that no one has ever known YHWH by the name YHWH, that is to say no-one has known that "I am YHWH": Lyle M. Eslinger, "Knowing Yahweh : Exod 6:3 in the Context of Genesis 1 - Exodus 15," in *Literary Structure and Rhetorical Strategies in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. L.J. de Regt, Jan de Waard, and J.P. Fokkelman (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1996), 188–98.

Therefore YHWH's question to Moses is re-orientating Moses away from the idea that Moses simply needs to know the most appropriate name to use, and towards giving Moses more detail about what the name means. It is difficult to determine from the perspective of the reader if the name YHWH was known prior to Moses, but this does not in fact bear on the meaning of Moses' question, because Moses is not initially asking what the name means, he wants to know what name he should be using to refer to God when he speaks to the Israelites. Exodus 6:3 suggests that the key name in relation to the patriarchs was El Shaddai, itself a slightly mysterious name. The bringing to use of the name YHWH draws the reader of the text back to Genesis 15:1 "I am YHWH, who brought you out from..." and perhaps to Genesis 22 also "YHWH sees". Taken together the actions of YHWH in bringing out and seeing a need represent what YHWH is doing in Exodus. Thus the name YHWH is an appropriate one to use in this context. In Exodus 3:14-15 YHWH's initial response suggests that there is more to know about this God as the narrative progresses.

1.6. MOSES AND YHWH: A DEFINING RELATIONSHIP

In his extensive study of Exodus 3 and 6 in relation to the patriarchal traditions Moberly writes:

This dimension of Israel's traditions – that whatever Israel knows about the name of God, it knows only through the mediation of Moses to whom alone a direct self-revelation of God has been given – should be taken seriously by the interpreter. Yet all too often the theological significance of Moses' access to the mind of God has become skewed by other interests.²²²

He follows this comment by criticising both those who read the text determined to defend the full, straightforward, historicity of the text as it stands, and those who read the text seeking to find the underlying origins of Israel's knowledge of God that stand beneath or behind the text.²²³ A full discussion of how the figure of Moses has been interpreted over

²²² Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 15.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 15–16.

the last century is beyond the scope of this study. A comprehensive overview of scholarship up to the 1980s can be found in Coats, and more recent useful overviews in Danny Mathews's discussion of Moses' portrayal in the Pentateuch and Stefan Kürle's *The Appeal of Exodus*.²²⁴ For our purposes Moberly's key point is made in the following sentence:

the point here is simply that, unless the role Moses has in the text is given full imaginative significance by the interpreter, without being too quickly pressed into historical categories of one kind or other, the nature and concerns of the Exodus 3 tradition will not be accurately appreciated.²²⁵

In this study my focus is on this role, and in particular on the dialogues between Moses and YHWH as being a key way to portray the character of YHWH. The importance of this particular focus on the relationship-in-dialogue is seen in a consideration of how Exodus 3:12 and 3:14 relate.

Exodus 3:12

וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ

Exodus 3:14

כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְיֶה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם

Exodus 3:12 is addressed directly to Moses, and is YHWH's affirmation that he will be with Moses. Here it should be noted that the verb "to be" is not strictly "necessary", אֲנִי עִמָּךְ would be sufficient to convey the sense of divine presence, and thus its inclusion strengthens our contention that 3:12 and 3:14 are intimately connected. Moses is to speak the words YHWH tells him to in 3:14b to the Israelites, beginning with the same verb "I will be" as 3:12 but instead of affirming the divine presence, the words affirm the divine sending of Moses.

²²⁴ George W Coats, *Moses: Heroic Man, Man of God*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 57 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 11–34; Danny Mathews, *Royal Motifs in the Pentateuchal Portrayal of Moses*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament studies (New York: T & T Clark, 2012), 28–43; Stefan Kürle, *The Appeal of Exodus: The Characters God, Moses and Israel in the Rhetoric of the Book of Exodus*, Paternoster biblical monographs (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013), 125–148.

²²⁵ Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 16.

Polak asserts that “I will be with you” in v12, “I will be” in v14a and 14b and “YHWH” in v15 are all in the same “symbolic category”.²²⁶ He further argues that “I have sent you” in v12, “who I will be” in 14a and “has sent me to you” in 14b and 15 stand in a similar relationship.²²⁷ From this he concludes that the name YHWH means “I will be with you” and “has sent me to you”, and “symbolises divine action for the sake of his people”.²²⁸ He asserts that “the structure of the response אֶשְׁרָא אִתְּךָ אֵלֹהִים turns this idea into a general and absolute principle without any limitations whatsoever. The certainty of divine succour is implied in God’s very name.”²²⁹ This final stage in Polak’s argument is questionable in the light of the analysis of the *idem per idem* construction above where I noted that a nuance of indeterminacy was still compatible with the idea of divine presence. A preferable way to state the argument would be to say that the structure of the response turns this idea into an absolute principle with no limitations other than those chosen by YHWH; the unstoppable nature of divine succour is implied in God’s very name.

This reservation notwithstanding, Polak’s valuable analysis of the parallels within 3:12-15 strengthens the importance already demonstrated by Moberly and den Hertog of the sending of Moses. An implication not drawn by Polak is the possibility here that the divine presence should be seen as manifested to Israel by the sending of Moses, particularly if 3:8 and 3:10 are compared: “I have come down” and “go! I will send you...” The name of God is revealed in 3:15 once God’s presence with Moses and therefore with his people has been strongly affirmed. The name YHWH is therefore inextricably linked to

²²⁶ Frank H. Polak, “Theophany and Mediator : The Unfolding of a Theme in the Book of Exodus,” in *Studies in the Book of Exodus*, ed. Marc Vervenne (Leuven: Leuven Univ Pr, 1996), 113–147, p123.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

his presence with his people through the one he sends in order to deliver them out of bondage.

1.7. CONCLUSIONS: EXODUS 3:13-15

I have surveyed a number of different approaches to understanding the meaning of the name YHWH, and in particular the critical sentence: אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה. I have placed the sentence in its immediate context of Exodus 3:13-15 as an answer to Moses' question. I have concluded that den Hertog's category of "re-orientating response" has much to favour it, and that this together with Sonnet's "initiating narrative", provides a stimulus towards investigating the narrative of Exodus in order to understand more precisely the role of this response in an understanding of the divine name. I have argued too that Moberly's statement regarding the importance of the portrayal of Moses is supported by an examination of Exodus 3:14b in relation to Exodus 3:12, which begin to demonstrate how closely YHWH ties his presence with Israel to Moses. This demonstrates the importance of a study of the dialogues between YHWH and Moses in order to deepen our understanding of the name YHWH.

In the conclusions of his study of Exodus 3:13-15 den Hertog points out that the divine name is proclaimed and explained in four places in Exodus: 3:14-15; 6:3; 33:19; and 34:5-7.²³⁰ To these one could also add that it is proclaimed and explained to a greater or lesser degree in 15:3; 20:1-7; and 34:14.²³¹ For den Hertog's four examples he points out that each of them plays a part in key narratives of Exodus, in which "a central question is who and how God is, and therefore the verses related to the divine name play a pivotal part within these narratives."²³²

²³⁰ Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 130.

²³¹ See also: Davies, "The Exegesis of the Divine Name in Exodus," 152-3.

²³² Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 131.

To this I would add that each of these narratives is one in which Moses plays a critical role as mediator and speaker of God's words, and in which Moses and YHWH are portrayed as speaking to one another. Thus a close reading of the dialogues between Moses and YHWH in Exodus in order to better understand how YHWH is portrayed as revealing his name is very important. I will turn now to outline our methodology for this analysis.

Chapter 2 Methodology

2.1. INTRODUCTION: READING NARRATIVE

In the previous chapter I reviewed approaches to Exodus 3:13-15 and concluded that because of the great importance given to Moses by YHWH, and because of the fact that the vast majority of YHWH's declarations of his name come to Moses, and through Moses to Israel, that a useful method of gaining a fuller understanding of what it means for YHWH to declare אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה to Moses would be to read the narratives of the dialogues between YHWH and Moses.

In this chapter I will outline a strategy for a close reading of the narratives of the dialogues between YHWH and Moses. In order to do this an approach to reading narrative in general, and the biblical narrative in particular will be outlined. I will examine how God as a character has been read both by those approaching the text with a narrative approach and those reading from within the discipline of Old Testament Theology. This will enable me to argue that the character of God needs to be read in a somewhat different way from other characters within the OT narrative, by virtue of his divinity and by virtue of the implied reader's pre-understanding of God.

Following this I will argue that an analysis of the dialogues has a vital importance for a close reading of the narratives of the dialogues. I will show that the relationships portrayed by dialogue are a vital part of any characterisation, and none more so than that between Moses and YHWH in the context of the ongoing revelation of the divine name. I will argue that applications made by biblical scholars and scholars of narratives from the sociological and linguistic field of Conversation Analysis can be utilised in assisting my narrative

reading. I do not argue that this analysis provides a comprehensive method for reading dialogues, but rather that applications from this analysis can enhance a narrative reading of the dialogues, and that the proof of this will be seen in an exegesis of the relevant texts. Finally I will conclude by outlining the method for the exegesis of the key sections of the book of Exodus which will follow this chapter.

A “close reading” of the text recognises that the reading process is a complex one, involving interaction between the text and reader. We need the essential awareness that we are reading ancient documents and therefore require a certain degree of appropriate “literary competence”.²³³ Further I will assume that there is a relationship between text and reader which gives an important role to the reader in the reading process.²³⁴ Phyllis Tribble’s discussion of rhetorical criticism makes use of Paul Ricoeur’s suggestive image of a reading of the text as somewhat akin to the playing of a musical score, permitting a variety of possible readings, but not an unlimited number.²³⁵ There are differences between texts and even between different sections within texts regarding the leeway given to the reader in producing meanings, with some texts assuming a more active reader than others.²³⁶

In this study I will adopt a narrative approach, informed by practitioners of rhetorical criticism. Thus some attention is needed to definitions. Essentially the starting point will be the model outlined by Seymour Chatman, and utilised effectively by Adele Berlin and Barbara Green (amongst others) in the area of Biblical studies, of the pairings of “author-

²³³ John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 16.

²³⁴ See discussion of reader response theory in: Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Pub. House, 1992), 517.

²³⁵ Phyllis Tribble, *Rhetorical Criticism: Context, Method and the Book of Jonah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 98; Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer, vol. 3, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 167.

²³⁶ Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, The Charles Eliot Norton lectures 1993 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994), 16–17.

reader”, “implied author-implied reader” and “narrator-narratee”.²³⁷ In terms of reading the narrative of Exodus I will not enter the discussions related to identifying the “real author” or authors of the book. This was a major emphasis of classic source criticism which has so far led to no consensus view.²³⁸

In relation to the implied author-reader pairing there are differing positions over whether there is one implied author of a particular biblical book or the possibility of several.²³⁹

This is different to the discussion over sources and redactors. It is possible that a redactor could combine sources in such a way that a text speaks with the voice of a single implied author and conversely it is possible that one author could write different sections of text to give two very different pictures of an author. In the biblical narrative of the book of

²³⁷ Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca ; London: Cornell University Press, 1978), 148–151; and discussion in: Barbara Green, *What Profit for Us?: Remembering the Story of Joseph* (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1996), 5–6.

²³⁸ From Wellhausen’s modifications of the documentary hypothesis until the latter half of the twentieth century it was common, with just a few dissenting voices, to see the Pentateuch as a document finally compiled in the post-exilic period. See for example: Driver, *The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version*; Noth, *Exodus*; Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*; But see dissenting voices of: Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*; Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*. Under the classic documentary hypothesis, the earliest source was the Yahwist “J”, probably writing in the south, possibly in the reign of Solomon, closely followed by the Elohist “E” in the north, probably early in the period of the divided monarchy. The Deuteronomist author “D” followed in the reformation of Josiah, while sometime in the exilic or early post exilic period the priestly writer “P” wrote his account and the four sources were combined in the era of Ezra. A general movement was discerned from the anthropomorphic “primitive” theology of J to a more distant, transcendent picture of God in P: Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J.A. Baker, vol. 1, 2 vols., Old Testament library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), 218. For the collapse of the consensus see: Rolf Rendtorff, “The ‘Yahwist’ as Theologian : Dilemma of Pentateuchal Criticism,” *JSTOT*, no. 3 (1977): 2–45; Championing a revised version of “J” as the key figure is: John Van Seters, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994); For differing perspectives on a deuteronomist and priestly author/redactors (and post-priestly redactions) see: Thomas B. Dozeman, “The Authorship of the Pentateuch,” *Dialogue* 32, no. 4 (1999): 87–112; Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid, eds., *A Farewell to the Yahwist?: The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation*, Society of Biblical Literature symposium series no. 34 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2006); Erhard Blum, *Studien Zur Komposition Des Pentateuch*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 189 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990); Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*; championing the classic documentary hypothesis is Baden in (e.g.): Joel S. Baden, “From Joseph to Moses: The Narratives of Exodus 1-2,” *VT* 62, no. 2 (2012): 133–58; For an up to date discussion of current proposals see: Jaeyoung Jeon, *The Call of Moses and the Exodus Story : A Redactional-Critical Study in Exodus 3-4 and 5-13* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013).

²³⁹ For the idea that there are different implied authors for different sections of Genesis see: Green, *What Profit for Us?*, 5–6; by contrast Sternberg comes close to arguing for one implied author (“the biblical narrator”) of the entire Primary History, see: Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana literary biblical series (Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press, 1985), 71–75.

Exodus a single implied author of the text will be assumed, unless there is good reason to suspect differently.²⁴⁰

In terms of narrative theory there is also some discussion over the relation of implied author to narrator within biblical narrative.²⁴¹ In general I will assume that the biblical narrator can be said to be “reliable”, that is to say, his portrayals of events and characters reflects that of the implied author. In our reading I will seek to come as close as possible to the reader implied by the text, usually since Iser described as “implied reader”, although Umberto Eco’s “model reader” is a similar entity.²⁴²

I will assume that the implied reader of Exodus is also the implied reader of at least the Primary History. I assume that this reader would have a basic knowledge of Israel’s history, as well as some awareness of at least some other biblical narrative.

This “close reading” will be informed by various aspects of narrative analysis. Each dialogue will be analysed in terms of the role it plays within the narrative discourse, paying careful attention to the way in which discourse and story relate in terms of time (order, duration and frequency), “spatial features”, plot, characterisation and point of view, and the impact this produces on the implied reader.²⁴³ Helmut Utzschneider, in his illuminating study of Exodus 1-14 *Gottes langer Atem* draws our attention (drawing on Martin Buber’s work) also to the importance of the concept of *Leitworte* in perceiving the meaning of a

²⁴⁰ This appears to be the position adopted by: Kürle, *Appeal*, 12.

²⁴¹ Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 71.

²⁴² Although there are subtle differences between the two, see: Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, 16.

²⁴³ Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, Bible and literature series 9 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), especially 43–82; Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 151–161; Boris Andreevich Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form*, trans. Valentina Zavarin and Susan Wittig (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 480.

text.²⁴⁴ Thus I will also be alert to key repetitions of words and roots that illuminate the text for us.

2.2. READING THE CHARACTER OF YHWH

2.2.1. Overview of Approaches to YHWH as a Character

A key aspect of characterisation in Exodus which requires special consideration is how YHWH is characterised in the book, and it is to this that I will now turn. In the last thirty years or so there has been an increasing amount of study on reading the biblical narratives as literature.²⁴⁵ However, with some exceptions many of the standard works on literary approaches to the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible focus around sections of the text thought particularly congenial to a study of the narrative art (Genesis and Samuel feature particularly highly), while other sections of the narrative receive much less investigation.²⁴⁶ In particular, sections of the narrative relating to YHWH and his character have received proportionally less attention.²⁴⁷

From those who have paid attention to YHWH's character there are essentially two contrasting approaches. The first considers YHWH as a character in the same essential

²⁴⁴ Helmut Utzschneider, *Gottes langer Atem: Die Exoduserzählung (Ex 1-14) in ästhetischer und historischer sicht*, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 166 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1996), 17.

²⁴⁵ For example: Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*; Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*; Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, Bible and literature series v.17 (Sheffield: Almond, 1989); David J. A. Clines, David M. Gunn, and Alan J. Hauser, eds., *Art and Meaning: Rhetoric in Biblical Literature*, Journal for the study of the Old Testament 19 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1982); David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford University Press, 1993); David J. A. Clines, "God in the Pentateuch: Reading against the Grain," in *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, Gender, culture, theory 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 187–211; Green, *What Profit for Us?: W. Lee Humphreys, The Character of God in the Book of Genesis: A Narrative Appraisal* (Louisville, Ke: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Barbara Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship*, Society of Biblical Literature. Semeia Studies no. 38 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000); Sarah Leblhar Hall, *Conquering Character: The Characterization of Joshua in Joshua 1-11* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010).

²⁴⁶ An examination of the scripture reference indexes of many of the works cited above should demonstrate this point; see for example: Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*; Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*; Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*.

²⁴⁷ For example neither Alter's nor Berlin's excellent books discuss the portrayal of God: Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*; Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*.

narrative category as other characters. The second considers YHWH as belonging in some sense to a separate category from the other characters and thus needing to be read in a different way. In my examination of the first category I will argue that there are some aspects of the narrative which are not dealt with well by this understanding. I will argue that a combination of insights from literary and theological perspectives lead to an understanding that the character of YHWH in the Biblical narrative stands somewhat apart from other characters because he is an already known entity, even as the implied reader's understanding of YHWH is reshaped by the YHWH of the narrative. I will begin with an examination of the views of those who see YHWH as a character in the same category as other characters.

2.2.2. YHWH among Other Characters

A summary of this approach is provided in an essay by David Clines who, analysing the way that God is talked about in Biblical narrative, suggests that a portrayal of God can be built up from three kinds of data: "The first is what the character God says about himself, the second is what the narrator says about him, and the third is what the narrator depicts him as doing and saying."²⁴⁸ For Clines the words of God are placed in "the mouth of the character God by the narrator, and behind the narrator, by the author", and hence occupy no special place above the words of the narrator.²⁴⁹

The same essential position is put forward by Lyle Eslinger who tackles the same question from the perspective of narrative theory in dealing with Exodus 1-15, asserting that:

There is a hierarchy of ontology and epistemology from the level of the narrator, who is external to the story world, untouched and unconditioned by it, down to the level of the characters, including God, who are stuck fast and firm within the limitations of their respective positions in their story environment. Evaluation of events from the subordinate level of the characters is relative to the conditions of their existence within the story, whereas assessment

²⁴⁸ Clines, "God in the Pentateuch: Reading against the Grain," 187.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

from the external, unconditioned narrator is relative only to the situation from which the narrator speaks.²⁵⁰

Furthermore, “we readers are addressed by the author only through the external, unconditioned narrator who is relating the story, the author’s own creation.”²⁵¹ For Eslinger the narrator is supreme over all his characters, including God, and “God gives no indication of any knowledge of the narrator”.²⁵²

In this approach any picture of God is built up one text at a time, seeking to read as if for the first time. In his article Clines does not aim at providing a “unified and coherent portrayal of the God depicted in the Pentateuch”, but rather at showing the different materials that contribute to the overall picture.²⁵³ Clines distinguishes clearly the God in the text from the God who is “worshipped and theologised about”.²⁵⁴ Clines argues that the God portrayed in the text of the Pentateuch is a character in a novel-like work, distinct from any real God behind the text and that therefore one needs to keep the distinction between any real God and the God of the text clear.²⁵⁵ Likewise in his reading of the character of God in Genesis, W. Lee Humphreys makes a clear distinction between the God who is depicted in the text and any “real God” behind the text. He discusses the pull that many readers of Genesis may feel to bring coherence and consistency between the two.²⁵⁶ Humphreys seeks to read as a first-time reader, setting aside the claims of theologians regarding any identity between the God in Genesis and the God worshipped and obeyed.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁰ Lyle M. Eslinger, “Freedom or Knowledge : Perspective and Purpose in the Exodus Narrative (Exodus 1-15),” *JSOT*, no. 52 (1991): 47–48.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 48–49.

²⁵³ Clines, “God in the Pentateuch: Reading against the Grain,” 188.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 190–1.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 190–191.

²⁵⁶ Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis*, 17.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

Such an approach has some parallels to that of Walter Brueggemann in his *Old Testament Theology*. In Brueggemann's *Theology* he aims to simply deal with the Yahweh in the biblical text "a text at a time", guided by the question: "How does ancient Israel, in this text, speak about God?"²⁵⁸ He observes that there is much of God's speech but even here it is "Israel's testimony that God has spoken so."²⁵⁹ Brueggemann sets aside any ontological or historical claims in order to do this,²⁶⁰ and in essence is therefore applying Clines' and Humphreys' methods on a large scale.

However such an approach fails to consider that YHWH's status as God might impact on how his speech, and speech about him or to him, should be read within the narrative. Hugh White develops a theory of how the "divine Voice" breaks into the world of the narrative from outside the text and applies this theory to the book of Genesis.²⁶¹ White's proposal is particularly interesting for its suggestion that the narrator's function is split between author and "divine Voice" with the author subject, just as the characters are, to the divine Voice or Word.²⁶² For White author and characters inhabit the same narrative world because the divine Voice breaks the distinction between the world of the characters and the world of the author.²⁶³ White's proposal does not need to be fully agreed with in order to appreciate that the idea that God's character is just one among other characters needs justification rather than simply being assumed.

In direct response to Brueggemann's *Theology of the Old Testament*, Fretheim considers that the narrative concept of "point of view" would suggest that words spoken by God

²⁵⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 117.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 118.

²⁶¹ See discussion in: Hugh C. White, *Narration and Discourse in the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 99–106.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 102–105.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 105–106.

could have a distinctive role to play in the text.²⁶⁴ Boris Uspensky's work on point of view through characters suggests that the (implied) author could make the perspectives and viewpoints of the character of God and the narrator distinct.²⁶⁵ Any study of characterisation of God in the narrative therefore needs to take the possibility of a distinctive ideological perspective in the speech of God seriously.

From a more theological perspective Fretheim argues that there must be some difference in speaking about God because all language about God is analogical, and therefore there is both a "yes and a no with respect to human analogies".²⁶⁶ He asks the question "is not the distinction between the textual God and the actual God somewhat different from the textual-actual distinction with the other characters? Does not the narrative itself present God as one who transcends the narrative in ways distinct from other characters?"²⁶⁷

In the consideration of the Exodus narrative I will at various points consider how far a statement about YHWH in the text is to be pressed literally and further whether the implied reader is regarded as having knowledge about YHWH and his actions that is different to other characters within the story. This brings us on to the next section in the argument.

2.2.3. YHWH in Distinct Category to Other Characters

I now turn to the perspectives of those who consider YHWH a character in a somewhat different light to other characters in the narrative. Under this heading I will argue that it makes sense to consider YHWH as a character who the implied reader is assumed to know already, in some sense at least. I will then consider two possible areas of misreading for the modern reader if this concept is pressed too far.

²⁶⁴ Terence E. Fretheim, "Some Reflections on Brueggemann's God," in *God in the Fray*, ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy K Beal (Minneapolis: Fortress Pr, 1998), 24–37, p35.

²⁶⁵ Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition*, 12–13.

²⁶⁶ Fretheim, "Some Reflections on Brueggemann's God," 36.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

2.2.3.1. YHWH Already Known

Meir Sternberg argues from a literary perspective that the character of God plays a distinct role in the narrative. For Sternberg there is a distinctive “poetics of biblical narrative”, centred on the portrayal of God. While in narratives more generally there is an “authoritative teller”, and “fallible characters”, the portrayal of God in the biblical narrative cuts across this division.²⁶⁸ God, Sternberg asserts, “figures as both inspiring originator and individual viewpoint, as object and subject of representation, as maker of plot and agent, as means and end, as part and reason for the whole.”²⁶⁹

Sternberg argues that in the Bible God is never introduced as such, but his reality is simply assumed, beginning with his words in Genesis 1.²⁷⁰ The biblical narrator, Sternberg explains, writes to those who are assumed to understand this God to be the God of their fathers and so the narrator avoids the awkwardness of introducing God by assuming his readers’ knowledge, but works to refine their perception of God piece by piece as the narrative progresses.²⁷¹

This view of God as one already known to the implied reader has some similarity to that expressed by Childs in his *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*:

The Old Testament assumes the reality of God. Because he has established a relationship with his creation, the Old Testament never speculates on the possibility of what Israel testifies already to have experienced. ... In sum, there is no place in time, either Israel’s or our own, from which one begins from scratch to develop an understanding of God.²⁷²

Childs and Sternberg are agreed that the Old Testament picture of God is not one given to anyone for the first time. It is always received by those who already know to some degree this God. This appears to be a fundamentally different sort of approach to the Old

²⁶⁸ Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 131.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 153.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 322.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 322–323.

²⁷² Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (London: SCM, 1985), 29.

Testament than that of those who seek to read the Old Testament as if for the first time. An examination of the Exodus narrative supports this understanding; when instructions for the Passover are given through Moses they are to be passed on to the Israelites' children, and on to their children, so that the story is continually retold. The implied reader of the text presumably stands as one of those hearing the retelling of the story.²⁷³ Therefore it is reasonable that the reader of these narratives today should ask what is already known of God in the rest of the Old Testament when approaching individual texts.

2.2.3.2. YHWH's Character Assumed

One area, however, where caution is needed with regard to the concept of a YHWH who is already known before the text is read is in assumptions that may be made regarding how the text can be read. Sternberg provides an example of this when he argues that since God is both omniscient and omnipotent then if the text read literally portrays a God who is not omniscient, or omnipotent, an alternative explanation must be found. Therefore Sternberg asserts that God is, for example, pretending ignorance to Cain for rhetorical effect, and further that for God there are no information seeking questions, only rhetorical ones.²⁷⁴

Sternberg claims that if God's omniscience and omnipotence are denied because of taking the narrative literally the resulting portrayal of God in the biblical narrative is one where God is shown as "more than human but less than superhuman".²⁷⁵ This God, Sternberg argues, is a being who is in all places, but whose knowledge and power are limited, resulting in a "logical monster". Sternberg argues instead that the rhetoric of the biblical narrator leads to the conclusion that these examples (i.e. God pretending ignorance to

²⁷³ There is also the occurrence of the etiological notes of the form "and it is called ... to this day" which place the implied reader in the world of the text.

²⁷⁴ Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 159. I have chosen the examples of omniscience and omnipotence purely because these are explicitly mentioned by Sternberg in this discussion; there are no doubt other characteristics which could also be discussed.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 180.

Cain) are choices made for the sake of “divine performance and communication”.²⁷⁶

While this has some plausibility, the danger is that preconceived ideas of God’s character become the dominant factor in reading the texts.

One way to avoid this danger and to take seriously the world of the biblical narrative for defining God’s character is to utilise John Goldingay’s more textually grounded approach. He suggests that “our understanding of omnipotence must be determined by who God is, rather than vice versa. We do not first determine the nature of omnipotence and assume it applies to God; we determine who God is and work out what omnipotence is when this being exercises it.”²⁷⁷ Goldingay defines omnipotence as YHWH being able to do whatever YHWH wants to do.²⁷⁸ Likewise his discussion of omniscience argues not that YHWH automatically knows everything simply by virtue of his being, but that YHWH can find out whatever he wants to and that he has limitless access to knowledge.²⁷⁹

2.2.3.3. YHWH’s Possibilities Limited

A further possibility of misreading occurs when later theological reflection is read too quickly into the text. One instructive example of this is in a discussion in Rolf Rendtorff’s *Old Testament Theology*, where he writes:

No one can know what God is really like. People can experience God in different ways: his creative and formative power, but also his judging and destructive power, his affection and his nearness, his security and his absence. And they can bring these experiences to expression. They can say how they imagine God and his actions and can depict him in language and also in visible images.²⁸⁰

Here “people” presumably means the Old Testament characters that interact with God, and the people in the world of the Old Testament. Rendtorff follows Brueggemann in asserting

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 181.

²⁷⁷ John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel’s Faith*, vol. 2, 3 vols., Old Testament Theology (Downer’s Grove, Ill: Inter Varsity Press, 2006), 65.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 2:64–67.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 2:69–71.

²⁸⁰ Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament*, Tools for biblical study series 7 (Leiden: Deo Pub, 2005), 609.

that Israel “expresses its experiences with God” in “speech about God” which the biblical authors express in third person form in speech about God, in second person form in speech towards God, and in first person form as divine speech, which remains the speech of Israel.²⁸¹

The danger inherent in such an approach is that it misses one very obvious point: the biblical narrator portrays God as one who speaks directly to people. In other words, while the modern reader of the text will often read from a position that portrayals of God speaking must be portrayals of an experience interpreted as divine speech this was not the position of the biblical narrator, who tells of God participating in conversation as a person, at least in the book of Exodus to Moses.

One particular example is in Rendtorff’s discussion of God’s anger: “when we read that God is angry, this means that humans experience God as angry, or more precisely, they experience something that they understand, or try to understand, as God’s anger.”²⁸² A study of the relevant texts which describe YHWH’s anger, however, demonstrate that, for the narrator, YHWH’s anger is described, and perceived by a particular event attributed to YHWH. Sometimes this event was immediate, but at other times the display of YHWH’s anger could be delayed (Exodus 4:14, 2 Kings 23:26 and Job 42:7). One could say that the text’s assumption is that something happened which the people involved understood as YHWH’s anger, but such an assumption does not come from the text. Rather the biblical narrative describes YHWH’s anger as sometimes leading YHWH to take particular actions.

Thus one needs to take seriously that the biblical narrators are not simply describing supposed human experiences of the divine, but describing a God who speaks and interacts

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² Ibid., 622.

with people directly. The modern reader may or may not agree with this, but to understand the portrayal of the God of whom the text speaks it is necessary to accept this feature of the biblical discourse in order to enter the biblical world.²⁸³

2.2.3.4. Conclusions Regarding YHWH as a Distinctive Category of Character

Thus a reading of YHWH as somehow distinct from other characters must not lead the reader too quickly away from the narrative descriptions of YHWH. In this reading of the texts I will seek to bear in mind Fretheim's reminder that all language about God is ultimately analogical, but also that the language used in the narrative does communicate something about how the narrator intended to portray YHWH. I will seek to avoid readings that too quickly flatten YHWH's character in the interests of harmonisation with either Christian tradition or other biblical texts, but at the same time will not assume that every statement about YHWH must be taken absolutely literally.

2.3. Conclusions regarding YHWH in Narrative

In conclusion the character of YHWH in Exodus needs to be read in close dialogue with the portrayal of YHWH in the rest of the biblical canon, and in an awareness of both what the implied reader already knows of YHWH and the real reader's assumptions regarding God's character. The implied reader of the narratives is one who sees these narratives as their history, telling the story which reveals the God who has acted in their past to save and redeem them. Our reading of the narrative therefore needs to be aware of the knowledge about YHWH that the implied author and implied reader of the narrative assume from the rest of the Old Testament.

²⁸³ Sternberg's argument regarding the nature of the Biblical narrative as historiography is important: "if as seekers for the truth, professional or amateur, we can take or leave the truth claim of inspiration, then as readers we simply must take it - just like any other biblical premise or convention ... or else invent our own text." Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 33–34.

It is not possible simply to read “God” or “YHWH” and apply modern categories of how God is expected to act, and neither can the categories of an ANE reader be applied without qualification to understand how God is expected to act. Equally God’s character cannot simply be read one character amongst others whose behaviour can be read in an entirely straightforward manner. Rather when the character of God appears in the text the question will be asked: how does this behaviour or character description align with the implied reader’s pre-understanding of God, and how does it align with a modern reader’s pre-understanding? Having asked that question, how far and to what extent the reader is drawn to change their pre-understanding of how God works or how God is must also be investigated, along with the extent the reader is drawn to bring already existing assumptions regarding God’s character into the reading of the text.²⁸⁴

Particularly important for dialogue purposes is the concept that YHWH is a God who speaks on a personal level with his chosen messengers and mediators, and in the case of Exodus particularly with Moses. A key part of this study of the dialogues between Moses and YHWH will therefore be the speeches of YHWH that are contained within these narratives. However I will be particularly alert to the narrative portrayal of these speeches within a set of dialogues and therefore I will now develop a method for reading dialogue in narrative.

2.4. READING DIALOGUE

2.4.1. The Importance of Dialogue

In discussions of characterisation within narrative, dialogue does not always feature highly or, at least, is not always discussed specifically. One important exception for our study is

²⁸⁴ This process is informed by Stiver’s insightful analysis of Ricoeur’s mimetic arc. This provides a way to understand how the knowledge of the reader and the text can fruitfully interact: Dan R. Stiver, *Theology after Ricoeur: New Directions in Hermeneutical Theology*, 1st ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 67–76.

Humphreys' study of Genesis, which does draw attention to the importance of the relationships between characters.²⁸⁵ Humphreys draws on Robert Alter's work concerning characterisation in the biblical narrative and also more widely from Chatman regarding character traits and characterisation. He adds to these his own comments on the importance of the portrayal of relationships between characters; in particular drawing on the concept of "interdividuality" (that the relationships of the characters in the narrative define them in basic ways) from Mikhail Bakhtin's work to develop his understanding of how the God of Genesis is portrayed.²⁸⁶ David McCracken, in a discussion about the large number of biblical narratives that centre on a challenge or dialogue between two characters, suggests that:

In these moments we have characters existing in the boundary between themselves and another. We know some things about these characters, but the heart of the drama in each case lies not in the traits that define an essential character, not in some typical essence that is revealed in the next moment, but rather in what happens between what we usually call characters.²⁸⁷

This is particularly important in the light of the biblical portrayal of the dialogues between Moses and YHWH. I will show in our analysis of Exodus 32-34 that Moses is portrayed as having a unique face to face access to YHWH, in which he speaks as a man would to a friend. Jacqueline Lapsley observes that "face to face" is usually used of divine-human encounters rather than human-human, and that these encounters are "intense, dramatic, and fraught with danger", and yet that the following phrase "evokes the ordinariness of everyday conversations between people", and thus "A highly unusual, dangerous experience has become a customary, everyday occurrence."²⁸⁸ Thus when the nature of these dialogues is examined careful attention must be given to both the "ordinary" nature

²⁸⁵ Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis*, 13.

²⁸⁶ See discussion in: *Ibid.*, 7–17.

²⁸⁷ David McCracken, "Character in the Boundary: Bakhtin's Interdividuality in Biblical Narratives," *Semeia*, no. 63 (1993): 29–42, p32.

²⁸⁸ Jacqueline E. Lapsley, "Friends with God? Moses and the Possibility of Covenantal Friendship," *Int* 58, no. 2 (2004): 117–129, p120.

of the dialogues as “everyday conversations” and the “intense drama” of the dialogues as divine-human encounters.

We should expect to find ways in which these dialogues are like everyday conversation at points, and other points where there is a large difference. Just as I have noted that in some ways YHWH is portrayed in a similar manner to other characters, and yet in other ways is not, so in some ways the dialogues will be like a conversation, and in other ways there will be a difference. The exact nature of the differences will only be delimited as the study progresses. Because reading narrative of dialogue has not received sustained attention in Biblical Studies (with some exceptions referred to below) I now turn to outline my approach, which utilises insights from studies of “real life” dialogue and conversation to aid a reading of the narrative.

2.4.2. The Usefulness of Socio-Linguistic Theories for Narrative Reading

There has been a recent move amongst some scholars to make use of various aspects of sociological and socio-linguistic theories in the reading of Old Testament Narrative.²⁸⁹

Victor Matthews reminds us that:

full competence in the use of a language or the modes of communication recognised within a particular culture includes knowing how to initiate and manage conversations and how to negotiate meaning with other people. It also includes knowing what sorts of body language, eye contact and proximity to other people are appropriate so that a person acts accordingly.²⁹⁰

Of course a written text can never reproduce the detail of a recording of an actual conversation, but it may well include information in the narrative in addition to simply the words or summaries of the words spoken. Matthews writes:

Given the restraints imposed by written dialogue, the reader must be careful to examine such narrative techniques as the use of metaphors and metonyms, stylized rhetorical

²⁸⁹ See especially: Victor Harold Matthews, *More than Meets the Ear : Discovering the Hidden Contexts of Old Testament Conversations* (Grand Rapids, Mich. ; William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008); and: Philip Francis Esler, *Sex, Wives, and Warriors: Reading Old Testament Narrative with Its Ancient Audience* (Eugene, Or: Cascade Books, 2011).

²⁹⁰ Matthews, *More than Meets the Ear*, 5.

devices and graphic verbs by the author as indicators of action and speech. Conventionalised conversational cues such as the use of particular vocabulary and syntax can be analysed. Plus, with a careful examination of the text, the reader can establish some elements of the setting, the positioning of those in a conversation, and the forms of speech they use.²⁹¹

This gives enough impetus to see if, with appropriate adjustments, it might be possible to make use of theories of social science and socio-linguistics in devising a method for reading narrative containing dialogues. This method will take into account the nature of the dialogues as dialogues, within a narrative, in which the divine being is a participant. The purpose of this reading is to understand better the way that the name of YHWH is revealed in the dialogues with Moses and the implications of this for the way that biblical theology speaks about the name and character of YHWH. For these purposes, focused on dialogue, the type of study I will make use of is Conversation Analysis, but occasional reference will be made to aspects of politeness theory.

2.4.3. The Contribution of Conversation Analysis

2.4.3.1. Introduction

In this section I will examine the possibility of utilising concepts derived from the socio-linguistic field of Conversation Analysis (CA) in reading the dialogues between Moses and YHWH. These concepts have been adapted by others to analyse dialogue in narrative both in the field of biblical studies and outside it. In the area of biblical studies at the time most of the research for this thesis was conducted the only full length monograph devoted to the subject was Raymond Person's analysis of Jonah. I will therefore begin by examining Person's work.²⁹²

²⁹¹ Ibid., 16–17.

²⁹² Elizabeth Tracy's monograph only became available to me in the last months as this thesis was being finalised. Detailed consideration of her methodology has regrettably not been possible. However a comparison of her conclusions regarding dialogues between humans and the divine in Genesis and our discussions of the dialogues in Exodus gives rise to some interesting commonalities and differences that

2.4.3.2. Conversation Analysis Theory

The theory of Conversation Analysis (CA) was developed from the study of actual oral conversations and seeks to answer two fundamental questions:

“Why that, in that way, right now?” This encapsulates the perspective of interaction as action (why that) which is expressed by means of linguistic forms (in that way) in a developing sequence (right now). Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998) suggest that there are “two core analytic questions in CA: What interactional business is being mediated or accomplished through the use of a sequential pattern? How do participants demonstrate their active orientation to this business?” (p. 99).²⁹³

CA begins from four basic assumptions: interaction is structurally organised, contributions are context shaped and context renewing, no detail of conversation can be dismissed as irrelevant to the interaction before analysis and the study of social interaction is best done from naturally occurring data.²⁹⁴

In his study of Jonah Person describes those parts of the theory which might be thought most suitable for literary analysis. One of the fundamental building blocks of his analysis is the concept of “adjacency pairs”.²⁹⁵ Person describes these pairs as follows:

- Adjacency pairs are sequences of two moves (verbal or non-verbal) that are:
- i. adjacent or containing an insertion sequence (for example, a clarifying question between question and answer)
 - ii. produced by different individuals
 - iii. ordered as a first part and a second part
 - iv. typed, so that a particular first part has a range of second parts: those which are linguistically preferred and those which are linguistically dispreferred.²⁹⁶

There are a range of possible first parts (request, offer, assessment, question or accusation) and each of these has two types of possible responses: “preferred” or “dispreferred”

would bear further investigation: Elizabeth B. Tracy, *See Me! Hear Me! Divine/Human Relational Dialogue in Genesis*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis & Theology 75 (Leuven, Netherlands: Peeters, 2015).

²⁹³ Paul Seedhouse, “Conversation Analysis Methodology,” *Language Learning* 54 (2004): 1–54, p16; see also: Ian Hutchby and Robin Wooffitt, *Conversation Analysis: Principles, Practices and Applications* (Oxford: Polity, 1998), 99.

²⁹⁴ Raymond F. Person, “Conversation Analysis,” ed. Mark J. Boda and J. G. McConville, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, IVP Bible dictionary series 4 (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2012).

²⁹⁵ Raymond F. Person, *In Conversation with Jonah: Conversation Analysis, Literary Criticism, and the Book of Jonah*, Journal for the study of the Old Testament 220 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 16.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

(“preferred” or “dispreferred” are in terms of conventional linguistic expectation, not necessarily the desire of either speaker).²⁹⁷ The “preferred” option is usually short, without delay and unqualified, while the “dispreferred” option will often be more lengthy, prefaced and give reasons for the response.²⁹⁸

Person gives a table, taken from Stephen Levinson’s work, of preference organisation in modern English conversation:²⁹⁹

| First Parts | Request | Offer | Assessment | Question | Blame |
|---------------------|------------|------------|--------------|-----------------------|-----------|
| Preferred second | Acceptance | Acceptance | Agreement | Expected answer | Denial |
| Dispreferred second | Refusal | Refusal | Disagreement | Unexpected/non answer | Admission |

There is the possibility that the first and second parts of an adjacency pair may be interrupted by an insertion sequence, where the second speaker may perhaps interject a question rather than directly provide one of the expected responses.³⁰⁰ The point that the “preferred” response is not necessarily the one desired by the speaker is illustrated by the “blame” category, where denial is the “preferred” response because it is the response that is usually short, without delay and unqualified.³⁰¹

2.4.3.3. Conversation Analysis Applied to Literature

From the first principles of CA outlined above it can be seen that the method needs some adaptation before it can be applied to written narratives of conversation rather than to recordings of actual oral conversation (as Matthews also noted above). CA takes note of all features of dialogue including non-verbal vocal sounds such as “uh”, “oh”, “um” and

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 16–17.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ S.C. Levinson, *Pragmatics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 336; cited in: Ibid., 19.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 18.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 19–20.

other similar sounds. It also pays close attention to the manner in which participants in conversation begin a reply but fail to complete the reply, and to how this difficulty may be resolved by other participants in the conversation. None of these features is prominent in written narrative of conversation, and certainly not in the Old Testament narratives.³⁰² In the light of these difficulties, if CA is to be applicable to written narratives, it must be possible to detect a fundamental similarity between narrated and actual conversation as well as the very obvious differences.

Person argues that there is such a similarity and he makes extensive use of the works of Deborah Tannen, who has written extensively on the similarities between written and oral narrative styles. Person first demonstrates that “reported speech” in oral dialogue is actually “constructed dialogue”.³⁰³ Tannen argues that speech even in oral dialogue is not usually repeated verbatim, but instead the sense of what has been said is conveyed.³⁰⁴ In literature the whole conversation, including participants, can be seen as constructed, although even literature may contain conversations based on “real people and events”.³⁰⁵ On this basis Person argues that, while a distinction between oral and written reports of conversation remains, there is a basic similarity in that both oral and written reports of dialogue can be seen as “constructed dialogue”.³⁰⁶ Both forms can choose to represent speech in direct or indirect form, or even choose to substitute the “performative consequences of the communicative act” for a speaker’s words.³⁰⁷

³⁰² Hugo Bowles, “The Contribution of CA to the Study of Literary Dialogue,” *Novitas-ROYAL* 5, no. 1 (2011): 161–68, p164.

³⁰³ Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 23.

³⁰⁴ Deborah Tannen, “Introducing Constructed Dialogue in Greek and American Conversational and Literary Narrative,” in *Direct and Indirect Speech*, ed. F Coulmas (Berlin: Moulton, 1986): 311-32, p311.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁶ Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 23.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

This final feature is a vital part of Person's application of CA to biblical narrative. Person suggests that the first parts of adjacency pairs will generally occur within direct speech, rather than as reported actions, because they play a defining role in the conversation.³⁰⁸ Person suggests that preferred seconds, which are likely to be brief, are often just conveyed by reporting the desired action.³⁰⁹ Person suggests that dispreferred seconds will either be lengthy (because their complication is being reported in full), or simply reported results (because their indirect nature is being stressed).³¹⁰ Other responses can sometimes be conveyed by being omitted altogether for particular narrative effect.³¹¹

Therefore, Person concludes, conversations within narration are formed of adjacency pairs, although these constituent parts may appear in a somewhat different form to a recorded conversation. Written narrative conversation cannot convey the full range of "performance qualities of oral conversation", however it can "compensate, to some degree" because of the range of expressions and modifiers found in written narrative.³¹² He cites Tannen, who suggests that written narrative is like oral narrative in that it depends on a sense of involvement, drawing the reader into the essence of the narrative and that both oral and literary narrative use "literary features" such as "repetition of sounds and words, syntactic parallelism, rhythm" to accomplish this.³¹³ Thus, while the written form allows for more variety of presentation than analysis of actual conversations, principles from oral CA can be used in analysing narrated dialogue.³¹⁴

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 26.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 27–8.

³¹¹ Ibid., 25.

³¹² Ibid., 29.

³¹³ Deborah Tannen, "Oral and Literate Strategies in Spoken and Written Narratives," *Language* 58, no. 1 (1982): 1-21, p2.

³¹⁴ Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 30.

In terms of his analysis of the narrative of Jonah, Person suggests that a key aspect of Jonah's characterisation is that Jonah, unlike the remaining characters in the narrative, uses dispreferred seconds in many of the conversations in which he is involved. Jonah's use of dispreferred seconds stands out because the preferred option in terms of CA would also be the option that aligns with the perspectives of the narrator and of the Lord.³¹⁵ He also notes that, unlike other prophetic call narratives, Jonah's refusal to obey the Lord is not reported as speech in Jonah 1:3, but instead merely his actions in refusing are reported.³¹⁶ There is no reassurance which changes his refusal into acceptance, and so the reader does not find the reason for Jonah's refusal until 4:2 when Jonah reports what he said when the Lord called him.³¹⁷ For Person this is part of a pattern in Jonah whereby in the conversations between Jonah and the Lord in chapters 1-3 the second part of an adjacency pair is always provided by a reported consequence (in other words, there is no verbal reply in any dialogue).³¹⁸ When the pattern is broken in chapter 4 attention is thus focused on the dialogue and its implications for the characterisation of Jonah.³¹⁹

2.4.3.4. Conversation Analysis and Reading Texts

Person seeks to demonstrate how CA, in particular the way that preferences are organised, can develop and clarify Iser's Reader Response theories when it is used with two other principles for governing conversational interaction: the Co-operative and the Given-New.³²⁰ Person takes the Co-operative Principle which suggests that there is an implicit social contract within conversation to maximise the efficiency of the dialogue from Grice's 1975 article "Logic and Conversation".³²¹ The Given-New Contract is an extension of this taken from Clark and Halivand's "Comprehension and the Given-New Contract" which

³¹⁵ Ibid., 67.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 73.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 78.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 79.

³²⁰ Ibid., 99.

³²¹ Ibid., 99–100; and see: H.P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation," in *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Arts*, ed. Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan (New York: Academic Press, 1975), 41–58.

suggests that in any interaction there is knowledge shared by speaker and hearer (Given) which need not be explained, and knowledge known only to the speaker (New) which must be explained in a manner which the hearer is capable of understanding.³²² Person applies these to the manner in which text and reader relate, and demonstrates that both of these assist the reader in filling gaps within the text.³²³

In relation to preference organisation Person argues that the first part of an adjacency pair leads the reader to view the scene from the speaker's perspective, and that this view point "wanders" with the character who is perceived as initiating the adjacency pair.³²⁴ He suggests also that readers seek to know as much "necessary or natural" information as possible and so a preferred second in the form of reported consequences delivers this, but by contrast "a dispreferred second in the form of reported consequences lacks much of the expected information".³²⁵

2.4.3.5. Evaluation of Person's use of Conversation Analysis

2.4.3.5.1. Difficulty of allocating responses as "Preferred" or "Dispreferred"

The usefulness of some aspects of Person's work has been questioned by Miller, who makes the point with regard to preferred responses that while Person's analysis may work for English conversation, in other contexts, especially perhaps Hebrew narrative, the "preferred" response to blame may actually be admission.³²⁶

³²² Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 100–101.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 104.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 106.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

³²⁶ Cynthia L. Miller, Kenneth M Craig, and Raymond F. Person, "Conversation Analysis and the Book of Jonah: A Conversation," *JHS* 1 (1997): 1–38, p9–10.

Conversation Analysts in general have sometimes found the preferred/dispreferred terminology to be difficult, but in a study of previously unpublished lectures by Sachs (one of the key figures in developing CA) Ronald Boyle concludes:

Preference organisation, if it is understood as being based on noticeable absence and accountability, is indeed one of those very simple mechanisms. The description of preference in this paper shows that preferred actions are ‘seen but unnoticed’ while dispreferred actions are of two kinds: one is simply noticeable and accountable while the other is noticeable, accountable and sanctionable.³²⁷

Boyle also emphasises that preference organisation should not be seen as a set of rules for conversation, but rather as descriptions of possible options for participants in conversation.³²⁸ An alternative, although somewhat similar method of discussing preference, especially in relation to accusation/denials, has been put forward by Jack Bilmes, who argues that response to accusations can be explained in terms of three concepts: “invited response, trouble-markers and response priority”.³²⁹ He goes on to note that “confession is the invited response”; that “denial is the first priority response” in that if there is not a denial then this will be noticed; and that “trouble markers” (or “reluctance markers”) suggest that the respondent is having difficulty composing an answer, often in the case of an accusation because the respondent does not want to confess.³³⁰

This concept provides the possibility of adjusting Person’s analysis that Jonah’s refusal is a “dispreferred” response to the Lord’s call.³³¹ A study of call narratives in scripture reveals that a reluctance on the part of the person called is normal, usually accompanied by some sort of reason (“I am only a child”, “I am the youngest son of the...” etc.).³³² Jonah’s

³²⁷ Ronald Boyle, “Whatever Happened to Preference Organisation?” *Journal of Pragmatics* 32, no. 5 (2000): 583–604, p601. Accountable here means that the person needs to give a reason, while sanctionable suggests that the conversation partner will react against the response.

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Jack Bilmes, “Preference and the Conversation Analytic Endeavor,” *Journal of Pragmatics* 64 (2014): 52–71, p60.

³³⁰ Ibid, p65. It is interesting to note that part of the empirical dimension of Bilmes’ study was carried out in Northern Thailand, giving a level of confidence that his observations cut across different cultures.

³³¹ Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 165.

³³² “The objection”, see: Norman C. Habel, “Form and Significance of the Call Narratives,” *ZAW* 77, no. 3 (1965): 297-323, p300.

refusal is different from these call narratives in that he does not voice his refusal, but simply acts in disobedience.

Therefore it is possible to describe three types of response to a call, a preferred response of obedience, typified by “Here I am”, a dispreferred response of refusal accompanied by reason and a dispreferred response of direct disobedience. The dispreferred response of refusal accompanied by a reason is usually followed by a reassurance or sign of some kind and leads to acceptance, while the direct disobedience is met, as in the case of Jonah, with some kind of punitive response.³³³ In the case of Moses in Exodus 3-4 his refusal is expressed in various reasons, culminating in his request that YHWH send someone else. This creates a cumulative effect indicating that Moses’ response is not merely a modest statement of his own inadequacy, but rather a deeper determination to avoid agreeing.

2.4.3.5.2. The derivation of the initial five categories of “first part” in adjacency pairs

The way that first parts are categorised by Person is also open to question. Miller points out that there may be more than the five first parts that Person considers to take into account when working on biblical narrative.³³⁴ Even within English a slightly different set of first pairs in conversation has been developed by M. Halliday.

His analysis divides first parts into two main categories depending on whether the speaker is giving or demanding, and each of these into two again depending on whether what is given or demanded is information or “goods and services”.³³⁵ This gives a slightly different table of preference organisation as follows (with slightly different terminology also).³³⁶

³³³ It might be thought that a refusal followed by excuse becomes a “preferred response”, simply because it is the expected response to the one familiar with prophetic call scenes. In this case the fact that an excuse is always required suggests it is still “dispreferred”, even if somewhat expected.

³³⁴ Miller, Craig, and Person, “Conversation Analysis and the Book of Jonah,” 22.

³³⁵ M. A. K. Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 2nd ed. (London: Edward Arnold, 1994), 69.

³³⁶ Ibid.

| Initiation | Offer | Command | Statement | Question |
|----------------------------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Expected response | Acceptance | Undertaking | Acknowledgement | Answer |
| Discretionary alternative | Rejection | Refusal | Contradiction | Disclaimer |

These four seem essentially comparable with Levinson's preference analysis above, but without "blame", which could be included under "statement" but whose inclusion as a separate category allows Levinson to classify the "expected" response as denial.

Michael Toolan for the purposes of literary analysis has developed a slightly different model of first parts and their responses. He redesignates "offer" as "undertaking", a term which he views as broader, and "command" is replaced by "request".³³⁷ Toolan reclassifies the response to the three non-questions as "Acknowledgements" plus some sort of explanation or action, and the response to questions as "Inform".³³⁸ He classifies conversations in a literary scene according to these categories and analyses the different types of move made by the different conversationalists as a starting point for an analysis of the portrayal of the character's interactions.³³⁹ This slightly different classification highlights the descriptive nature of the analysis, and suggests that a degree of flexibility may be useful in approaching the analysis of particular texts.

³³⁷ Michael Toolan, "'What Makes You Think You Exist?' A Speech Move Schematic and Its Application to Pinter's *The Birthday Party*," *Journal of Pragmatics* 32 (2000): 177-201, p183-4.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 183.

³³⁹ Toolan, "What Makes You Think You Exist?" 187-196.

2.4.3.5.3. *Potential Weakness in Conversation Analysis Applied to Ancient Texts.*

Cynthia Miller cautions in her response to Person that Conversation Analysis, the Co-operative Principle and the Given-New Contract all depend on “the cultural norms of the language community and the pragmatic context of the specific speech situation”.³⁴⁰

Therefore not only do we need to be satisfied that a method devised for English oral conversation can legitimately be used on written conversation, we also need to be satisfied that it can be used on ancient documents.

Even in a native English-speaking context Toolan has argued that the principles governing conversation are more flexible than a rigid application of the above principles might suggest. He describes the Co-operative Principle as one “in which requirements of truthfulness, informativeness, relevance and clarity are attended to (or ‘flouted’ only with good reason).”³⁴¹ Toolan argues this is only a partial picture and that other principles (e.g. “submission, coercion, resistance, tact”) may well exist and be important for particular types of interaction, under the general principle of relevance.³⁴² Which principles have most bearing on any particular conversation can only be decided by analysis of any particular conversation.

Miller suggests that when dealing with ancient literary texts there is a need to consider large numbers of examples in order to understand “not just the norms for co-operative conversation but also literary conventions for representing conversation in narrative”.³⁴³ A consideration of the different dialogues between Moses and YHWH makes a useful contribution to this understanding.

³⁴⁰ Miller, Craig, and Person, “Conversation Analysis and the Book of Jonah,” 13.

³⁴¹ Michael Toolan, “Analysing Fictional Dialogue,” *Language and Communication* 5, no. 3 (1985): 193–206, p199.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Miller, Craig, and Person, “Conversation Analysis and the Book of Jonah,” 14.

One further area of study from CA research that is useful to consider for the purpose of the “re-orientating response” offered by den Hertog is analysis of question and response pairings where the respondent attempts to transform the question rather than provide a direct answer.³⁴⁴ Study from practitioners in CA across cultures appears to demonstrate a marked preference for questions to be answered in a straightforward manner, and therefore these transforming responses are particularly significant.³⁴⁵ An answer to a question can resist the agenda of the question, and “works to transform its focus, its bias, or its presupposition(s), though in doing so, these answers also reject the design of the question.”³⁴⁶ In my study I will show how YHWH’s answers to Moses’ questions work to transform Moses’ assumptions regarding YHWH and his purposes.³⁴⁷

2.4.3.6. Benefits of Conversation Analysis

2.4.3.6.1. Comparison

One benefit of outlining the structure of a dialogue clearly is that it should enable effective comparison to be made between the different dialogues between Moses and YHWH. Karla Suomala has studied the dialogues in Exodus 32-34 using CA, with particular attention to

³⁴⁴ Den Hertog, *The Face of God*, 122 cites: Tanya Stivers and Makoto Hayashi, “Transformative Answers: One Way to Resist a Question’s Constraints,” *Language in Society* 39, no. 01 (2010): 1–25; and see also: Tanya Stivers, “An Overview of the Question–response System in American English Conversation,” *Journal of Pragmatics*, Question-Response Sequences in Conversation across Ten Languages 42, no. 10 (2010): 2772–81.

³⁴⁵ So Heinemann concludes in his study of Danish: “In this, Danish patterns with the other languages in showing a strong orientation to the relevance of answering a question when asked, of doing this in a type-conforming, fitted manner that confirms the information inquired about and of letting the selected recipient respond.” Trine Heinemann, “The Question–response System of Danish,” *Journal of Pragmatics*, Question-Response Sequences in Conversation across Ten Languages 42, no. 10 (2010): 2703–2725, p2725; It is also notable that this preference changes does vary across cultures, but even in the culture studied with the highest proportion of responses that did not provide an answer this was still a distinct minority response. Kyung-Eun Yoon, “Questions and Responses in Korean Conversation,” *Journal of Pragmatics*, Question-Response Sequences in Conversation across Ten Languages 42, no. 10 (2010): 2782–2798, p2794.

³⁴⁶ Stivers and Hayashi, “Transformative Answers,” 13.

³⁴⁷ In other words, it is more significant that YHWH’s answers are “transformative” than that they are often “dispreferred” in that they are not the response Moses’ question seeks.

how the dynamics of power are depicted in the conversations between God and Moses.³⁴⁸

She has compared these conversations with ancient translations, rewritten accounts, Rabbinic interpretations and Targumic renderings.³⁴⁹

In this study of the dialogues between Moses and YHWH a comparison of the dynamics of the different dialogues between Moses and YHWH will be undertaken. Further studies could usefully analyse other conversations between YHWH and individuals.³⁵⁰

2.4.3.6.2. Reading Process

Further benefits of Person's use of CA are identified by Miller:

He has highlighted the importance of dialogue and its structural significance for biblical narrative. He has shown how the first half of an adjacency pair produces expectation of a relevant and acceptable response; where a response is absent, a gap is produced that the reader must attempt to fill. He has shown that the linear order of narrative may be displaced chronologically in order to place the second half of an adjacency pair immediately after its first part.³⁵¹

Therefore as part of a wider approach to the text CA has a valuable role to play in helping the reader understand how the narrator portrays the characters and their relationship.

Person's investigation of the relationship between CA and Reader Response criticism is helpful here, as is Tannen's concept of the text drawing the reader into the "creation of a shared world of images" to achieve understanding.³⁵² CA should also be informed by and inform other narrative approaches to dialogue in the reading process as the reader attends to the particularity of each conversation.

³⁴⁸ Karla R. Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue: Exodus 32-34 in Postbiblical Literature*, Studies in Biblical Literature 61 (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 10.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁵⁰ Those between YHWH and Abraham, and the other call narratives would be an obvious starting point.

³⁵¹ Miller, Craig, and Person, "Conversation Analysis and the Book of Jonah," p23.

³⁵² Deborah Tannen, "How Is Conversation like Literary Discourse? The Role of Imagery and Details in Creating Involvement," in *The Linguistics of Literacy*, ed. Pamela Downing (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1992), 31-46, p33.

2.4.3.7. Conversation Analysis in the Wider Picture

In conclusion, Person has demonstrated that principles derived from CA have a useful and distinct role within analysing written dialogue. I will refrain from using “Conversation Analysis” to describe my approach but will instead speak of analysis of the dialogues in order to point out that I am not attempting to perform the impossible task of a CA of a written text, but rather utilising principles derived from the theory in order to develop an approach to written accounts of dialogue. In terms of first parts of adjacency pairs and the responses I will begin with an adaptation of Toolan’s analysis from above.

It will be particularly important to look for any unexpected features within the conversation, in particular for any aspects of the conversations that create a gap within the text. The way in which the structure of the conversation links to aspects of narrative and rhetorical art will be important to consider: point of view, repetition, plot, characterisation, etc. This will enable the text’s characterisation of Moses and YHWH to be understood as fully as possible in order that conclusions about the significance of the revelation of the name would be as accurate as possible. It is also important to be aware of particular situations where the nature of the dialogue will require consideration of other areas of study related to CA, and I will consider one of these very briefly here.

2.4.4. Politeness Theory

A key aspect of socio-linguistic research to take into consideration in the interpretation of biblical dialogue, and particularly in the context of the conversational interaction between a superior and inferior as between YHWH and Moses, is the contribution of Politeness Theory. This was developed in the 1980s by Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson.³⁵³ Aspects of this theory have been applied to the Lachish correspondence, and to Israel’s

³⁵³ Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*, 2nd ed., Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics 4 (Cambridge, UK: University Press, 1987).

request to pass through Edom's territory in Numbers 20, as well as to some of the speeches (in particular those of Esther) in the book of Esther.³⁵⁴ This will help us to understand how Moses and YHWH are portrayed in relation to other characters within the Exodus narrative, and in particular to understand to what degree Moses is portrayed as using "polite language" before YHWH, and to what degree he strays from this expectation.

Once again caution is needed in applying a theory developed by observation of modern cultures to ancient written documents; but this caution notwithstanding it does seem that there is potential for a number of useful observations to be prompted by an analysis illuminated by this theory. In particular, it encourages the reader to pay careful attention to those markers of speech that can be thought of as distinguishing degrees of politeness within the speech of characters, especially with regard to concepts such as deference.

2.5. METHODOLOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

Having considered various theoretical concepts in reading narrative of dialogue it remains to outline the effect of the theory on the practice of my study. The focus of the study is on the dialogues between Moses and YHWH, and therefore in each section of the study I will begin with an analysis of the way in which the action recorded in the narrative presents the characters of YHWH and Moses. I will look at how the speech of YHWH and Moses, taken individually, contributes to their characterisation. Finally, I will analyse the way in which the narrative portrayal of the dialogue between Moses and YHWH adds to their characterisation. I will bring the results of these analyses together in order to demonstrate

³⁵⁴ Benjamin Thomas, "The Language of Politeness in Ancient Hebrew Letters," *HS* 50 (2009): 17–39; Edward J. Bridge, "Polite Language in the Lachish Letters," *VT* 60, no. 4 (2010): 518–34; Edward J. Bridge, "Polite Israel and Impolite Edom: Israel's Request to Travel through Edom in Numbers 20.14-21," *JSOT* 35, no. 1 (2010): 77–88; Bryan D Estelle, "Esther's Strategies of Becoming an 'bd Mškył [Hebrew Characters]," *HS* 53 (2012): 61–88.

how the dialogue between Moses and YHWH in each section of the narrative contributes to an understanding of the divine name.

For the purpose of laying out the dialogue I will divide the conversations into pairs, reflecting the essential statement and response concept derived from various forms of Conversation Analysis, and also shown to apply to forms of constructed dialogue, both oral and written.³⁵⁵ A comparison of Halliday, Person and Toolan demonstrates that various different analytical options are available for describing the first and second parts of these conversations, and so I have adopted labels that seem to me to be most useful in describing this sort of biblical dialogue.³⁵⁶

The most useful general categories for the first parts of each individual section are: Command, Request, Statement and Question. Further, a particular type of command that it will be useful to identify is “Commissioning”. This gives the following categories:

| Initiation | Commissioning | Request | Command | Statement | Question |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Expected response | Acceptance | Acceptance | Obedience | Agreement | Answer |
| Discretionary alternative | Refusal | Refusal | Refusal | Disagreement | Decline |

³⁵⁵ Tannen, “How Is Conversation like Literary Discourse? The Role of Imagery and Details in Creating Involvement,” 33; Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 69; Cynthia L. Miller, *The Representation of Speech in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Linguistic Analysis*, Harvard Semitic monographs: no. 55 (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1996), 35-36; Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 25-28; Toolan, “What Makes You Think You Exist?” 183-4.

³⁵⁶ S.C. Levinson, *Pragmatics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 336; cited in: Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 19; Halliday, *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, 69; Toolan, “What Makes You Think You Exist?” 185.

It was noted above (2.4.3.2.) that there is also the possibility of interrupting the two part sequence of initiation-response with a new first part dialogue, often labelled an “insertion sequence”. In Exodus 3-4 there are a number of these types of response from Moses as he objects to YHWH’s commissioning. I also noted how there may be a “re-orientating response” to questions, which does not exactly answer the question in an anticipated manner, but also does not form a direct refusal.

Throughout this thesis Miller’s method of labelling adjacency pairs will be followed. Each pair is marked with a capital letter, and each part of each pair by a numeral; if a part needs to be divided then this is indicated with a lower case letter.³⁵⁷ The speech introductions are in italics, as in many cases these provide additional materials to guide the reader in understanding the portrayal of the scene. In some cases the first or second part of a pair is portrayed by action rather than speech, and this can be seen in the analysis by the absence of inverted commas. Speech that forms an “insertion sequence”, where a question is asked rather than an expected response provided, is indented and labelled INS.A1 or similar.³⁵⁸ This indentation should provide clarity in ascertaining when the main flow of the conversation is returned to. If a speech contains dialogue anticipating dialogue in the (narrative) future then the future speech is indented and labelled FUT.A1. Each speech move is allotted a category according to the categories given in the previous chapter, and where it adds to the discussion labelled as “Preferred” (PREF) or “Dispreferred” (DIS).

I will summarise how Moses and YHWH relate to each other in the dialogue, and what this relationship adds to our understanding of the revelation of the name. In particular I will consider how this portrayal of YHWH in the narrative should be understood in conjunction with prior portrayals of YHWH and how far this needs to be modified in the light of what is

³⁵⁷ Miller, *Representation*, xviii; Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue*, 38 n.8. (page 22, footnote is on p38)

³⁵⁸ Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 18.

already known, or how far what is already known needs to be modified in the light of new portrayals. It is to this task that I will now turn.

Chapter 3

Dialogues of Calling: Exodus 3-4

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter begins my exegesis of the dialogues between Moses and YHWH. I will argue that a close reading of Exodus 3-4 demonstrates that when YHWH tells Moses “I will be who I will be” this is neither an evasive answer, nor an answer intended to emphasise above all else YHWH’s independence. Instead a careful reading of the dialogues will demonstrate that while YHWH’s answer does indeed affirm YHWH’s freedom to determine who he will be, that freedom is exercised surprisingly by transforming Moses into the means by which YHWH is with his people. A close reading of the dialogues will also demonstrate, through an investigation of YHWH’s speech and action, that this working through Moses does not restrict YHWH who remains free to be who YHWH is and therefore to act in ways that may be surprising to characters in the narrative, or to the readers of the narrative.

In terms of analysis of the dialogues I will begin at 3:1 with the first encounter of Moses and YHWH. A division is commonly seen in the narrative of chapters 3 and 4 at 4:17 or 18.³⁵⁹ Exodus 3:1-4:17/18 has been regarded as the “call narrative” of Moses, often with 4:1-18 forming an expansion of the basic narrative in 3:1-12/15/22.³⁶⁰ Following Habel,

³⁵⁹ Noth has a large section from 2:11 to 4:23, of which 3:1-4:17 form a sub-unit: Noth, *Exodus*, 29–35; Cassuto suggested 2:23-4:31: Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*; Childs sees 3:1-4:17 as one section, followed by 4:17-6:1: Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 51–52; Greenberg has divisions of 3:1-4:17, 4:18-26 and 4:27-6:1 Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 56,86, 96; Houtman suggests 2:23-4:19, followed by 4:20-31 Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:326; Propp takes 3:1-4:31 as a unit, with 4:31 acting as a conclusion to the narrative of 2:11-4:31: William Henry Propp, *Exodus 1-18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible v. 2 (New York ; Toronto: Doubleday, 1999), 180; Dozeman has 3:1-4:18 (non P calling) and 4:19-6:1 (confrontation with Pharaoh): Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, The Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich. ; Cambridge UK: Eerdmans, 2009), 115, 149; With 2:23-6:1 as a large section is: Utzschneider, *Gottes Langer Atem*, 69; with 3:1-4:31 is: Albertz, *Exodus 1-18*, 77, 99.

³⁶⁰ See discussion in: Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 53–56; others have argued that “the substantial literary unity of Exodus 3:1-4:18 is still plausible”: Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 176–177; the debate however has continued; Romer identifies an A-B-B’-A’ pattern in Exodus 3 which means he sees 4:1-18 as

both Childs and Terence Fretheim see a basic similarity in the accounts of Moses' calling and that of Gideon and Jeremiah.³⁶¹ Fretheim suggests that "it is reasonable to conclude that Moses' call is portrayed in terms of a prophetic paradigm".³⁶² Childs argues that the current form of the text is a "greatly expanded form of the basic call narrative", a narrative which may have originally ended at 3:12 combined with 3:16-17a, but to which "in its present form a series of objections has been appended which allows a variety of divergent traditions to be incorporated within the narrative framework".³⁶³

The call narratives discussed by Norman Habel, however, encompass both those called as prophets and as deliverers, and so it is necessary to consider whether Moses' call may be more reflective of the latter.³⁶⁴ Hava Shalom-Guy analyses the call narratives of Moses and Gideon and concludes that the call narrative of Gideon has been patterned on that of Moses, with both being of a similar type to that of Saul.³⁶⁵ This would place Moses' call in closer affinity with that of a deliverer for Israel than that of a prophet.

Den Hertog, however, argues that, while the sending in 3:10 and 3:12 could relate to the sending of a "saviour" figure, Moses' concern with speech in 3:13 highlights the prophetic

an expansion: Thomas Römer, "Exodus 3-4 Und Die Aktuelle Pentateuchdiskussion," in *Interpretation of Exodus*, ed. Riemer Roukema (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 65–69, p72; while Dozeman argues for the literary unity of the narrative: Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Commission of Moses and the Book of Genesis," in *A Farewell to the Yahwist? The Composition of the Pentateuch in Recent European Interpretation*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman and Konrad Schmid, Society of Biblical Literature symposium series no. 34 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2006), 107–130, p111.

³⁶¹ Habel, "Form and Significance of the Call Narratives", 316-7; Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 54; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 51.

³⁶² Fretheim, *Exodus*, 51.

³⁶³ For Childs Moses' call as YHWH's messenger was linked to later "classic prophetism" by the tradition which understood Moses' call as marking a new feature because, unlike the patriarchs, Moses was commissioned to transmit a message for others. Thus the questions raised by Moses in present text of the call narrative "echo the inner and outer struggles of the prophets of Israel" Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 54–56.

³⁶⁴ See: Habel, "Form and Significance of the Call Narratives," 316.

³⁶⁵ Hava Shalom-Guy, "The Call Narratives of Gideon and Moses: Literary Convention or More?" *JHS* 11 (2011): 1–19, p10.

nature of his role.³⁶⁶ Thus den Hertog argues that Moses is portrayed as a prophetic figure, in ways parallel to other prophetic commissions and instructions (citing Isa. 6:9, 7:7 and Jer 2.2, 5), one who is allowed to “participate in divine foreknowledge (Exod. 3:18-22 cf Amos 3.7)”, share in “divine deliberations” (“4:1 in relation to 3:18; cf Isaiah 6”), and can testify to his mission by means of signs (4.2-9; cf Deut. 13:2; Isa. 7:11, 14).³⁶⁷ In addition he argues that the phrase in 3:13 “he has sent me to you” marks out a new departure in that Moses is the first prophetic person to be sent by God with a message.³⁶⁸

John Van Seters suggests that the narrative has drawn on both traditions to present Moses’ call, and Moberly notes that Moses is presented in the narrative of Exodus 3:1-4:17 as the archetypal person who both acts (3:7-10) and speaks (3:13-15) on YHWH’s behalf.³⁶⁹

While the emphasis of Moses’ excuses moves towards a focus on speech, the call itself is presented first as an action “deliver Israel” (3:10), and then in terms of speech “say to Israel (3:15), say to Pharaoh (3:18)”. Therefore Moses is represented as both a prophetic figure and a deliverer within the narrative because he is presented in ways which cohere with aspects of both typical “call scenes”.

While most of these analyses of the call narrative finish their discussion of Moses’ call at or before 4:18, I will analyse the narrative through to 4:31 because the interaction between Moses and YHWH continues to 4:27. The chapter concludes with an initial resolution (4:28-31) in that Moses and Aaron obey their instructions and are believed by the people, who rejoice that YHWH has taken note of their plight.³⁷⁰ I will begin by examining how

³⁶⁶ Den Hertog also argues that the phrase Moses suggests he will say to Israel “the God of your fathers” is not, for den Hertog, a distancing of himself from the people, but a phrase which suggests that Moses sees himself as God’s emissary: Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 67.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 68.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 24.

³⁶⁹ Van Seters, *The Life of Moses*, 45; Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 14.

³⁷⁰ See especially: Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 243.

the narrator portrays the characters of Moses and YHWH, initially by action, then in speech and finally how the speech of the two characters interacts.

3.2. MOSES AND YHWH IN ACTION

3.2.1. YHWH

3.2.1.1. The Angel of YHWH, YHWH and God at the burning bush: 3:1-6

The first question to be addressed is that of the different designations for God. At the start of the narrative scene the מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה was described as appearing in the bush, and the narrative records that it was when YHWH saw that Moses had seen the bush that אֱלֹהִים calls to Moses from the bush. Various source critical explanations have been proposed to explain these differences.³⁷¹ It is not the purpose of this study to adjudicate these proposals; rather I will consider the impact which the current form of the text makes on the reader.

A number of scholars have considered this in one way or another. Cassuto suggested that אֱלֹהִים is used where Moses' subjective viewpoint as one who does not yet know that he is being addressed by YHWH is highlighted, while יְהוָה is used when YHWH is being spoken of objectively.³⁷² Jacob argued similarly, adding an additional detail that הָאֱלֹהִים is used for Moses' address to God because here Moses is addressing the specific form of the

³⁷¹ The angel of YHWH and YHWH are used (logically enough) by the J source, while "God" belongs to E's version of this narrative according to: Driver, *The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version*, 19–20; likewise: Noth, *Exodus*, 68; however Childs points out that according to the traditional source divisions the burning bush appears in 4b, an "E" section, but is more characteristic of "J", and he suggests that there is "more unity in the present text than has been generally recognised", meaning that at the least there is a large common core to the J and E strands: Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 52–53; Propp agrees with the traditional division, although does suggest that it is not impossible that 2-4a are entirely E's work: Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 192; Dozeman sees 3:1-4:18 as a literary unit in the non-P history, and mentions Blum's suggestion that the repetition is a dittography Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 118–119; Blum, *Studien Zur Komposition Des Pentateuch*, 25.

³⁷² Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 32.

מִלְאָהּ יְהוָה in the bush (which he does not yet recognise as YHWH).³⁷³ Boris Uspensky's study of the concept of "point of view", where he suggested that the different designations given to characters by each other and the narrator in a narrative are indicators which guide the reader's perception of events, gives the arguments of Cassuto and Jacob an additional level of support.³⁷⁴ This is particularly so with regard to Cornelis Houtman's objection to Cassuto's position, where he argues that 3:7 does not support Cassuto's analysis, because it is a statement addressed to Moses.³⁷⁵ Here a consideration of "point of view" dynamics suggests that at 3:7 the reader is led to see the action from YHWH's perspective of his determination to rescue the people, and thus "YHWH said" is entirely appropriate. At the start of the scene at the burning bush the reader has been guided to see the events through Moses' eyes. Moses does not yet know the name YHWH (see prior discussion), and so the more generic title for deity draws attention to Moses' lack of knowledge. The analysis of the dialogues as a whole will help to evaluate this hypothesis.

YHWH's first activity in this section is to appear in the person of his angel in a flame of fire in the midst of a burning bush. There is no direct reason given for this appearance, and I will investigate its implications for the dialogue below.³⁷⁶

3.2.1.2. The Anger which Burns, yet is not Manifested: 4:14

Moses in 4:14 is the first individual in the biblical narrative specifically said to be a recipient of YHWH's anger. Often in the biblical narrative YHWH's anger is said to burn, and a consequence is reported of that anger, sometimes in terms of someone being struck down, or in terms of some particular action (Num. 11:1, 11:33, 12:9-10, 22:22; 32:10-13; Deut. 6:15; Jdg. 2:14; 2 Sam. 6:7; 24:2; 2 Kgs. 13:3; 24:20). However in this instance no

³⁷³ Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, 55.

³⁷⁴ Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition*, 27–33.

³⁷⁵ Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:346.

³⁷⁶ The angel of YHWH is portrayed in some narratives as simply speaking (Genesis 16), in others as walking and speaking with a character (Genesis 18) and speaking from heaven (Genesis 21 and 22)

manifestation of YHWH's anger is recorded, the narrative simply moves into the speech of 4:14, and the sending of Aaron.³⁷⁷

Cassuto seeks to resolve the issue by arguing that Aaron's sending is the result of YHWH's anger, in that Moses would no longer receive the honour alone of accepting YHWH's commission.³⁷⁸ If this is so then this episode would be the only example of YHWH's anger being shown by the provision of an assistant rather than some particular physical manifestation.³⁷⁹ In Exodus 4, there is no mention of the issue of who will receive glory for the Exodus, in addition the issue of Moses being "glorified" has not received attention in Exodus 3-4, therefore the sending of Aaron is not the result of YHWH's anger.

Thomas Dozeman suggests that YHWH's reply should be translated "Is there not Aaron your brother, the Levite?", noting that the construction is the same as 4:11, and that both are therefore rhetorical questions.³⁸⁰ It follows that 4:14 is intended to draw Moses' attention to information that he has hitherto neglected in his assessment of how the mission can happen. In 4:11 he has neglected YHWH's power to enable his speech, and in 4:14 he has neglected the status and abilities of his brother Aaron in the Israelite community. This means that 4:14 is not a manifestation of YHWH's anger, and this lack of manifestation generates a gap in the narrative.³⁸¹ In this case the gap draws the reader to reflect on what

³⁷⁷ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 79.

³⁷⁸ "Moses, who did not willingly accept the commission with which God wishes to honour him, was punished in that the glory of fulfilling the task did not belong to him alone, but was shared in part by his brother Aaron": Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 50; see also Propp, who also suggests that Aaron's help is also "in some sense a punishment, a diminution of Moses' dignity", and adds that eventually all Israel will suffer because of Aaron at the golden calf Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 213.

³⁷⁹ It may be that the account of Barak in Judges 5:9 provides some analogy in that Barak will still deliver Israel, but will not receive the glory of killing his enemy. However the Barak narrative specifically states that Barak will not receive the glory, and does not record any manifestation of anger on the part of either Deborah (the prophetess) or YHWH.

³⁸⁰ Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 143.

³⁸¹ There are at least two other passages within the Old Testament which may point in this direction (Num. 11:10; Jos. 7:1), where YHWH's anger is kindled, but the narrative has to be read further to discover the manifestation of the anger. In Numbers 11 this anger is explicitly mentioned again, but in Joshua 7 it is not.

YHWH's displeasure looks like, and to read the narrative as it continues for clues to resolve this issue.³⁸²

3.2.1.3. The Mysterious Night Attack: 4:24-26

The final incident where YHWH acts without speech in the narrative is in the enigmatic account of Exodus 4:24-26. There are many possible readings of the event; indeed a recent study identifies no fewer than 40 different approaches to the text.³⁸³ The first difficulty in the narrative is that the identity of the one attacked is not specified. It could be Moses under attack, or it could be one of Moses' sons, and there has even been dispute over which son is the most obvious candidate.³⁸⁴ Some have even argued that the ambiguity is deliberate.³⁸⁵ A further question is: who does Zipporah touch with the foreskin? Is it Moses, or is it Moses' son? It has even been proposed that she in fact touches YHWH's feet (or the feet of an angelic representative) with the foreskin.³⁸⁶ There is the question of

³⁸² See discussion of gaps and their filling in: Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 235–240.

³⁸³ John T. Willis, *Yahweh and Moses in Conflict: The Role of Exodus 4:24-26 in the Book of Exodus*, Bible in History (Frankfurt am Main; Bern: Peter Lang, 2010).

³⁸⁴ Most scholars, modern and ancient, have suggested that Moses is the one who is under attack, so see for example: William Henry Propp, "That Bloody Bridegroom (Exodus iv 24-6)," *VT* 43, no. 4 (1993): 495–518; From an analysis of the historical background see Julian Morgenstern, "The 'Bloody Husband' (?) (Exod 4:24-26) Once Again," *HUCA* 34 (1963): 35–70; and discussions in: Werner H. Schmidt, *Exodus, Sinai Und Mose: Erwagungen Zu Ex 1-19 Und 24*, 3th ed., Erträge zur Forschung; Bd. 191 (Darmstadt: Wiss.Buchges, 1995), 120; and Werner H. Schmidt, *Exodus*, vol. 1, 3 vols., Biblischer Kommentar. Altes Testament 2 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1988), 220; See also from a slightly more literary perspective: Ruth Blum and Erhard Blum, "Zippora Und Ihr Choten Damim," in *Hebräische Bibel Und Ihre Zweifache Nachgeschichte*, ed. Erhard Blum (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990), 41–54; From a wider analysis of the role of circumcision in the biblical narrative, utilising some psychological perspectives see John Goldingay, "The Significance of Circumcision," *JSOT*, no. 88 (2000): 3–18; From a feminist perspective see Susan Ackerman, "Why Is Miriam Also Among the Prophets? (and Is Zipporah Among the Priests?)," *JBL* 121, no. 1 (2002): 47–80; Giving a slightly fresh reading of the "bridegroom" phrase is: Christopher B Hays, "'Lest Ye Perish in the Way': Ritual and Kinship in Exodus 4:24-26," *HS* 48 (2007): 39–54; Reading the story in conjunction with the Balaam narrative is: B. Embry, "The Endangerment of Moses: Towards a New Reading of Exodus 4:24-26," *VT* 60, no. 2 (2010): 177–96; however see Jacob for a summary of Rabbinic arguments favouring Moses' second son Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, 106–110; For modern interpretations suggesting Gershom as the victim of the attack see: Hans Kosmala, "Bloody Husband," *VT* 12, no. 1 (1962): 14–28; and also Adam J. Howell, "The Firstborn Son of Moses as the 'Relative of Blood' in Exodus 4.24-26," *JSOT* 35, no. 1 (2010): 63–76.

³⁸⁵ From the perspective of a narrative analysis, utilising some of Sternberg and Perry's suggestions with regard to gap filling see Lawrence Kaplan, "'And the Lord Sought to Kill Him' (Exod 4:24): Yet Once Again," *HAR* 5 (1981): 65–74; or from the perspective of structural analysis see: Seth Daniel Kunin, "The Bridegroom of Blood: A Structuralist Analysis," *JSOT*, no. 70 (1996): 3–16.

³⁸⁶ e.g.: Hays, "'Lest Ye Perish in the Way': Ritual and Kinship in Exodus 4:24-26," 45.

whether “his feet” are in fact a euphemism for either Moses’, or even YHWH’s genitalia.³⁸⁷

There are further questions regarding the correct translation of the phrase uttered by Zipporah: $\text{בְּיָמֵי הַיָּמִין}$, in particular over the translation of יָמִין as “bridegroom”, “son in law”,³⁸⁸ or perhaps more broadly “relative by marriage”,³⁸⁹ or whether the word should be related to the idea of circumcision or protection.³⁹⁰ Furthermore there is disagreement over the significance of the plural of blood. Should it be taken in the sense of “bloodguilt”, or perhaps in the sense of “bloodthirsty” as in the Psalms, or does it have some other significance?³⁹¹

There is not the space or time to adjudicate all these issues in this study, but at this point I simply note how problematic these verses prove for attempting to understand the characterisation of YHWH.³⁹² My analysis of this event will concentrate on how it fits into the sequence of the narrative of Moses’ return to Egypt, a context that was somewhat overlooked by interpreters up until the latter decades of the last century. In particular I will observe how the attack relates to the dialogue between Moses and YHWH, and in that context see how an understanding of the dialogues can at least suggest an understanding of this enigmatic text.

³⁸⁷ Arguing for Moses is: Ackerman, “Why Is Miriam Also Among the Prophets?” 74; reviewing (and rejecting) older approaches (e.g. Gressmann) arguing for YHWH is: Propp, “That Bloody Bridegroom (Exodus iv 24-6),” 501-502.

³⁸⁸ Arguing that both are possible is: Propp, “That Bloody Bridegroom (Exodus iv 24-6),” 500-501

³⁸⁹ Beginning with this translation, before narrowing it according to context is: Howell, “The Firstborn Son of Moses as the ‘Relative of Blood’ in Exodus 4.24-26,” 63-66.

³⁹⁰ For the idea that the phrase is related to protection, and is actually a divine title for God (in a similar manner to El Roi in Genesis 16) see: Hays, “‘Lest Ye Perish in the Way’: Ritual and Kinship in Exodus 4:24-26,” 51-52.

³⁹¹ Arguing for “a bridegroom who has shed blood” is: Propp, “That Bloody Bridegroom (Exodus iv 24-6),” 502; arguing that the phrase reflects the (male orientated) violence of the Exodus story is: Jacqueline Osherow, “Brides of Blood: Women at the Outset of Exodus,” in *From the Margins v 1, Women of the Hebrew Bible and Their Afterlives*, ed. Peter S. Hawkins and Lesleigh Cushing Stahlberg (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Pr, 2009), 46–51, p50.

³⁹² Patrick simply notes here that the very fact that this passage causes such problems highlights the overall consistency in the portrayal of YHWH: Dale Patrick, *The Rendering of God in the Old Testament*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 53.

3.2.1.4. Conclusions Regarding the Narrated Character of YHWH

From these narrative events the character of YHWH emerges as rather unknowable. He appears in a flame which does not consume, gets angry but gives no obvious manifestation of this anger, attacks for no defined reason, and withdraws when an act is performed for which there has been no obvious instruction. Clearly this is only a partial description of how YHWH is characterised in these chapters. However it is important for our clarity of thinking to understand that if these descriptions by the narrator of YHWH's actions were the only characterisation of YHWH then the portrayal of YHWH would be one of a rather ambiguous character, a terrifying and holy deity, who acts and attacks without reason.

3.2.2. Moses

3.2.2.1. Moses at the Bush: 3:1-6

Prior to chapter 3 Moses was at the centre of the events of 2:11-22, and in a rather different way of 2:1-10. Stefan Kürle argues that 2:1-10 utilises some aspects of ANE tradition to mark Moses as the hero of the narrative, while not using all elements, and that this is a prelude to a “deconstruction” of Moses as a hero in 2:11-22 and 3:1-4:17.³⁹³ This rhetorical strategy is designed, according to Kürle, to demonstrate to the implied reader who has a view of Moses as a heroic figure, that YHWH is the hero of the text with Moses only accomplishing things by YHWH's authority.³⁹⁴

Whether this is the purpose of the strategy or not, it is certainly true that by the start of 3:1 Moses is described as thoroughly united to Jethro and his family, and perhaps therefore to

³⁹³ He highlights the contrasting approaches of Coates (Moses as Hero) and Butler (an anti Moses tradition) to highlight how Moses' character can be read in a variety of ways, and argues that this reflects a deliberate rhetorical strategy: Kürle, *Appeal*, 164–166; and then: Coates, *Moses*, 49ff; and: Trent C. Butler, “An Anti-Moses Tradition,” *JSOT*, no. 12 (1979): 9–15.

³⁹⁴ Kürle, *Appeal*, 167.

wider life in Midian. The grammar of 3:1 marks a new stage, with the disjunctive *waw*,³⁹⁵ and this is marked by the evidence of Moses' new life in Midian. He is married, has a son and is now described as a shepherd ("keeping the flocks of his father-in-law") of Jethro's flocks. Exodus 3:1-3 set the scene for the encounter between Moses and YHWH. The simple description of his activity as a shepherd, together with the knowledge that he is married with a child suggests that from Moses' perspective there is no desire or reason to go back to Egypt.

Moses does not necessarily know Horeb as "the mountain of God". Rather the description is the narrator's way of marking the event to come for the reader, who may already know that Horeb is the venue for Moses' calling.³⁹⁶ At the mountain of God the reader is told that the *הַיְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי מֹשֶׁה* ("angel of YHWH") appears to Moses from the midst of the bush in a flame of fire (perhaps even "as a flame of fire"). Moses does not know at first that it is *הַיְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי מֹשֶׁה* appearing to him. Moses knows only what he sees, and the text draws the reader into the narrative with the sequence *וַיֵּרָא מֹשֶׁה וַיִּהְיֶה*, with *וַיִּהְיֶה* here marking the way in which the reader is led to see the action from Moses' point of view.³⁹⁷

In 3:3 the reader is told Moses' thoughts as he looks on the bush and learns that Moses is curious enough to come closer to see the "vision" of the bush that burns without being consumed. The root *הִרָא* is used six times in 3:2-4 (3:2, "the angel of YHWH appeared", "he saw", 3:3, "let me turn aside", "this sight", and 3:4 "YHWH saw that he had turned to see").³⁹⁸ The dialogue begins with sight, the angel of YHWH appears to Moses' sight by means of a flame of fire, Moses sees (perceives) that though the bush is on fire it is not

³⁹⁵ Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 197.

³⁹⁶ See especially, for a defense of the concept that the implied reader of Exodus has some knowledge of the Exodus story, and particularly of Moses: Kürle, *Appeal*, 151.

³⁹⁷ Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, 67.

³⁹⁸ This is noted by Childs, although not much developed: Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 70.

consumed, and Moses turns aside to take a closer look at the sight. YHWH sees that Moses has turned aside to see. A number of readers of Genesis 16 have noted links and allusions between Genesis 16 and Exodus 3, partly because of the concentration on the root *ראה*.³⁹⁹

I will examine the implication of this sight for the study of the dialogue below, and will argue that the dialogue can be implicitly said to begin at 3:1. In the context of the dialogue which has begun Moses hides his face because he is afraid to look on God. This fear is entirely expected if the reader thinks forwards in the biblical narrative, but the reader also notes that this is the first time such a fear has been expressed (although Jacob in Genesis 32 does express surprise that he has seen God face to face, and yet has been allowed to live).

3.2.2.2. Moses' Return to Jethro and Egypt: 4:18, 4:28-31

After the dialogue in 3:4-4:17 Moses, in 4:18, "returned to his father-in-law". Only when Jethro has given his blessing, and YHWH reassured him that those who wanted to kill him are dead, does Moses actually return to Egypt taking his family with him. This raises the question of whether this fear has been behind all of Moses' previous objections.⁴⁰⁰ It is only after he is united with Aaron that Moses' obedience is shown to be complete.

3.2.2.3. Conclusion Regarding Moses as a Narrated Character

From the narrated actions of Moses and language about Moses the reader learns that he is initially a shepherd, working for his father-in-law. After the early positive responses to the bush (turning aside to look, and hiding his face) he, after the calling dialogue, appears

³⁹⁹ Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story," *JBL* 117, no. 1 (1998): 23–43; Scott K. Nikaido, "Hagar and Ishmael as Literary Figures: An Intertextual Study," *VT* 51, no. 2 (2001): 219–42; Paul Edward Hughes, "Seeing Hagar Seeing God: Leitwort and Petite Narrative in Genesis 16:1-16," *Didaskalia (Otterburne, Man.)* 8, no. 2 (1997): 43–59; Pamela Tamarkin Reis, "Hagar Required," *JSOT* 87 (2000): 75–109.

⁴⁰⁰ This issue can of course be explained by recourse to source criticism, so: Noth, *Exodus*, 35. However our concern here is with the impact that the present form of the text makes on its readers.

somewhat slow to return to Egypt. He is therefore shown as a rather reluctant rescuer, who needs to be saved by the prompt actions of his wife, and given the support of his brother before he obeys YHWH. From this rather sparse portrayal of both YHWH and Moses I now turn to examine YHWH's speeches in more detail in this chapter.

3.3. CHARACTERISATION OF MOSES AND YHWH THROUGH SPEECH

The next major manner in which characters are characterized in biblical narrative is through their speech and the speech of others. In this section only YHWH speaks about YHWH, and then usually in speeches commissioning Moses, so I will examine YHWH's speeches commissioning Moses in order to understand how YHWH's self-presentation within the narrative relates to the previously examined statement of self-revelation in 3:13-15. Here I will focus primarily on their content, and seek to understand what the statements say about YHWH's character and characterisation, and how they relate to events in future narrative time. I will conclude the section by analysing the way in which Moses' objections have been understood, in order to see what an examination of the dialogues can add to this understanding.

3.3.1. Deliverance Proclaimed: 3:8-10

The introduction to YHWH's speech in 3:8-10 echoes the description of God in 2:24-25 and this can be seen by placing the two speeches next to each other, with three of the main verbs used in 2:24-25 also used in 3:8.⁴⁰¹ The concept of the cry of the Israelites coming to YHWH is also in both sections, with 2:24-25 using the idea of the cry "going up" to God, while 3:10 has the idea of the cry "coming" to God. The main difference between the two texts is that Exodus 3 contains no mention of covenant specifically, which for some means

⁴⁰¹ Schmid uses this as one of his arguments for dating Exodus 3-4 after the priestly redaction of the Pentateuch: Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 178; However, see discussion in: Jeon, *The Call of Moses and the Exodus Story*, 190, for a counter to this. Ultimately from the perspective of the final form we are not concerned to adjudicate such disputes here, but they do provide evidence of what current readers find jarring in reading these documents.

that Exodus 3 cannot be consciously evoking Exodus 2, although for the reader of the current narrative the mention of the patriarchs evokes the covenant.⁴⁰²

My interest is in the impact which the differing order of the verbs produces on the reader of narrative of the book of Exodus. In 2:25 the verbs “see” and “know” follow on from YHWH hearing the cry of the people and remembering his covenant. Thus YHWH’s remembering of his covenant leads on to a seeing of the Israelites and to the cryptic final statement “and YHWH knew”. This final statement, by leaving the object of YHWH’s knowledge unresolved, creates a gap that is filled by YHWH’s speeches and in particular by YHWH’s speech in 3:7-10.⁴⁰³

In Exodus 3:8 YHWH’s speech conveys his concern for the Israelites, his perception (הִרְאָה) of their plight, his hearing (שָׁמַע) of their cries, and his knowledge (יָדָע) of their suffering and of his action on their behalf. YHWH announces that he has come down to deliver his people, and to bring them up into the land he has promised before.⁴⁰⁴ All three verbs highlight YHWH’s involvement in the suffering of the people, and together build towards the key verb in 3:8 “and I have come down”. YHWH sees, hears and knows the affliction of his people and therefore he descends to intervene.

The order of the verbs here provides a contrast with the order of the verbs in the accounts of God’s judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18), and God’s judgement on Babel

⁴⁰² See: Römer, “Exodus 3-4 Und Die Aktuelle Pentateuchdiskussion,” 74-75; For an overview of the debate see: Jeon, *The Call of Moses and the Exodus Story*, 190–192.

⁴⁰³ See for example: Thomas B Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 93; It does not seem necessary to follow the LXX in translating the verb as a niph'al, with a reflexive sense “he made himself known to them” as does: Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 178.

⁴⁰⁴ The ordering of the verbs in 2:23-25 and 3:8 is of interest, and again has caused much discussion of the priority and order of the verses, particularly as 2:25 is syntactically odd; God is simply said to have seen the Israelites Israel and to know, without any object of “know” being specified. See again discussion in Jeon, who concludes that 2:25 must be a later addition to link 2:24 with 3:7-10 to ensure that all three verbs of YHWH’s cognition were included from those verses: Jeon, *The Call of Moses and the Exodus Story*, 190–192. Once more, our focus is on the present text and its impact on the reader.

(Gen. 11).⁴⁰⁵ Brian Howell argues in regard to Genesis 11 that God goes down “in order to see the tower *from its location on earth*”.⁴⁰⁶ In Genesis 18 the outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah has come up to God, and God goes down to see if it is as bad as has been suggested, saying “and if not I will know” (Gen. 18:21). This knowledge, argues Howell, is not a “gathering information” exercise; it is rather that “his act of coming down and seeing performs the act of a legal witness” as part of YHWH’s declared intention to instruct Abraham.⁴⁰⁷ Intriguingly, and perhaps analogous to Moses’ role in Exodus 3, Howell also notes that YHWH himself does not “come down”, but rather sends two emissaries as a witness to Sodom’s sin, and to confront the offenders personally.⁴⁰⁸

In Exodus 3, however, YHWH does not come down *in order* to know or see, rather he descends *because* he sees and knows. At Babel and Sodom God’s action appears to have been judgement, for which he needed to come down in order either to demonstrate the essential failure of those being judged (Babel), or to bear witness to their sin (Sodom). In Exodus 3:7-10 all the verbs of perception precede the declaration of YHWH’s coming down to rescue Israel. While a tower built by people can never reach YHWH, the cries of a suffering people reach him, are heard, their plight seen and known, and YHWH’s descent in order to rescue announced. YHWH needs nothing more than the cries of his suffering people in order to begin rescue.

⁴⁰⁵ Brian Howell links these three passages together in his study of biblical metaphor: Brian C. Howell, *In the Eyes of God: A Metaphorical Approach to Biblical Anthropomorphic Language* (Princeton Theological Monograph Series 192; Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 205–207.

⁴⁰⁶ In other words the point is not that God cannot see the tower from heaven, but that to make the point that they had failed to reach heaven God comes down to “execute punishment from the very place that they had attempted to establish their independent identity”: *Ibid.*, 172.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 205.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 207.

This declaration is followed by a further confirmation that he has heard and seen the Israelites.⁴⁰⁹ The impact of the repetition is to build to the commissioning of Moses as the climax to the statement, which as William Propp observes, is parallel to YHWH's action in v8.⁴¹⁰

Brueggemann detects something slightly underhand about this sending of Moses in 3:10 and suggests that YHWH, rather than taking risks himself, leaves his human servants to do this.⁴¹¹ Utschneider, in his study of Exodus 1-14, suggests that initially the bringing out of Israel from Egypt is a task given to Moses in Exodus 3, but following Moses' objections it is taken on by YHWH, "*nicht Mose, sondern Gott*".⁴¹² This is rather too neat given the large role that Moses continues to play in the Exodus events, in particular his key role in confronting Pharaoh.

Instead 3:10 does not portray YHWH handing over the role of rescue to Moses but acting, and entering the situation, through Moses.⁴¹³ YHWH descends, but he descends in Moses. It is perhaps no wonder Moses objects as he does in 3:11, because his deliverance of Israel is described as YHWH's deliverance of Israel. It was one thing for YHWH's angelic messengers in Genesis 18 to see on YHWH's behalf, but for YHWH's rescue to be performed by a human agent is, at this point in the biblical narrative, unprecedented.

⁴⁰⁹ Often those holding to the Documentary Hypothesis saw this as a doublet, marking a change from "J" to "E", e.g. Driver, *The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version*, 24; more recently Propp has suggested that v7 is E, v9 J and v8 from E, and that the redactor has woven these threads together to form a purposeful structure: Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 194-5; by contrast, arguing for the literary unity of 3:1-4:18 see: Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 176; Dozeman, following Greenberg and Blum suggests that the repetition conforms to a pattern found elsewhere in the Deuteronomistic History, in Joshua 14:6-12 and 2 Samuel 7:27-29 there is a pattern of revelation followed by ground for action introduced with "and now" and the action, also introduced with "and now". Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 130; Blum, *Studien Zur Komposition Des Pentateuch*, 11; Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 99.

⁴¹⁰ Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 195.

⁴¹¹ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 364.

⁴¹² Utschneider, *Gottes Langer Atem*, 52; see also: Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 188.

⁴¹³ This concept to divine action is parallel to a conception of divine speech argued for by Nicholas Wolterstorff that God can be said to commission or even appropriate the speech of people: Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 54.

Thus YHWH's speech in 3:7-10 affirms the narrated description of God in 2:23-25, and highlights his concern and care for his people, and his plan to deliver them through Moses. This action marks a decisive break with the way that divine-human interaction has been portrayed in Genesis. There God was active in creation, and in calling Abraham, and in various instances of speaking to Abraham, but by the time of the Joseph narrative he appears not to intervene other than directing events in some mysterious way "behind the scenes" (Genesis 50:20).⁴¹⁴ Now YHWH states that he has come down to rescue his people, with the surprise in the narrative being that this "coming down to rescue" entails sending Moses to effect their release.

How this sending of Moses works out is, of course, the central focus of the rest of chapters 3-4, and it is perhaps not surprising that Moses' reaction is one of trepidation. I will examine Moses' comment in more detail below together with YHWH's reply to it, and since I have already examined 3:13-15 in some detail I will now move on to YHWH's second major commissioning speech to Moses.

3.3.2. YHWH's Plans: 3:16-22

The reader first notes that Moses is told to gather the elders of Israel. Moses' mission does not entail, at least at first, the complete re-ordering of Israel, but rather works through already existing structures, even if the reader observes in chapter 5 that those structures are breaking down under the pressure of the Egyptian oppression. YHWH's address to the elders, as to Moses, begins with the reminder that he is the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob and so specifically links the elders back to the promises to the patriarchs. The elders of Israel can be assumed within the narrative

⁴¹⁴ Humphreys, *The Character of God in the Book of Genesis*, 256; Mark McEntire, *Portraits of a Mature God: Choices in Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 60.

context to be at least dimly aware of the stories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, at least to the extent that they will take Joseph's bones with them when leaving Egypt (cf Ex. 13:19).

This link to the Genesis narratives is strengthened by the fact that YHWH affirms his concern for the people not with the verb הִשָּׁרֵךְ but with הִשָּׁרֵךְ . This is another common verb in the Old Testament, with a wide range of meanings. In Exodus the term is used both negatively in terms of YHWH's punishment of sin (Exod. 20:5; 32:34; 34:7) and positively in terms of YHWH's attention and action on behalf of his people. In Exodus 4:31 the people hear, presumably through the elders who have listened to Aaron's speech, YHWH's הִשָּׁרֵךְ for his people. Houtman points out:

Rabbinic tradition sees a connection between 3:16ff. and Gen. 50:24ff., where the dying Joseph speaks, using the phrase with הִשָּׁרֵךְ : hearing the words spoken by Joseph signifies to the elders that their fulfilment, the liberation is near; consequently they listen to Moses (e.g. *ExR.* III. 8, and see also Rashi, Nachmanides and Keil).⁴¹⁵

That such a connection is suggested by the Exodus narrative is strengthened by the reference in Exodus 13:9 to Joseph's request to his brothers in Genesis 50, where Joseph uses הִשָּׁרֵךְ to speak of what God will do. Both the mention of the patriarchs and the verb used for YHWH's concern for the people therefore remind the reader of the Genesis narratives.

YHWH declares that he will bring them up from the oppression of Egypt; both עָלָה and עָנִי were used in 3:8-10 of YHWH's action and the people's suffering. YHWH intends to speak directly to Israel through Moses and the repetition of his concern to a new audience emphasises YHWH's concern.

⁴¹⁵ Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:371.

YHWH's speech is couched in large part as speech that Moses is to deliver to the elders and Pharaoh. Since these speeches are couched as a future conversation I will examine these details in the context of the conversation analysis. Giving instructions to Moses rather than just describing what will happen has the effect of making the matter seem more certain and fixed. It makes the descriptions more concrete than the general outline of 3:7-10, and thus demonstrates an increased level of concern and capability. YHWH has not only come down to deliver, but he also has an operating plan, which includes detailed instructions for Moses. Moses' objections thus look all the more feeble by comparison. In the context of the narrative as it stands this section functions as giving more detailed explanation of what Moses is to do.

3.3.3. YHWH the Deliverer is YHWH the Creator: 4:11-12

Once again (as with 3:12) YHWH does not answer Moses' objection in terms of Moses, but rather in terms of who YHWH is and what YHWH can and will do. As I have noted previously, YHWH's response to Moses' objection is parallel to 3:14-15, where he moves from a statement regarding his identity to further instructions to Moses. In 4:11, while YHWH's reply itself may be only brief, its theological significance is great.⁴¹⁶ The emphasis here is on YHWH's power as creator, which gives him the ability to deal with Moses' problem of speech. This aspect of YHWH's work was not emphasised in chapter 3, where the stress was on YHWH's rescuing and judging work, but here where the emphasis is on how YHWH's presence with Moses will help Moses to do the job he is required to do, YHWH proclaims YHWH's nature as creator. Childs argues that these verses caution us against too quick a separation of YHWH's creative and saving work.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ Childs describes this verse as akin to wisdom sayings, often found on the lips of the "classical prophets... the pattern reminds above all of Deutero-Isaiah in its exalted tone": Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 78.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

The commissioning is followed by an assurance of YHWH's presence with Moses' mouth and that YHWH will teach Moses what to say. It is as the one who made Moses' mouth that YHWH declares אֲנִי יְהוָה עִם־פִּיךָ and thus YHWH's name and YHWH's creative ability are linked together.⁴¹⁸ These statements are placed on the lips of YHWH himself, and thus convey divine self-disclosure. In the placement of this explanation here, at this point in the narrative, it shows that it is not merely in the plagues or the parting of the Red Sea that YHWH's creative power is demonstrated in the Exodus, impressive as these events are, but also in the causing of Moses to be YHWH's spokesman.

Each of YHWH's speeches includes some form of the verb "to be", often in contexts, as here, where a pronoun plus preposition would also convey the same sense. Therefore אֲנִי can be seen as a *Leitwort*, a repeated word or phrase that reveals something about the structure and theme of the text.⁴¹⁹ Jacob argues this repetition emphasises that "the entire narrative is centred around God, His Name, His Being, and His actions."⁴²⁰ Furthermore, these repetitions are placed on the lips of YHWH himself to Moses, so that they are being used deliberately to evoke for Moses the memory of what YHWH has already said (3:14-15). They reinforce that YHWH will be present with Moses on the mission to which YHWH has called Moses. I will analyse YHWH's speech to Moses after Moses' refusal in 4:13 in the next chapter in the context of a discussion of the nature of Moses' role and YHWH's character.

⁴¹⁸ Without the need to proposing any hypothetical emendations to Exodus 3:14 as in the various forms of the hypothesis that YHWH is derived from a hiphil verbal form: Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 69–70; Freedman, "Name," 154.

⁴¹⁹ See definition (developing from the work of Buber) in: Utzschneider, *Gottes Langer Atem*, 17–18; it is perhaps a function of the wide scope of this work that the verb "to be" does not receive any attention in the discussion.

⁴²⁰ Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, 98.

3.3.4. YHWH's Firstborn: 4:21-23

The aspect of conflict is heightened in YHWH's additional instructions in 4:21-23, which appear to be out of sequence.⁴²¹ When read in the context of the narrative as a whole these instructions suggest to the reader that the signs Moses was told to perform before the Israelite elders and people (4:5) will also be signs for Pharaoh.⁴²² The instructions also introduce the concept that YHWH will give Pharaoh the strength to resist YHWH's demands.⁴²³ This is followed by YHWH's announcement of his intention to kill Pharaoh's firstborn due to his refusal to let YHWH's firstborn (Israel) go free. This statement to Pharaoh is to be made after the wonders and so functions as an introduction to the final plague.⁴²⁴ The reader is thus reminded of the eventual destination of the narrative, and in the world of the narrative Moses is informed that Pharaoh will be defeated by YHWH.

Referring to Israel as YHWH's firstborn is another "first" for the narrative, and stresses the importance that YHWH places on Israel, described before as "my people". The words in their narrative setting are addressed to Pharaoh, to be delivered by Moses. Thus the reader thinks about the impact of the words in relation to Pharaoh and to Moses. For Pharaoh the words are a direct challenge to his rule and authority, but they also pose a challenge for Moses: if Israel is so important to YHWH, then why has Moses been so reluctant to rescue them?

If Exodus 4:24-26 is at least possibly about the circumcision of Moses' son then the theme of sons links Exodus 4:21-23 and 4:24-26.⁴²⁵ Exodus 4:21-23 serves to heighten the

⁴²¹ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 102.

⁴²² Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:429. So the beginning of the plague narrative, where Aaron's staff becomes a snake and the Nile is turned to blood.

⁴²³ See the insightful discussion in: John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (Downers Grove, Ill; Milton Keynes: InterVarsity; Paternoster, 2003), 351.

⁴²⁴ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 102; and see also Driver, who suggested that it may originally have been J's introduction to the final plague: Driver, *The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version*, 31.

⁴²⁵ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 78; Kaplan, "'And the Lord Sought to Kill Him' (Exod 4:24) : Yet Once Again," 67-68

importance of the Exodus, and permits the suggestion that YHWH's anger at Moses' refusal may be behind the threat to the life of Moses' son, or Moses. Furthermore the inclusion of the instructions here serves to alert the reader to Moses' advance knowledge of Pharaoh's resistance. Exodus 4:21-23 does not contradict 3:16-22, rather it provides additional information as to YHWH's motives and methods in relation to Pharaoh and Israel.

3.3.5. YHWH's Speeches of Commissioning and Instruction: Conclusion

Through these speeches YHWH is shown as a God who sees the suffering of his people, and is motivated to come down. He is a God who comes down by sending a human person, Moses. YHWH is not only the rescuing God, he is the creator God as well and he is a God who has a special relationship with his people: Israel is his son. YHWH's speeches show a distinct progression, providing Moses with the information he needs to do the task he is called to, and yet not providing all the information Moses, or even the reader, needs to make sense of every future narrative event. The reader is given much more information from YHWH's own lips than from the words of the narrator, and yet there is room for the reader, and certainly for Moses, to be surprised, curious and kept in suspense by YHWH's and by Pharaoh's actions.

3.3.6. Moses' Objections in the Narrative

Moses' speeches in this narrative are all in the context of responses to YHWH's speeches, and are usually objections of one sort or another. I will consider various proposals which have been put forward for understanding Moses' objections, before demonstrating how this understanding is improved by an analysis of the dialogue. Childs argues that a chief concern of the narrative as it stands is to paint a portrayal of Moses' fundamental

resistance to God's call.⁴²⁶ He suggests that Moses' objections "do not have a logical flow", but that they reflect a combination of genuine problems and contrived excuses, all of which are met by God with "utmost seriousness. The objection is examined and then met with a divine promise".⁴²⁷

Thomas Römer sees Exodus 3:1-22 as the primary call narrative with its pattern: speech of God, objection and reply, objection and reply, speech of God.⁴²⁸ Dozeman argues that the "call narrative" in 3:1-4:18 is focused on the twin issues of the identity of the deity and the authority of Moses, with the split between these two foci coming at the end of 3:15.⁴²⁹

Dozeman argues that the interweaving through the narrative of the "repeated resistance of Moses to the divine commission" suggests that Exodus 3:1-4:18 forms a literary unit.⁴³⁰

Dozeman divides the second section further at 4:10, with the first half focused around Moses' authority in relation to the elders and a second on Moses' authority in relation to Aaron.⁴³¹ Each of these sections contains an objection to the divine commission, an expected feature of the call narrative.⁴³²

Van Seters also argues that Moses' objections structure Moses' call narrative.⁴³³ He analyses these objections as beginning with Moses expressing his own inadequacy, in a similar way to Saul and Gideon, followed by a "shift to Moses' relationship to the Israelite people", first with the question of the identity of the deity, and then with the question of Moses' acceptance as a messenger of the deity, before switching back to Moses himself,

⁴²⁶ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 71.

⁴²⁷ Although there is also a sense that the objections do reflect an increased degree of "doubt and excuse making": *Ibid.*, 73-75.

⁴²⁸ Römer, "Exodus 3-4 Und Die Aktuelle Pentateuchdiskussion," 72-73; he then sees 4:1-18 as a later expansion on the theme of Moses' objections.

⁴²⁹ Dozeman, "The Commission of Moses and the Book of Genesis," 111.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁴³² *Ibid.*

⁴³³ Van Seters, *The Life of Moses*, 53.

firstly his inability to speak, and finally his unwillingness.⁴³⁴ Van Seters argues there is “nothing haphazard about this structure; it reflects a single author” and it has a “general consistency in style, theme and literary structure.”⁴³⁵

In a similar manner Houtman also sees an overall unity to Exodus 3:1-4:17.⁴³⁶ He sees a very similar structure to Van Seters, with a shift from Moses’ inadequacy, to his acceptance by the people and back to Moses’ inadequacy.⁴³⁷ Houtman writes: “God carefully listens to all of Moses’ objections, and gives completely satisfying answers (3:12, 14-22; 4:2-9, 11-12)”.⁴³⁸ Den Hertog concurs with this assessment of the pattern, and adds the observation that 3:11 and 3:13 are both couched as questions, while 4:1 and 4:10 are firm denials.⁴³⁹ With regard to YHWH’s responses to Moses’ objections den Hertog adds some nuance to Houtman’s comments when he suggests that “the promise of assistance in 3:12 is then mirrored by a more specific one in 4:12.”⁴⁴⁰ Furthermore den Hertog notes that Moses’ objection in 4:10 is not followed immediately by a reference to his stated problem, but first by a more general response as to who YHWH is, followed by the promise of divine aid to answer the specific objection; this, den Hertog argues, is a similar pattern to 3:14-15.⁴⁴¹ I will now turn to an examination of the dialogues and see if any further development of den Hertog’s pattern can be found.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 53.

⁴³⁶ While accepting that there may be a combination of sources involved in its production he also thinks the final product is a “meaningful text”: Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:422.

⁴³⁷ He structures this as follows:

A 3:11 – Moses’ unsuitability (who am I?)

B 3:13 – the people won’t accept him (what is his name?)

B’ 4:1 – the people won’t accept him (they won’t believe)

A’ 4:10 – Moses’ unsuitability (I can’t speak). Ibid., 1:324.

⁴³⁸ Houtman goes on “He assures Moses of his presence and guarantees the success of the undertaking (3:12). He gives detailed instructions concerning the mission, so that Moses is well equipped to assume his task (3:14-22)”. Ibid., 1:324–5.

⁴³⁹ Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 113.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 114.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

3.4. ANALYSIS OF THE DIALOGUES

3.4.1. The Burning Bush: 3:1-6

A1 ATTENTION GETTING⁴⁴² ²And the angel of YHWH appeared to him in a flame of fire, from the middle of the bush.

A2 INVESTIGATION (PREF) And he looked, and the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed,³ and Moses said: ‘Let me turn aside in order to see this great sight, why the bush is not burning up.’

⁴When YHWH saw that he had turned to see, then God called to him from the midst of the bush, and he said:

B1 CALL “Moses, Moses.”

And he said:

B2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT (PREF)⁴⁴³ “Here I am.”

⁵And he said:

C1 COMMAND “Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”

C2 Implied OBEDIENCE (PREF)

⁶And he said:

D1 SELF-INTRODUCTION “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.”

D2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT (PREF) Then Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look on God.

The dialogue opens (A1) with a non-verbal invitation from YHWH to Moses. This is unusual in the dialogues, but is a key part of the communication between YHWH and Moses, so I have included it as the first adjacency pair.⁴⁴⁴ In the context of a discussion of everyday conversation a query “can be signalled either by a phrase or by a gesture.”⁴⁴⁵ In this case the appearance stands out by contrast to the angel of YHWH’s appearances in the book of Genesis, where the angel has always either appeared in some kind of human form, or been a voice calling from heaven.⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴² Space prohibits any detailed analysis of the significance of a “burning bush” in particular, but, whatever else it may signify, it certainly functions within the dialogue as a means by which YHWH gets Moses’ attention.

⁴⁴³ Compare 1 Samuel 3, Genesis 22 and Isaiah 6, “here I am” is a “standard response” to YHWH’s call.

⁴⁴⁴ Person argues that second parts of pairings can often be simply given by reporting the actions of characters: Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 25.

⁴⁴⁵ Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), 39.

⁴⁴⁶ For an informative study of these dialogues see: Tracy, *Dialogue in Genesis*.

Moses' response is the preferred one of turning to look, and to move closer to see the sight more clearly.⁴⁴⁷ This response is followed by what would be a standard call and response pairing (B) except for the twofold calling of Moses' name. This twofold calling is rare, but indicates a matter of some importance. Abraham is addressed in this manner in Genesis 22 at the moment he is about to sacrifice Isaac, Jacob is addressed in this way when God calls him to go down to Egypt in Genesis 46 and Samuel is addressed in this way in 1 Samuel 3 when YHWH brings his word of judgement on Eli and begins Samuel's role in the nation's life.⁴⁴⁸ The twofold calling of the name is also how YHWH proclaims his own name in Exodus 34.⁴⁴⁹ By this the reader is primed to understand the scene as one of calling and to expect Moses' role to be particularly important. Moses' response is the normal response to being addressed by God in such a way (cf. Gen. 22, Gen. 46, 1 Sam. 3).

God's next speech (C1) commands Moses to remove his shoes, and Moses' response goes unreported. Kare Berge describes this as a "blind motif", whose significance is not further developed in the narrative, and where the stress is not laid on the fulfilment of the command, but rather on the command itself.⁴⁵⁰ It is reasonable, therefore, to assume that

⁴⁴⁷ It does not seem that the reader is supposed to worry unduly about the different terminology used by the narrator "bush which burns but is not consumed", and Moses: "why the bush does not burn (up)": Propp notes the difficulty, but considers it minor, and that to "resort to source analysis" as Schmidt does is to "overreact": Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 200; Schmidt, *Exodus*, 1:104; Houtman suggests that the point is the remarkability of a bush that continues to burn without being consumed in a "few moments": Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:341-2.

⁴⁴⁸ Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, 52.

⁴⁴⁹ Jacob cites Ibn Ezra as making this connection: *Ibid.*, 982.

⁴⁵⁰ Berge gives several examples of similar commands where compliance is not reported (Gen. 13:7; 18:6; Exod. 1:22, 9:1-5; 17:14; Isa. 7:1-9): Kare Berge, *Reading Sources in a Text: Coherence and Literary Criticism in the Call of Moses; Models-Methods-Micro-Analysis*, Arbeiten zu Text und Sprache im Alten Testament 54 (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1997), 75; it should be noted that Joshua 5:13-15, in some ways a parallel passage to Exodus 3, and one in which Joshua's obedience to the command to remove his shoes is specifically stated, does not thereby imply that a failure to report Moses' removal of his shoes implies he did not. Rather it is that the emphasis in Joshua 5 and 6 is on Joshua's complete obedience; see: Lebharr Hall, Sarah, *Conquering Character: The Characterization of Joshua in Joshua 1-11* (London: T & T Clark International, 2010), 94.

Moses complies with the command, especially as Moses hides his face in response to the self-introduction of God in D1.⁴⁵¹

Moses' fear in the presence of the divine is a theme less developed within Genesis, at least at first, where Abraham encounters the angel of YHWH without any fear. It is only in the narrative surrounding Jacob that fear enters the equation (Gen. 28:14; Gen. 32:30) and in the designation, also on the lips of Jacob of "Fear of Isaac" (Gen. 31:42, 53). It is perhaps not surprising that it comes more into focus in this incident of the burning bush, at the first instance of a place described as "holy" in the Old Testament.⁴⁵²

A key feature of this introductory command to Moses is that YHWH introduces himself as the God of Moses' father. YHWH introduces himself as the God of the patriarchs, and the God of Israel, by adding "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", and hence identifies Moses' family with Israel. This is the start of the process of re-orientating Moses to his identity as an Israelite.⁴⁵³

3.4.2. The Commissioning of Moses (I): 3:7-15

⁷And YHWH said:

E1a STATEMENT "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and I have heard their cry because of their slave drivers. Indeed, I know their suffering. ⁸And I have come down to rescue them from the hand of Egypt, and to bring them up from that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹For now indeed the cry of the Israelites has come up to me and also I have seen the oppression (with) which Egypt oppresses them.

E1b COMMISSION ¹⁰So now: **Go, and I will send you to Pharaoh, and bring out my people, the Israelites, from Egypt.**⁴⁵⁴

¹¹And Moses said to God:

INS.A1 QUESTION (DIS) "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring out the Israelites from Egypt?"

¹²And he said:

⁴⁵¹ Compare Gideon and Manoah's fear in Judges 6:22-23 and 13:22), and Isaiah's reaction to the vision of Isaiah 6.

⁴⁵² Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 25.

⁴⁵³ Seitz, "The Call of Moses and the 'Revelation' of the Divine Name," 151-152

⁴⁵⁴ Here, and throughout the commissioning sections, I have emphasised YHWH's command to Moses to go by placing it in bold type.

INS.A2 RE-ORIENTATING ANSWER “{You can go to Pharaoh and bring out the Israelites}⁴⁵⁵ because I will be with you(sg), and this will be the sign to you: when you (sg) bring out the Israelites from Egypt you (pl) will worship God on this mountain.”

¹³*And Moses said to God:*

INS.B1 QUESTION (DIS) “If I go to the Israelites and I say to them, ‘the God of your fathers has sent me to you’, then they may say ‘what is his name?’ – what shall I say?”

¹⁴*And God said to Moses:*

INS.B2a RE-ORIENTATING ANSWER “I will be who I will be”

And he said:

INS.B2b ANSWER “Thus you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I will be has sent me to you.’”

¹⁵*And again he said to Moses:*

INS.B2c ANSWER “Thus you are to say to the Israelites ‘YHWH, God of your fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob has sent me to you – this is my name for ever, this how I am to be remembered⁴⁵⁶ from generation to generation.’”

3.4.2.1. YHWH’s speech

This speech (E1a) is specifically ascribed to YHWH, rather than to God or even the angel of YHWH, and in the context of this chapter this marks for the reader a switch towards YHWH’s perspective on events. As I noted above, the contents of this speech are concerned with YHWH’s people, and with YHWH’s promises made to Abraham in Genesis 15 concerning the land. In 2:24-25 God’s concern for the people was described, here it is restated and given specific content from YHWH himself.⁴⁵⁷ In the context of the narrative this begins to bring Moses’ knowledge into line with that of the reader.

3.4.2.2. Moses’ Objection (I)

Moses’ response is a question which begins an “insertion sequence” (INS.A1 in the outline), in other words a conversation within the conversation, where a question is asked rather than a direct response provided.⁴⁵⁸ It is noticeable that Moses is described as replying to God, rather than being said to reply to YHWH. The effect of this description is to remind the reader that Moses does not yet know God as “YHWH”. Moses’ objection

⁴⁵⁵ Miller argues that often the “causal ׀ at the beginning of a direct quotation does not bear a relationship to a matrix verb within the quotation, but rather is pragmatically linked to a preceding quotation or action within the narrative context”; in Exodus 3:12 God’s answer begins by referring back to Moses’ question: Miller, *Representation*, 107.

⁴⁵⁶ Or invoked, this is the name YHWH is to be called by in worship – see HALOT, ׀ךָ.

⁴⁵⁷ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 59–60.

⁴⁵⁸ Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 18.

ignores all that YHWH has said about his activity and the suffering of the people; instead it focuses on Moses' inability or lack of identity required to undertake his task.

In general such a response could be expected to be classified as “dispreferred”, given that it does not obey the commission. However an objection based on the identity of the one called is familiar in the wider context of the Old Testament call narratives. Gideon replies to the divine call by asking how he will deliver Israel since he is the weakest in his family, and his clan the weakest of his tribe (Judges 6:15), while Saul also speaks of his family's lowly status in response to Samuel (1 Samuel 9:21) and Jeremiah speaks of his relative youth (Jeremiah 1:6).⁴⁵⁹ An initial objection to a divine call is expected, so Moses' reply could be counted as a “preferred” response if it fits this pattern.⁴⁶⁰ However it is also usual for such expressions of modesty to make some comment on the low status of the one being commissioned. Moses, however, says nothing about his family or occupation, but focuses on the problem of Pharaoh.⁴⁶¹ This leads Saner to conclude that “a good reader should be puzzled, and a bit troubled, by Moses' question. True humility would require him to say something like: ‘who am I that you should send me to bring out the Israelites?’”⁴⁶²

The question “who am I?” leads the reader back to Exodus 2, where Moses was introduced. This provided a mixture of images of Moses. In 2:1-10 the infant Moses is placed on the Nile, in a manner reminiscent of other ANE birth stories (e.g. Sargon's), indicating that he is likely to be a hero of some sort in what follows.⁴⁶³ The next stage of

⁴⁵⁹ Habel, “Form and Significance of the Call Narratives”, 300-308; Shalom-Guy, “The Call Narratives of Gideon and Moses,” 6-7.

⁴⁶⁰ For example, it could be argued that the question demonstrates Moses' response is a statement of humility as expected on such occasions. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 36.

⁴⁶¹ Intriguingly Cassuto's explanatory paraphrase includes the comment “who am I a lowly shepherd”. Yet that is precisely what the biblical narrator does not do: Ibid.; Saner, “YHWH, the Trinity, and the Literal Sense,” 125.

⁴⁶² Saner, “YHWH, the Trinity, and the Literal Sense,” 125.

⁴⁶³ Arguing that Moses is portrayed in a semi-heroic manner, because only the first few stages of the familiar motif are utilised is: Kürle, *Appeal*, 148–150; arguing for a mixture of ANE motifs with Hebrew wisdom concepts is: Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 8–14; with a thorough discussion of the “Floating Foundling”

Moses' life is however distinctly unpromising. He identifies himself as a Hebrew, and kills one of their oppressors, but on intervening in an intra-Hebrew dispute he is rejected and flees Egypt. He is identified as an Egyptian by Jethro's daughters. The question "who am I to lead the Israelites?" is a pressing one for Moses, who was rejected by Israelites and found himself a stranger in a strange land.⁴⁶⁴

YHWH does not suggest that Moses' identity or lack thereof is a problem from God's perspective. YHWH's answer provides a new way for Moses' identity to be defined.⁴⁶⁵

Moses' objection is met with the affirmation "I will be with you", a key phrase for much of what follows. As the narrative is followed it becomes clear that "I will be with you" is more than a simple reassurance of presence. יהוה is repeated in 3:14 three times, and it is seen as closely tied in with YHWH's name. To express the thought that God will be with Moses only the יהוה and אעמך are needed.⁴⁶⁶

In the context of 3:14 it is plausible that יהוה has been expressly chosen here to make the link with the divine name explicit.⁴⁶⁷ Moberly notes that each time YHWH's name is mentioned in this section it is immediately followed by a sending of Moses, and he links this to the idea of Moses being the archetype of the prophet.⁴⁶⁸ Rather than Moses being defined by who he is, he will be defined by who YHWH is, and by what YHWH has called him to do. Moses will become, in conversation with YHWH, the rescuer and deliverer of

motif in ANE (and wider) literature, and a tentative willingness to accept that such tales could be based on an underlying historical reality is: Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 155–158.

⁴⁶⁴ See especially: Seitz, "The Call of Moses and the 'Revelation' of the Divine Name," 151.

⁴⁶⁵ Thus while Albertz is correct to say that YHWH here promises his assistance, this is by no means all that is contained in this affirmation of YHWH's presence: Albertz, *Exodus 1-18*, 83.

⁴⁶⁶ See Genesis 26:3 and 26:24, and Genesis 28:15 and 28:20, for examples of both in a single dialogue.

⁴⁶⁷ Coats, *Moses*, 64.

⁴⁶⁸ Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 23.

Israel, rather than retain the identities he frames for himself of Moses on the run from Egypt, and Moses the shepherd of Midian.⁴⁶⁹

God's reassurance of his promise is followed by the provision of a sign demonstrating his presence. This is a normal part of "call narratives", but in this case matters are less clear because of the lack of clarity over the referent of "this" because of future reference of the sign.⁴⁷⁰ The most straightforward reading of the text is to take the sign as referring to the future gathering of the Israelites at Sinai.⁴⁷¹ The sign will still function as a reassurance for Moses; when the sign is fulfilled the task of bringing Israel into the land will still be incomplete, and the sign will also validate Moses in the eyes of the people, given that "you will worship" is plural.⁴⁷² This supports Seitz's analysis that a key feature of the dialogue in chapter 3 is that YHWH is drawing Moses to a closer identification with Israel.⁴⁷³

Thus, while Moses' objection and YHWH's response are a "normal" feature of similar "call narratives", in both objection and response there is a subtle twist that marks this dialogue as somewhat "different". Moses' objection does not give a reason for his question "who am I?" which would usually be assumed to be a statement of modesty. Here however I argued that it is most likely based on his lack of identity as an Israelite. God's reply does not provide an immediate sign of his presence but rather a future sign. In other words, Moses is invited into action with YHWH in order to see how his question will be resolved.

⁴⁶⁹ See similar comments on the conversation with Gideon in: McCracken, "Character in the Boundary," 18-19.

⁴⁷⁰ Noth suggested that the referent of "this" is now lost to us: Noth, *Exodus*, 42; Childs argues for the burning bush as the sign: Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 60; in addition Propp suggests either Moses' rod as the sign, or even the name 'eyheh: Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 203.

⁴⁷¹ Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:364-5.

⁴⁷² Coats, *Moses*, 63.

⁴⁷³ Seitz, "The Call of Moses and the 'Revelation' of the Divine Name," 151.

3.4.2.3. Moses' Objection (II)

After YHWH answers the objection Moses moves on to a further question (INS.B1), envisaging the second part of his commissioning (“bring out my people”) and in particular what they will say. This is initially striking because in 3:10 YHWH simply commands Moses to go so that he can send him to Pharaoh and bring out the Israelites, without reference to any meeting with the Israelites first. However it is difficult to imagine Moses bringing the Israelites out without first having met them, and instructed them.

Furthermore, the remainder of the dialogue between YHWH and Moses continues on the assumption by both YHWH and Moses that this is something Moses is expected to do.

Thus 3:10 contains within it at the least an implied suggestion that Moses is being sent to the Israelites as well. In this case 3:11 and 3:13 fit together, the first questioning the fitness of the one being sent, while the second questions the name of the one sending (and implicitly therefore in context the fitness of the one sending).⁴⁷⁴

I have investigated the meaning of Moses' question in detail previously. There is no parallel in a “call narrative” for this question; such parallels as there are exist in two theophanies where the divinity of the messenger is not yet known.⁴⁷⁵ Moses by contrast knows the divinity of his dialogue partner, but wishes to know the name. YHWH does not provide the response that the reader would expect. This is the case in both of YHWH's responses to Moses in the first part of the commissioning narrative. Both responses begin with a general statement regarding YHWH's plan, and go on to provide a more detailed response:

⁴⁷⁴ It is probably Durham who comes closest to this understanding with his suggestion that Moses moves from “Who am I?” to “Who are you?”, but he does not explicitly tie this into the verb “to send”: Durham, *Exodus*, 37.

⁴⁷⁵ Genesis 32:29 and Judges 13:18, both questions addressed to divine figures by a human who did not know that the figure was divine.

| | Exodus 3:12 | Exodus 3:13-15 |
|---|--|--|
| Moses' question | "Who am I...?" | "They will ask, 'what is his name?' What shall I say?" |
| General statement regarding YHWH | "I will be with you | And God said to Moses: "I will be who I will be." |
| Specific instruction | and this will be the sign to you: when you (sg) bring out the Israelites from Egypt you (pl) will worship God on this mountain." | And he said: "Thus you shall say to the Israelites: 'I will be has sent me to you.'" And again he said to Moses: "Thus you shall say to the Israelites: 'YHWH, God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has sent me to you'" |

Neither response can exactly be said to be "preferred" in that neither addresses Moses' particular concern in the way that the reader imagines Moses wants. "I will be with you" followed by a sign that will only be fulfilled when Moses does as he is told does not immediately address Moses' concerns.⁴⁷⁶ Even more starkly "I will be who I will be" does not exactly fulfil Moses' request for a name. And yet both responses re-orientate Moses to the things he needs to know and the person he needs to be in order to carry out his commission. Exodus 3:12 assures him of YHWH's presence, and gives him additional assurance in the future moment when he arrives at Sinai with Israel. Similarly YHWH's response in 3:14 is both an assurance of YHWH's presence and an affirmation of YHWH's freedom to be present as he chooses. YHWH's instruction in 3:14b is an affirmation that YHWH is present to Israel in and through Moses and 3:15 is a confirmation that this YHWH is the God of their fathers. At 3:15 YHWH finishes his response to Moses' second question and 3:16 begins a new commissioning speech.

⁴⁷⁶ The implied reader knows that the presence of YHWH is the ultimate reassurance for Moses, but in the narrative Moses does not know the story, and does not have any personal experience of the God who is speaking to him. Thus the presence of YHWH does not (yet) give anything like the same degree of reassurance to Moses that it would to the implied reader of the narrative.

3.4.3. The Commissioning of Moses (II): 3:16-4:11

F1a COMMISSION ¹⁶“Go and gather Israel’s elders and say to them:

F1b: STATEMENT

FUT.A1 ‘YHWH, God of your fathers has appeared to me – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob saying:

STATEMENT “I have paid close attention to you, and the things done against you in Egypt.

¹⁷So I declare:

PROMISE I will bring you up from the affliction of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

FUT.A2. TRUST ¹⁸And they will listen to you;

then you and the elders of Israel will go to the King of Egypt and you (together) will say to him:

FUT.B1 REQUEST ‘YHWH, God of the Hebrews has met with us, so now, let us go a three day journey into the wilderness so that we may sacrifice to YHWH our God.’

FUT.B2 REFUSAL ¹⁹But I know that the King of Egypt will not let you go even by a mighty hand. ⁴⁷⁷

FUT.C1 DEMONSTRATION ²⁰So I will stretch out my hand, and I will strike Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in their midst.

FUT.C2 OBEDIENCE After that he will let you go. ²¹And I will give favour to this people in the eyes of Egypt so that when you go, you will not go empty, ²²for each woman will take silver jewellery and gold jewellery from her neighbour and from those living in her house and you shall put (them) on your sons and on your daughters, and so you shall plunder the Egyptians.”

⁴And Moses answered and he said:

F2b CONTRADICTION (DIS) “But see, they will not believe me or listen to my voice ⁴⁷⁸, for they will say ‘YHWH did not appear to you.’”

²And YHWH said to him:

G1 QUESTION “What is that in your hand?”

And he said:

G2 ANSWER (PREF) “A staff.”

³And he said:

H1 COMMAND “Throw it down to the ground.”

H2 OBEDIENCE (PREF) So he threw it down to the ground, it became a snake and Moses fled from it.

⁴Then YHWH said to Moses:

I1 COMMAND “Stretch out your hand and seize it by its tail.”

I2 OBEDIENCE (PREF) So he stretched out his hand and he took hold of it and it became a staff in his hand.

J1a STATEMENT ⁵“Therefore they will believe that YHWH God of their fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob appeared to you.”

⁶And YHWH said to him again:

J1b COMMAND “Put your hand in your cloak, and take it out.”

J2b OBEDIENCE (PREF) And (indeed) his hand, being struck with a skin disease, was as snow.

⁷Then he said:

⁴⁷⁷ See discussion below, most English translations follow the LXX “except by a mighty hand”.

⁴⁷⁸ More idiomatically “listen to my voice” could be “listen to me”, or even “obey me”, but “listen to my voice” has been kept throughout 4:1-9 to show the repetitions of this phrase. See discussion below.

K1 COMMAND “Return your hand to your cloak.”

K2 OBEDIENCE (PREF) And he took it out from his cloak, and it returned as his flesh.

L1a STATEMENT ⁸“And so if they do not believe you or listen to the voice of the first sign then they will believe the voice of the second sign, ⁹but if they do not believe even this second sign or listen to your voice then take from the waters of the River and you shall pour out to the dry ground and the waters which you took from the River shall become blood on the dry ground.”⁴⁷⁹

¹⁰*And Moses said to YHWH:*

INS.A1. STATEMENT (DIS) “Please my Lord, I am not an eloquent man. Not in the past, nor since your speaking to your servant, for I am slow of speech and slow of words.”

¹¹*And YHWH said to him:*

INS.B2. STATEMENT “Who enables a person to speak? Or who makes a person dumb, or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, YHWH?”

3.4.3.1. Moses and the Elders

YHWH repeats his commission to Moses (F1), and begins to provide the details of what needs to be done. This section is presented in the form of a future dialogue that Moses will have, first with the elders and then with Pharaoh. YHWH tells Moses to say to the Israelite elders (FUT.A1) that YHWH has appeared to him, and then Moses is to say what YHWH has said to him. YHWH’s speech includes a further declaration by YHWH, intended for the ears of the Israelite elders that he will do as he has promised. The effect of this (FUT.A2) is that the elders will believe Moses. Their response will be “preferred”, in that believing is the correct response to a prophetic word, and they will be ready for the next stage.

3.4.3.2. Moses and the Elders before Pharaoh

This will be followed by Moses and the elders going to Pharaoh (FUT.B1), and saying “YHWH, the God of the Hebrews has met with us, so now please let us go on a three day journey into the wilderness, so that we may sacrifice to YHWH our God.” This request strikes the reader as jarring because it is not the complete deliverance that YHWH declared in 3:8-10 and seems somehow underhand.⁴⁸⁰ Propp suggests that the tradition of the three day journey request developed because of the inherent appeal of “Trickster tales”, so that

⁴⁷⁹ The translation here follows some English translations and LXX. The MT has a somewhat awkward repetition of “shall become”, which may make the sentence somewhat more emphatic.

⁴⁸⁰ Jacob however argues that since the three days is a description of the length of the journey there is never any suggestion of a return by the Israelites: Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, 125.

“tradition has created an enjoyable story of the Hebrews and their god outwitting a tyrant (cf 1:15-21)”.⁴⁸¹

By contrast, Brueggemann argues even this “small” demand is actually a big threat, because it “deligitimates the religious claims of the empire through the sacramental acknowledgment of a counter-God.”⁴⁸² This explanation may help a reader in a largely secular context, where “worship” is often perceived as a “non-threatening” activity, take the request for a three day journey to worship as a weighty one. However, even if Brueggemann is right to suggest that this is a large threat to Egyptian society, it is still less of a threat than the entire Hebrew workforce leaving and not returning.

Because of this the suggestion of Driver is plausible that the request for a three day journey may not have been intended as a deception, but could have been intended as the beginning of a negotiating strategy, by starting off with a small demand before moving on to a greater one.⁴⁸³ In this he has been followed by a number of more recent commentators.⁴⁸⁴

YHWH proceeds to warn of the conflict that will result (FUT.B2): Pharaoh will not agree even to a three day journey and will not let Israel go, lit: “and not by a mighty hand”. The meaning of “mighty hand” is somewhat unclear. The essential problem is the function of the *waw* in “וְלֹא בְיָד חֲזָקָה”. The *waw* could be taken as an “epexegetical *waw*” which clarifies what has gone before so that the sentence would read “...will not let you go, not

⁴⁸¹ Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 207.

⁴⁸² Brueggemann, Walter, “The Book of Exodus: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections” in *General and Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus*. Vol. 1 of *New Interpreter’s Bible*., ed. Leander Earl Keck (Nashville :: Abingdon Press, 1994), 714.

⁴⁸³ Driver, *The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version*, 25.

⁴⁸⁴ See, for example: C. Houtman, *Exodus* (Leuven: Peeters), 376; Terence E Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 66; Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 1st English ed, Publications of the Perry Foundation for Biblical Research in the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1967), 43.

even by a mighty hand...⁴⁸⁵ Alternatively a perhaps more straightforward option is available followed by many English versions, following the LXX, “will not let you go, except by a mighty hand”.⁴⁸⁶ In this case the LXX could reflect a textual variation: אֵלָּוּן, or a rare use of the *waw* for an exceptive clause, with Propp noting some examples that provide parallels (1 Sam. 20:2; 2 Sam. 13:26 and 2 Kgs. 5:17) which would substantiate a translation along the lines of “if not/except by a mighty hand”.⁴⁸⁷ In either case, given that 3:20 clearly refers to YHWH’s hand the point made remains the same, that YHWH will need to stretch out his hand and strike Egypt before Pharaoh will let the people go.⁴⁸⁸

YHWH promises that he will indeed stretch out his hand and perform mighty wonders (FUT.C1) and that Pharaoh will finally relent and give the “preferred” response to a command and obey by letting the people go (FUT.C2). The final section of this speech anticipates the conflict to come, and reinforces for the reader that YHWH knows and declares what will happen.⁴⁸⁹

3.4.3.3. Moses’ Objection (III)

Moses’ response in 4:1 is introduced with וַיַּעַן מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר “And Moses answered and said”. This particular way of introducing speech is relatively rare within the Pentateuch.

⁴⁸⁵ Ronald J Williams, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), #434, p154. If this construction is right the question is whose hand is referred to, Israel, YHWH or Pharaoh. Israel does not seem likely because the “hand” of Israel is not referred to elsewhere in the Exodus context, see: Houtman, *Exodus*, 378. To read the hand as YHWH’s hand seems somewhat odd as in the next verse (3:20) it is YHWH stretching out his hand which makes Pharaoh let them go, although see Alec Motyer who comments: “The fact that Pharaoh could resist the Lord’s hand in verse 19 but submitted to it in verse 20 lies within the doctrine (and problem) of divine providence: Alec Motyer, *The Message of Exodus: The Days of Our Pilgrimage*, The Bible speaks today, Old Testament (Leicester: IVP, 2005), 73. Under this position it is perhaps Pharaoh whose hand is most likely referred to here, although this has not often been suggested, perhaps because the alternative seems simpler.

⁴⁸⁶ See discussion in: Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:378.

⁴⁸⁷ Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 207. A further possibility is the Samaritan Pentateuch’s הַלֵּוּן, although it is not clear how the clause would function as a question either

⁴⁸⁸ Dozeman identifies 3 key motifs in this section which are “all reflecting a background in war, and anticipating the ensuing conflict between Yahweh and Pharaoh”, namely: Pharaoh’s resistance, YHWH’s wonders performed among the Egyptians and the plundering of the Egyptians: Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 138–139.

⁴⁸⁹ So Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 77; and against Fretheim, *Exodus*, 67–69.

Miller finds that in the context of lengthy dialogues it usually comes only once or twice, and often identifies particularly significant responses in the conversation.⁴⁹⁰ In the context of this analysis it seems therefore that the וְיִּי at the start of Moses' answer is an emphatic exclamation of Moses' perception that he will not be believed, rather than introducing a conditional clause.⁴⁹¹ This stark refusal moves beyond the "expected" objections to a prophetic call and forms a definite move towards a "dispreferred response", perhaps even a response to which a reader might expect some degree of sanction.⁴⁹²

In response to the first two objections from Moses YHWH gave lengthy spoken responses. In response to the third objection YHWH issues commands which are followed by signs of his power to reassure Moses that he will be able to convince the people. YHWH's commands begin with a question to Moses, inviting his response. Moses complies with YHWH's request for obedience and this begins a sequence of relatively straightforward commands by YHWH, and actions by Moses that lead to YHWH's signs in response. This sequence forms a vivid contrast with the remainder of the narrative, and Moses' actions with the snake form a sequence that is somewhat comic, yet perhaps highlights Moses' willingness to obey YHWH in a matter that does not involve speech.

In the midst of this command and obedience sequence both J1a and L1 begin without a speech introduction at all; YHWH's speech simply continues on,⁴⁹³ indicating that YHWH's speech here is relatively continuous, happening almost simultaneously with Moses' actions

⁴⁹⁰ Miller identifies Genesis 24:50-51, and also cites Wenham as suggesting: Gen. 18:27; 23:5, 10, 14; 24:50; 27:37; 39; 40:18: Miller, *Representation*, 321; and see: Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, Word biblical commentary 2 (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1994), 272.

⁴⁹¹ Understanding the sentence as a "brusque response" with a note of "harsh dissidence" is: Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 77; By contrast understanding it as a conditional "they may say" with the expected "what then am I to do/say" missing: Houtman, *Exodus*, 389; also Dozeman, along with NRSV and NIV: Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 139; Noting the issue succinctly is Propp: וְיִי "could also be translated more emphatically: 'look - they will not believe me'": Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 209.

⁴⁹² See my discussion of this issue in the previous chapter and especially: Boyle, "Whatever Happened to Preference Organisation?" 589.

⁴⁹³ Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 209.

in response. In terms of dialogue between the two, this section provides something of an interlude, with both sets of speeches being relatively short, until YHWH's final instructions to Moses which meet Moses' objection in 4:1. Moses' "answer" has been answered by YHWH's signs, and by the reassurance that the people will believe. Here the structure of Moses' objection and YHWH's verbal response can be outlined as follows:

| Exodus 4:1-9 | |
|---|---|
| Moses' objection (4:1) | But they will not believe me, and they will not listen to my voice because they will say "YHWH did not appear to you." |
| General statement of reassurance (4:5) | Therefore (because of the signs) they will believe that YHWH, God of their fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob appeared to you. |
| Specific instruction (4:8-9) | And if they do not believe you or listen to the voice of the first sign then they will believe the voice of the second sign. But if they do not believe even these two signs then you are to take water from the Nile and pour it out on the ground and the water which you took from the Nile will become blood, it will become blood on the ground. |

Here I note that YHWH's first reassurance goes to the heart of Moses' objections, in that it affirms that they will believe that YHWH (the God of their fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob) appeared to Moses. The second follows after an additional sign, and provides the reassurance that the "voice of the signs" will be believed. It is striking, in the context of Moses' following objection, that YHWH provides another voice to go alongside Moses' voice.⁴⁹⁴ If this voice is not believed then YHWH provides a final sign.⁴⁹⁵ In the next objection, however, Moses moves the focus back to his own voice.

3.4.3.4. Moses Objection (IV)

YHWH's response to Moses' objection is met by Moses objecting once more. 4:10 is the first time Moses is said to address YHWH; perhaps now that the name has been revealed,

⁴⁹⁴ Propp suggests the phrase "voice of the signs" means something like "meaning", but also notes a suggestion from O'Connell (unpublished) that the signs "voice" validates Moses' "voice". Ibid., 210. Thus we might conclude that there is something of a wordplay on קוֹל in these verses.

⁴⁹⁵ Propp is not impressed with the signs: "Yahweh provides Moses with miracles that make him seem an ordinary conjuror and even smack of fakery." Ibid., 227 however in 4:30-31 there is no evidence of the signs being unconvincing, rather they serve to move the narrative on to the next stage.

Moses can be said to speak to YHWH, although it is only in chapter 5 that Moses will actually address YHWH by name. His response shifts from how he feels the Israelites will respond back to his own perceived incompetence. He begins with a polite form of address, acknowledging YHWH's superior status, **יְיָ אֱלֹהֵי**, and refers to himself as **עֶבְרָדָה**.⁴⁹⁶ He describes himself literally as “not a man of words”; a description reflected to some degree by the dialogue in Exodus 3-4, where YHWH has the longest speeches. Moses claims that he is unsuitable for the mission YHWH has called him to. There is thus an implicit contrast between the “polite” form of his speech and the negative tone of his statement, which contradicts all that YHWH has said up to this point.

I have analysed YHWH's reply earlier, but it gains an added sharpness when it is placed alongside Moses' objection. Moses might be slow to speak, and “not a man of words”, but YHWH is both the one who gives the ability to speak and the words to speak. YHWH forbears from pointing out that he has given Moses signs which will do much of the talking for Moses but focuses on the aspect of his character which will be of particular use to Moses' situation. He proceeds to commission Moses and give him specific reassurance. Moses' objection and YHWH's reply can be set out as follows:

| | Exodus 4:10-12 |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Moses' objection | “Please, my Lord, I am not an eloquent man, not in the past, nor since you have been speaking to your servant for my mouth and tongue are slow.” |
| General statement regarding YHWH | And YHWH said to him: “Who enables a person to speak? Or who makes a person dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, YHWH?” |
| Specific answer to question/objection | So now, go and I will be with your mouth and I will teach you what you are to say.” |

⁴⁹⁶ See discussion in: Miller, *Representation*, 271–2; Here the **יָא** is usually taken to mean “pardon me”, with the sense of “on me be any guilt arising from what I say or do.” 40.2.3.a. Bruce K Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 681. See also Judges 6:13.

The final part of YHWH's answer to Moses forms another commissioning of Moses, affirming that YHWH will indeed be with Moses and will direct him. I will now consider the section of the dialogue which follows.

3.4.4. The Commissioning of Moses (III): 4:12-18

L1b COMMISSION ¹²“So now, go and I, I will be with your mouth, and I will teach you what you shall say.”

¹³*But Moses said:*

L2 REQUEST “Please, my Lord, send someone else.”⁴⁹⁷

¹⁴And the anger of YHWH burnt against Moses, and he said:

M1 INSTRUCTION “Is there not Aaron your brother the Levite?⁴⁹⁸ I know that he is eloquent and he is (now) coming to meet you and when he sees you, his heart will rejoice. ¹⁵And you will speak to him and tell him what to say and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and I will teach you what you are to do. ¹⁶So he will speak for you to the people for he will be your mouth and you will be his god. ¹⁷And take this staff, by which you will perform the signs, in your hand.”

¹⁸Moses went back to his father in law, Jethro and said to him:

M2/N1⁴⁹⁹ RESPONSE/REQUEST “Please let me return to my family in Egypt and see if they are still living.”

And Jethro said to Moses:

N2 ANSWER “Go in peace.”

3.4.4.1. Moses' Refusal

YHWH's command to Moses to go is the third such command in the dialogues. The dialogue between Moses and YHWH has involved a constant wrestling for control. Each time Moses seeks to divert YHWH from the call to deliver the people, and each time YHWH provides a sufficient answer and brings the conversation back to the topic.

This wrestling for control is followed in 4:13 by a response that suggests Moses has run out of arguments to oppose YHWH's call. Once again his response begins with a polite

⁴⁹⁷ This is a relatively common translation of this verse, which I will justify below. Literally Moses' words are: “I pray my Lord, please send by a hand (whom) you will send”.

⁴⁹⁸ See section 3.3.3. above; this follows Dozeman's suggestion.

⁴⁹⁹ This response by Moses forms the second part of an adjacency pair in conversation with YHWH, but the first part of a pair with Jethro.

form of address; in addition to ׀ the particle נָ is also used.⁵⁰⁰ Christiansen suggests that the particle נָ indicates something more polite than a command, and thus has the effect of softening the nuance of the imperative, making it a “proposal, and not a direct command”.⁵⁰¹ Moses’ words are somewhat vague: “send by the hand (of whom) you will send”, reflecting the *idem per idem* construction of 3:14. Durham argues that this is actually a “deferential resignation”, while others have suggested that this is a “please send someone else as my helper”, and others that it may be a reluctant acquiescence.⁵⁰² Taken in isolation Moses’ statement could be interpreted this way, but YHWH’s response indicates that YHWH is angry with Moses, and therefore it is a refusal couched in “polite” terms.⁵⁰³

I have examined above YHWH’s anger (2.1.2.) and so move to YHWH’s words which effectively ignore Moses’ request to be replaced, but instead provide Aaron to be a helper. They do not carry any sense of sanction; on the contrary they act as a reassurance to Moses. YHWH goes on to include Aaron in his words of assurance from 4:12, making clear that he will be with the mouth of Moses and Aaron, and that he will teach them both what they are to do. Once again he repeats אֲנִי אֶשְׁמְרֶם אֶתְּמַר אֲנִי אֶשְׁמְרֶם alluding back to 3:12 and 3:14. If 4:12 had the effect of tying YHWH’s name to his enabling of Moses to speak, then 4:15 ties YHWH’s name to the dual sending of Moses and Aaron. I will analyse further in conjunction with Exodus 7:1 the implications of Moses being called “God”, but whatever these may be, at the very least these verses are a strong affirmation of the divine presence with Moses. YHWH concludes by telling Moses to take up his staff once more in order that he may do the signs YHWH has given him.

⁵⁰⁰ Shulman argues that the particle נָ is an indicator of a polite request, particularly when addressed by an inferior to a superior: Ahouva Shulman, “The Particle NAH in Biblical Hebrew Prose,” *HS* 40 (1999): 57–82.

⁵⁰¹ Bent Christiansen, “A Linguistic Analysis of the Biblical Hebrew Particle Nā’: A Test Case,” *VT* 59, no. 3 (2009): 379–93.

⁵⁰² Durham, *Exodus*, 50; “that another person should speak for him” Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, 91; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 213.

⁵⁰³ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 79.

3.4.4.2. Moses' "Obedience"

Moses' response (M2) is to return to Jethro in order to get permission (N1) to go and see if his family are still living. It is not completely clear if this is a simple obedience to YHWH, or a further delaying tactic, and thus I have simply designated it as a "response" in my analysis. It is also a response that marks the start of a new adjacency pair in a conversation between Moses and Jethro. In this speech Moses does not mention the real purpose of his return. This raises questions in the reader's mind regarding Moses' understanding of his mission, and willingness to undertake the mission, questions which will be explored below.⁵⁰⁴ Jethro responds with a clear "go in peace" to Moses, removing all obstacles to Moses' return. The expectation is that Moses will begin his journey back to Egypt in obedience to YHWH. Jethro's response echoes YHWH's, with its clear call to "go", the fourth time Moses has received such a command in the narrative. It is also the fourth time that Moses appears not to comply with such a command because in the next statement Moses is once more portrayed as being told to "go" by YHWH.

3.4.5. The Commissioning of Moses (IV): 4:19-26

¹⁹And YHWH said to Moses in Midian:

O1 COMMAND "Go, return to Egypt, for all the men seeking your life are dead."

O2 OBEDIENCE ²⁰Moses took his wife, and his sons, and he mounted them on a donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt; and Moses carried the staff of God in his hand.

²¹Then YHWH said to Moses:

P1 COMMAND "As you go to return to Egypt consider all the wonders I have put in your hands, that you are to do before Pharaoh. But I will strengthen his heart and he will not let the people go.

²²And you will say to Pharaoh:

FUT. A1 STATEMENT/THREAT "Thus says YHWH:

'Israel is my firstborn son and ²³I said to you:

INS.A1 COMMAND "Let my son go, so that he may serve me."

⁵⁰⁴ "Whoever these 'brothers' may be, why should Moses doubt that they are alive": Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 215; adding the insight that the phrase "whether they are still alive" may be a more general idiom about their welfare is: Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 101; Calvin suggested that Moses supposed he would not be believed, which has some narrative plausibility given the length of Moses' excuses: John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, trans. Charles William Bingham, vol. 1, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 86-87, www.ccel.org.

INS.A2 REFUSAL But you refuse to let him go
so I will kill your firstborn son.””””

P2 SILENCE

Q1 THREAT ²⁴And on the way, at the lodging place, YHWH met him and sought to kill him.

Q2 ACTION ²⁵But Zipporah took a flint and cut the foreskin of her son
and she put it on his feet and she said:

R1 DECLARATION “A bridegroom of blood you are to me.”

R2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT ²⁶And he stopped (attacking) him, then she said:

DECLARATION (REPEATED) “A bridegroom of blood by circumcision”

3.4.5.1. Moses’ Obedience Begins

Exodus 4:19 has seemed to some to be out of place in the narrative.⁵⁰⁵ In the current form of the narrative YHWH’s command in 4:19, “go, return to Egypt”, suggests Moses may be reluctant to go back. He has in 4:18 been told by Jethro that he can go in peace, but no action of Moses is recorded in the narrative in response to Jethro’s permission. Instead the narrator records YHWH’s fourth command to Moses to “go”. This time rather than instructions about what to do or say, or description of how he will be helped in his task, he is simply told that those seeking to kill him are dead.

The reader has already been told that the Pharaoh of chapters 1-2 is dead (2:23), and now Moses is told that all of those seeking to kill him are dead. It is only then that Moses is ready to go back to Egypt. This suggests that a large part of Moses’ reluctance underlying all his other objections may have been a fear for his life. However YHWH did not directly address this underlying fear in his speeches, but rather used Moses’ objections to reshape Moses’ understanding of YHWH’s identity and of Moses’ identity in relation to YHWH. The final information about Moses’ obedience is that he carries the staff of God, just as YHWH had commanded him in 4:17, as he returns.

⁵⁰⁵ Noth considered that the original narrative of the Exodus did not contain Exodus 3:1-4:17, and that 4:18 was a direct continuation from 2:23a, with 4:19 something of a secondary addition Noth, *Exodus*, 33–34; explaining the issue by recourse to source analysis (switch from E to J) is: Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 215; but seeing the present text as meaningful and suggestive of Moses’ hesitation to return is: Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:421–422.

3.4.5.2. Pharaoh's Son

The uniqueness of YHWH's speech (P1) in 4:21-23 as an instance of reported speech to which no response is given raises the question as to whether any response is expected or not. Miller argues that there are instances of speech elsewhere such as the Levitical regulations, which do not require an immediate dialogical response.⁵⁰⁶ YHWH's statement here does not seem to require a response as such from Moses, other than simple obedience, but as every other statement from YHWH to Moses regarding future events in the chapter thus far has met with some sort of response it seems odd that there is silence here.

The speech is once again set out as speech which Moses is to deliver, this time to Pharaoh, which contains within it YHWH's account of his preceding dialogue with Pharaoh, presumably in the narrative context, the original command YHWH gives to Pharaoh through Moses to let his people go free. Moses' performing of the signs goes with the demand from YHWH to let the Israelites go. As with 3:16-22 Pharaoh will initially refuse (INS.A2), and only after the refusal will YHWH strike decisively (FUT.A1).

3.4.5.3. Moses' Son?

The theme of striking continues into the next verses, where Moses, or Moses' firstborn, comes under attack.⁵⁰⁷ This analysis of the dialogue brings together a number of important features identified in isolation by commentators on this text up to this point. In the light of the recent consideration of the idea that the journey back to Egypt is also a journey back to

⁵⁰⁶ Miller, *Representation*, 301.

⁵⁰⁷ In recent decades a number of scholars have argued that a reason for the attack is intrinsically absent from the text, and the attack is therefore non-rational. From the perspective of narrative criticism, see: Kaplan, "And the Lord Sought to Kill Him' (Exod 4:24): Yet Once Again," 72; seeing the non-rationality as an essential part of the structure of the narrative is: Kunin, "The Bridegroom of Blood : A Structuralist Analysis," 6–9; Embry argues that the narrative is a "type scene" of a "missional journey narrative" (where "missional" implies a journey at divine command) which can be read in parallel with Numbers 22. For Embry there is no need to seek a reason in anything other than it being an essential feature of a "missional journey narrative", both Moses in Exodus 4 and Balaam in Numbers 22 must be endangered because they are on a "missional journey": Embry, "The Endangerment of Moses," 196; although this seems a somewhat problematic approach to reading narrative, even if Embry's comparison of Exodus 4 and Numbers 22 is reasonable in itself. It is hard to see why an element appearing as part of an essential feature of such stories should not have a reason within that narrative.

Moses' identity as an Israelite, it is striking that Moses' reluctance and indeed refusal to be sent to bring Israel out of Egypt has not been brought into this discussion.⁵⁰⁸

Exodus 4:21-23 demonstrates that Pharaoh's son is in jeopardy because of Pharaoh's refusal to let Israel go and the later Passover narrative demonstrates that the lives of all firstborn are forfeit without the blood of the lamb on the doorposts.⁵⁰⁹ It therefore does not seem unreasonable, in terms of narrative logic, that Moses' son is placed in jeopardy because of Moses' refusal to participate in YHWH's rescue plan. I have noted above that YHWH's anger burns in Exodus 4:13 without any obvious outward manifestation and that such a lack of manifestation creates a "gap" for the reader who expects such a manifestation to occur.⁵¹⁰ In another term from Sternberg, a level of suspense has been created in the implied reader because it is expected that YHWH's anger leads to a manifestation of some sort.⁵¹¹

The incident of YHWH's attack "on the way", at a point where Moses has given no answer to YHWH in response to 4:21-23, and where no reason is given for YHWH's attack, generates a strong sense of shock in the reader.⁵¹² The reader is driven to see if any previous gaps can be explained by the current incident, and it is this desire that suggests reading Exodus 4:24-26 in the light of YHWH's anger in 4:14. The reader notes that 4:18-20 suggest a degree of unwillingness from Moses to go back to Egypt. This is followed in 4:21-23 by an explanation of the seriousness of refusing to let the Israelites go free. Since

⁵⁰⁸ While Dozeman sees this section in Exodus as structured around Moses' return journey to Egypt and the concept of family and kinship he does not discuss Moses' reluctance to return at this point, see: Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 149-455.

⁵⁰⁹ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 79.

⁵¹⁰ See Sternberg's analysis of gapping in biblical narrative, in particular: Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 235-240.

⁵¹¹ See: *ibid.*, 264ff; and in particular Sonnet, "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh (Exodus 3)," 335-337.

⁵¹² In Sternberg's terms this comes under the heading of "surprise" Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 309; and see also: Sonnet, "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh (Exodus 3)," 340-346

Moses has been unwilling to participate in God's plan of rescuing the Israelites, it is not altogether unsurprising that his son should be put in jeopardy also.

It is Zipporah's action in response to the attack which proves to be the correct one. This suggests that the circumcision performs the function of identifying Moses with Israel and with his mission to rescue Israel. If the manifestation of YHWH in this text is as an angel ("the angel of YHWH") then it is entirely possible that Zipporah puts the blood of Moses' son on the feet of the angel of YHWH in order to consecrate Moses as an atoning for Moses' transgression of reluctance to participate in the redemption of the people.⁵¹³ In this case perhaps the phrase means something like "kinsman protector by means of blood", and becomes in effect another divine title, much as Hagar declares YHWH to be "El Roi".⁵¹⁴ In the narrative context there appears to be something attractive about this option because it keeps the interaction between the two characters named in the narrative (YHWH and Zipporah). In the context of the dialogue it makes sense that Zipporah's statement may be a declaration to YHWH of a new relationship brought about by the circumcision of the son. Moses' and Zipporah's identity are now defined by YHWH, YHWH has become her blood relative, and Moses is now fully identified with YHWH's mission so that YHWH stops his attack.

3.4.6. The Commissioning of Aaron: 4:27-31

²⁷And YHWH said to Aaron:

S1 COMMISSION "Go to meet Moses in the wilderness."

S2 OBEDIENCE So he went and he met him at the mountain of God. And he kissed him.

⁵¹³ Hays, "'Lest Ye Perish in the Way': Ritual and Kinship in Exodus 4:24-26," 42; See also comments of Ibn Ezra discussed by Gilders regarding the motif of blood: William K. Gilders, *Blood Ritual in the Hebrew Bible: Meaning and Power* (Baltimore ; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 97.

⁵¹⁴ Hays, "'Lest Ye Perish in the Way': Ritual and Kinship in Exodus 4:24-26," 52; Alternatively the phrase could be addressed to Moses' son, and the phrase would then mean indicate that he is now safe through being a part of his family: Howell, "The Firstborn Son of Moses as the 'Relative of Blood' in Exodus 4.24-26," 73-74; Another possibility is that the phrase is addressed to Moses, and is some kind of symbolic language associated with the vicarious circumcision of Moses' son: Ackerman, "Why Is Miriam Also Among the Prophets?" 74-76.

²⁸*And Moses told to Aaron*

T1 STATEMENT all the words of YHWH which he had sent him and all the signs which he had commanded him

T2 OBEDIENCE ²⁹and Moses went, and Aaron, and they gathered all the elders of the Israelites.

³⁰*And Aaron spoke*

U1 STATEMENT all the words which YHWH had spoken to Moses and he did the signs before the eyes of the people.

U2 ACCEPTANCE ³¹Then the people believed and they heard that YHWH had shown concern for the Israelites and that he had seen their distress. So they bowed down and worshipped.

3.4.6.1. The Obedience of Aaron

The first address to Aaron (S1) is the only time in these narratives that Aaron individually is addressed by YHWH. His response at this point (S2) is a model of compliance. YHWH tells Aaron to *לֵךְ לְקַרְאֵת*, and Aaron is said to *וַיִּלְךְ וַיִּפְגַּשְׁהוּ*. While YHWH's command to Aaron uses *קָרָא*, Aaron's action is described as *פָּגַשׁ*, the same verb as used for YHWH meeting "him" on the way in 4:24. The use here in the description of Aaron's action is the more normal use for *פָּגַשׁ*, which usually describes a neutral meeting rather than an antagonistic one.⁵¹⁵ There is some variation within these narratives around the verbs translated as "meet" (cf. Exod. 3:18, 4:24, 4:27, 4:27, 5:3), but there does not appear to be any significant difference in meaning between the verbs. The use of *פָּגַשׁ* here links 4:24 with 4:27, and contrasts Moses' meetings with YHWH and Aaron. Aaron comes to Moses in peace, in obedience to God's command. The straightforward pair of a commissioning and obedience provides a resolution to the tension of the previous section.

It also provides a stark contrast, both structurally and thematically, to Moses' responses thus far to YHWH's commands. Moses has only obeyed YHWH on the fourth time of asking, and even then he has not straightforwardly been said to "go". Aaron's obedience

⁵¹⁵ See HALOT, *פָּגַשׁ*.

also demonstrates that YHWH's words in 4:14 that Aaron will come and be pleased to meet Moses have been fulfilled.

3.4.6.2. Moses and Aaron Go

Moses tells Aaron all that YHWH has told him, and together they go to the elders. In these final verses of chapter 4 Aaron's complete obedience is demonstrated, and once Aaron is in the picture Moses also obeys. It is only here that Moses is the subject of וַיִּשְׁמַע in obedience to YHWH's instructions.

These verses resolve many of the tensions created by the situation of the Israelites and the knowledge of God recorded in chapter 2. They portray the scene that YHWH anticipated with the words of Exodus 3:16-17, and the enactment of the signs of 4:1-9, along with 4:15-17:

| 3:16-17; 4:1-9, 4:15-17: Anticipation | 4:28-31 Narrated Events |
|---|--|
| <p>“Go and gather Israel’s elders and say to them: ‘YHWH, God of your fathers has appeared to me – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob saying: “I have taken notice of you, and of the things done against you in Egypt. So I declare : I will bring you up from the affliction of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, ... , a land flowing with milk and honey.”’</p> | <p>4:29-31 and Moses went, and Aaron and they gathered all the elders of the Israelites. And Aaron spoke all the words which YHWH had spoken to Moses</p> |
| <p>4:1-9 Provision of the signs – so that they may believe Moses and listen to his voice.</p> | <p>and he did the signs before the eyes of the people</p> |
| <p>Then they will listen to your voice...</p> | <p>and the people believed and they heard that YHWH had shown concern for the Israelites and that he had seen their distress. So they bowed down and worshipped.</p> |
| <p>4:15-17 “And you shall speak to him (<i>Aaron</i>) and tell him what to say and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and I will teach you what you are to do. So he will speak for you to the people for he will be your mouth and you will be his “god”. And take this staff, by which you will do the signs, in your hand.”</p> | <p>4:28 And Moses told to Aaron all the words of YHWH which he had sent him and all the signs which he had commanded him.</p> |

In chapter 3 Moses is told that he will speak to the elders, but in chapter 4, in line with subsequent narrative it is Aaron who speaks, although with Moses speaking to him first.

There is a further question over whether Aaron also performed the signs “and he performed the signs...” because the subject of the verb is unclear, although Aaron might most naturally be thought to be the subject, as with the previous verb.⁵¹⁶ If the reader concludes that Moses performs the signs then this is relatively straightforward to assimilate to the picture painted thus far of Moses’ activity. However, with Dozeman and Childs, it is more straightforward in terms of the grammar, even if more awkward from the perspective of the narrative, to read that Aaron performs the signs. If it is Aaron who performs the signs then this suggests his role as Moses’ mouthpiece extends to being Moses’ hands as well.

The elders of Israel are gathered in 4:29, as instructed, but the signs are done before all the people. The move from elders to people in the text may be due to the close identification of the elders with the people.⁵¹⁷ This does not seem unreasonable, especially given that Moses’ original commission is to the people. Further, given the nature of 4:29-31 as a summary of the narrative of chapters 3-4, it is reasonable that some compression has taken place in the narrative. The effect of these verses is to draw the attention of the reader to the reaction of the Israelites, who observe and believe all that Moses and Aaron say and do.

3.4.7. Conclusions from Analysis of the Dialogues

At this point it will be instructive to compare this dialogue with dialogues which the implied reader of the primary history has come across previously in the book of Genesis. In a fascinating recent study Elizabeth Tracy examines a selection of dialogues between

⁵¹⁶ Dozeman assumes Aaron is the subject, creating a “literary tension with 4:17”: Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 156; Childs also concludes that “oddly enough” these signs are performed by Aaron Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 104; Driver however argued for Moses as a possibility for the referent because he is the most recently named: Driver, *The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version*, 34; Propp also considers Moses most likely, given 4:17: Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 221.

⁵¹⁷ Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:452.

God and people in the book of Genesis.⁵¹⁸ Her conclusions provide a useful comparison with the dialogues between Moses and YHWH in Exodus.

First is the fact that the Deity, through dialogue, expresses a knowledge of the individual named within the conversation. The Deity's choice of question and response is not tangential. It is focused and poignantly specific to the individual human's situation. For the length of the question there is no other Divine human personal relationship as important as that of the named individual.

Second is the idea that the human perspective must be expressed ... the human voices what amounts to their limited world view... the Deity explicitly addressed almost every trepidation with a wider possibility...

...every individual is known and identified as important to the Divine. A study of Genesis 15 indicated that first, belief and knowledge are different, second that questioning and challenging the Deity can build human understanding and finally, signs leading to sure knowledge only come after belief and acting on that belief.⁵¹⁹

In my discussion of the dialogues with Moses it can be seen that much of this appears to hold true in Exodus 3-4.⁵²⁰ In particular I have noted that Moses' questioning and challenging does indeed build his, and the reader's, understanding of the nature and character of God.⁵²¹ Each of God's answers to Moses' objections both re-orientates Moses to YHWH's character, and gives new instructions to Moses, as can be seen clearly in the following chart:

⁵¹⁸ Unfortunately the publication date of this work precluded substantial interaction with the methodology: Tracy, *Dialogue in Genesis*.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁵²⁰ By vivid contrast with Carroll's reading: "It is YHWH who does all the speaking. Not until v. 11 will Moses get a word in—whether edgeways or otherwise I do not know—and then only to ask a question which will be brushed aside. It may look like a dialogue, but in reality YHWH is intent on speaking not listening and, although he will entertain various interjections and objections from Moses, has other things on his mind which are more important than holding a conversation with a shepherd who cannot resist giving in to his own curiosity." Robert P. Carroll, "Strange Fire : Abstract of Presence Absent in the Text: Meditations on Exodus 3," *JSOT*, no. 61 (1994): 39–58, p43.

⁵²¹ See in particular Moberly: "the narrator indeed viewed the whole story as paradigmatic of a fundamental problem in the life of faith. This problem is the potentially demanding nature of God's call, which is such that human nature may shrink back and need reassurance. This means therefore that Moses' questions are basic to the narrative as God's commissioning, and material introduced in the context of Moses' questions need not be of incidental or secondary significance within the context depicted." Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 14.

| | Exodus 3:12 | Exodus 3:14-15 | Exodus 4:1-9 | Exodus 4:10-12 |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| Moses' objection | "Who am I to deliver Israel?" | "When I go and I say to them, then they may ask 'what is his name' – what shall I say?" | "But they will not believe me, and they will not listen to my voice because they will say 'YHWH did not appear to you.'" | "Please my Lord, I am not an eloquent man, not in the past, nor since you have been speaking to your servant for my mouth and tongue are slow." |
| General statement regarding YHWH | "I will be with you." | And God said to Moses: "I will be who I will be." | "Therefore (because of the signs) they will believe that YHWH, God of their fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac and God of Jacob appeared to you." | And YHWH said to him: "Who places the mouth on the man? Or who makes him dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind, is it not I, YHWH?" |
| Specific instruction | "And this will be the sign to you: when you (sg) bring out the Israelites from Egypt, you (pl) will worship God on this mountain." | And he said: "Thus you shall say to the Israelites: 'I will be has sent me to you'" And again he said to Moses: "Thus you shall say to the Israelites: 'YHWH, God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has sent me to you'" | "And if they do not believe you or listen to the "voice" of the first sign then they will believe the "voice" of the second sign. But if they do not believe even these two signs then you are to take water from the Nile and pour it out on the ground and the water which you took from the Nile will become blood, it will become blood on the ground." | "So now, go and I will be with your mouth and I will teach you what you are to say." |

Here it can be seen that the initial part of YHWH's answer always contains a general statement about YHWH and his identity (presence with Moses, "I will be who I will be", that they will believe YHWH appeared to Moses, and that YHWH is the creator). This function of re-orientation is strongest in 3:14-15 and 4:11-12 as YHWH's speech moves on to a renewed call to Moses.

Moses' "objections" also have the effect of provoking YHWH's statements of self-disclosure, particularly those statements that utilise the verb "to be".⁵²² These statements demonstrate that YHWH is committed to being with Moses, and that he will be with Moses as he chooses to be with him. Therefore they deepen the meaning of the phrase "I will be who I will be" and show that it has an ongoing significance in the narrative context.

YHWH's first statement in 3:7-10 can be said to be unprompted by Moses, but following that YHWH reveals himself in response to Moses' arguments. It is possible to imagine a dialogue where YHWH revealed everything at first, but such a dialogue would place Moses and YHWH in a very different relationship. The ongoing dialogue has the effect of joining Moses and YHWH together, even as drastic measures are required to finally bring about resolution.

The structure of the dialogue also highlights the importance of the difficult section in 4:21-26. In the narrative Moses is commanded four times to go, but Aaron only needs one command. A structure for the narrative can be seen based around this imperative, and the words and events which follow in response to the commands:

⁵²² See discussion above under 3.3.3.

| Command I | Command II | Command III | Command IV | Command V |
|--|---|--|---|---|
| 3:7-10 YHWH's concern, followed by commission (Go!) | 3:16-22 Commission (Go!) followed by future events | 4:12 Go! | 4:19 Go! | 4:27 Go! |
| 3:11 Objection I – who am I? | 4:1 Objection I – they won't believe | 4:13 Objection – send someone else | 4:20 Moses obeys (silently) | 4:27 Aaron obeys exactly |
| 3:12 Reassurance + sign | 4:2-9 Reassurance + signs | 4:14-17 Anger then reassurance + the rod which will do the signs | 4:21-23 Command to perform the signs | 4:28 Moses tells Aaron all the words, and all the signs |
| 3:13 Objection II – what is your name | 4:10 Objection II – “Not a man of words – I” | 4:18 Permission Requested from Jethro “to see if my brothers are living” | Moses is silent | 4:29 Moses & Aaron go, and gather the elders, speak the words and do the signs |
| 3:14-15 Re-orientating Response | 4:11 Re-orientating response | 4:19 Answer – those seeking your life are dead | 4:24-26 Seeking to kill him, YHWH appears | 4:31 The people believe and they worship |

There is a clear parallel between the first two commands and their objections, and a definite contrast with the final command which portrays Aaron's complete obedience. The third and the fourth commands, however, have a degree of similarity to the pattern of command and objection. Moses' responses may not be as directly negative as previously but they are still not as positive as desired, especially not by comparison with Aaron's obedience. Indeed from 3:6 (“Moses hid his face”) until 4:27 (“Aaron went and met...”) there is not a complete statement of obedience in the whole dialogue.

YHWH's first words following the initial objection to a commissioning are always related to the signs, while the second focus more on YHWH's nature and the specific instructions which are required for Moses to complete the task. Thus in 4:19 YHWH gives Moses the command to “go”, and supplies the key information that those seeking to kill Moses are dead. Moses' return is portrayed silently, and he is reminded to remember the signs and given advance warning of the confrontation with Pharaoh. He continues to be silent, and

then the reader comes to the incident of the night time confrontation, which according to this analysis should give Moses further important information about YHWH. Here it highlights for Moses the nature of what is at stake in the Exodus, and the need for Moses to ensure that he is not a figure like Pharaoh who delays the redemption of YHWH's people.

After the incident "on the way" the narrative moves to a swift speech of YHWH to Aaron, possibly from some time prior to this, and then to a simple report which informs the reader that matters are now proceeding according to YHWH's instructions. In the context of the whole dialogue, YHWH's mysterious attack "on the way" has a critical role in bringing the character of Moses to a position of identification with the people and obedience to YHWH. My suggestion is that Exodus 4:24-26 is, in part at least, a demonstration to Moses that not participating in the rescue is an act of serious defiance, on a par with Pharaoh's stubborn refusal to let the people go.

YHWH's speeches convey that YHWH's plan was one of deliverance for his people, which involved a very particular task for Moses in terms of delivering his message, both to the Israelite people and, together with the elders of Israel, to Pharaoh. Viewing these speeches in the context of the dialogue brings into sharp focus the narrator's emphasis on Moses as the one through whom these speeches come, and enables us to see the situation through Moses' eyes.⁵²³ From the dialogue the reader learns that not only does YHWH intend to rescue his people, but he intends to do it through Moses, and nothing, not even Moses' objections, will stop him. Yet Moses' objections do matter, they draw further disclosure from YHWH, and demonstrate that there will not be an Exodus without Moses' participation.

⁵²³ Kürle, *Appeal*, 194.

3.5. THE NAME OF YHWH AND THE CALL OF MOSES

I have observed how the construction of the characters of Moses and YHWH works as the reader moves from the ambiguity of narrated events to the seemingly clearer world of the speeches, to the construction of character within the dialogues and partial clarity of the events anticipated in the speeches. YHWH's actions at the bush and "on the way" speak of mystery and danger, of "unleashed, unlimited holiness", and of YHWH as a God of whom it can be said there are "none that will finally tame this dangerous God."⁵²⁴ However, YHWH's speeches speak of a God who has a determined resolve to rescue his people, and to defeat their enemies. A picture emerges in these speeches of commissioning and calling by a God of defined purpose, and unstoppable power.

This picture is modified once more in the analysis of the dialogues. Here YHWH's plans are clarified and his character made more known as Moses objects, and as Moses argues with YHWH. Moses is indispensable to the divine plan, both because he is YHWH's chosen rescuer and because he is the means by which YHWH is made present with the people. YHWH's call has a transformative effect on Moses, yet that does not make Moses a mere tool, rather he is a genuine participant in YHWH's rescue plan. Furthermore each of YHWH's responses to Moses is a further clarification of his character in connection with his name. As the narrative progresses the reader sees that YHWH's plans do come to fruition, but often in rather unexpected ways, and with some unexpected setbacks on the way. Moses acts in obedience, but sometimes not exactly as anticipated. Thus the narrator preserves elements of suspense, and the reader is engaged and drawn further into this narrative.

⁵²⁴ Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 718.

Chapter 4

Dialogues of Re-formation: Exodus 5:22-7:7

4.1. INTRODUCTION

An examination of this section will show that YHWH's concern above all else is that his name might be known in the delivering of Israel and his judgement on Egypt, and especially Pharaoh. YHWH's name is explained further in terms of his future actions, with verbs that give content to the connection between his name and presence I observed in chapter 4. YHWH's declaration "I will be who I will be" means that he will be with Israel to rescue her and bring her out of Egypt, and take her to be his people, in the manner in which he chooses to do so. These chapters develop further the role of Moses, who is YHWH's spokesman and ambassador. YHWH's revelation to Israel and his orders to Pharaoh come through Moses who speaks and acts for YHWH, and who carries YHWH's presence to Israel and to Pharaoh. I will show that the dialogues between YHWH and Moses show that YHWH will remake Moses' identity so that he is no longer the reluctant rescuer but an obedient ambassador.

4.1.1. Initial Setback: A Review of 5:1-21

It is necessary to examine briefly aspects of Exodus 5:1-21 because this provides essential background to YHWH's action in deliverance, and also helps to show how YHWH's speeches in chapter 3 unfold in the narrative. The structure of the overall conversation within this chapter moves from Moses' speech declaring YHWH's words to Pharaoh, to Pharaoh's speech to his officials, to the officials' speech to the people of Israel. This is followed by the Israelite officials speaking back to Pharaoh, only to be rebuffed, at which

point they go and speak to Moses who in turn speaks to YHWH, who responds with his declaration of intent.⁵²⁵

In Exodus 5:1 Moses and Aaron go to Pharaoh to deliver YHWH's message from chapter 3.

This initial dialogue can be outlined as follows:

¹And afterwards Moses and Aaron went in and they said to Pharaoh:

A1a DECLARATION "Thus says YHWH God of Israel:

A1b COMMAND "Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness."

²But Pharaoh said:

A2 REFUSAL "Who is YHWH that I should listen to his voice by letting the Israelites go? – I do not know YHWH and I will not let Israel go"

The first part of Moses' and Aaron's speech (A1a) is a declaration to Pharaoh that they speak the word of God. It comes in the same form as declarations made by the Old Testament prophets.⁵²⁶ In the confrontation with Pharaoh Moses speaks with YHWH's authority, and as such his words are YHWH's words to Pharaoh.⁵²⁷ However the words which Moses and Aaron deliver in the second section (A1b) are not identical to those given in YHWH's instructions in 3:18. Propp argues that this portrays Moses failing to comply with YHWH's instructions.⁵²⁸ This set of "mistakes" though may not make up such a strong case as Propp suggests.⁵²⁹ Most fundamentally Propp's analysis of Moses' portrayal in

⁵²⁵ See helpful diagram in: Georg Fischer and Dominik Markl, *Das Buch Exodus*, Neuer Stuttgarter Kommentar (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2009), 81.

⁵²⁶ Although, as Driver noted, rather rare in the Pentateuch where it is usually in Moses' encounters with Pharaoh Driver, *The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version*, 31; Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 105.

⁵²⁷ This will be explored further below.

⁵²⁸ He identifies five key mistakes by Moses: failing to lead the elders to Pharaoh, demanding more than YHWH had commanded, working no wonders, making no threat against the firstborn, and becoming dejected despite YHWH's forewarnings Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 259; See also: Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 65–66; and also: Alec Motyer, *The Message of Exodus: The Days of Our Pilgrimage*, The Bible speaks today, Old Testament (Leicester: IVP, 2005), 99–100.

⁵²⁹ The first of these "mistakes", as Propp himself also discusses, may not be any more than the narrator simply assuming the elder's presence as part of those who came (אֲנָשִׁים). Propp allows that the text could be read either way on this point, but considers that the other four "errors" of Moses decide this issue: Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 259; Propp cites: Van Seters, *The Life of Moses*, 74; and Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, 112–113. Moses not performing wonders is no indication that Moses is failing: in chapter 3 these come after Pharaoh's refusal and in chapter 7 after very specific commands of YHWH. His initial speech would be unlikely to contain the threat against the firstborn because this implies some kind of prior refusal on Pharaoh's part. Moses' dejection comes in the wake of the actual worsening of the Israelite condition which results from his speech to Pharaoh. The remaining item on Propp's list is that Moses demanded more than YHWH commanded, but this is questionable because the demand to go to the wilderness to celebrate a festival is not a greater demand than the request for a three day journey.

Exodus 5 fails to reckon with the fact that a complete portrayal of *verbatim* repetition is relatively rare in the Old Testament, where some variation in reports or deliveries of messages is common.⁵³⁰ This variation also reflects to a degree “real life” conversations where quotations presented as *verbatim* do in fact often vary from the original words spoken, while still conveying the meaning.⁵³¹ Here the introduction כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה reflects YHWH’s commands to Moses in 3:18 and 4:21, and the content reflects the meaning of YHWH’s instructions in 3:18.⁵³²

Despite Moses and Aaron’s obedience to YHWH the speech meets with non-compliance from Pharaoh, who refuses to acknowledge the God Moses and Aaron speak for (מִי יְהוָה) and therefore refuses to obey the command (לֹא יִדְעָתִי אֶת־יְהוָה וְגַם אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא אֲשַׁלַּח). The concept of knowing YHWH is a central one in the narrative of the Exodus, and so this initial rejection of YHWH by Pharaoh, and of Moses and Aaron as YHWH’s messengers, sets up the plague narrative to come.⁵³³

⁵³⁰ Indeed throughout the plague narrative there is some variation in the request to “let my people go”. At the announcement of the first plague the command is to say: “YHWH God of the Hebrews has sent me to you, saying” (Exod. 7:16). At the second and fourth plague announcements the command is to say: “Thus says YHWH” (Exod. 8:1, Exod. 8:20). At the fifth and seventh plagues the command is to say: “Thus says YHWH, God of the Hebrews” (Exod. 9:1, 9:13). At the eighth plague announcement Moses and Aaron declare “Thus says YHWH, God of the Hebrews” (Exod. 10:3), but YHWH’s instructions as to what to say have not been reported. Each of these announcements also concludes with “so that they may worship/serve me”, using the verb עָבַד rather than the words for festival or sacrifice in 5:1-3 commanded in 3:18. The key point here is that each of these statements comes in the context of the plagues, and there seems to be no great difference of meaning attached to the variety. Importantly for our purposes, there does not seem to be any suspicion in the narrative context that what Moses and Aaron say in 10:3 is overstepping their orders. Furthermore, it is common within biblical narrative to have a degree of varying repetition; see for example discussion in: Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 390–393.

⁵³¹ Tannen, “Introducing Constructed Dialogue in Greek and American Conversational and Literary Narrative,” 330-331

⁵³² Furthermore since 5:1 and 5:3 together convey the full meaning of YHWH’s instructions in 3:18 it is surely possible, in the world of the narrative, that Pharaoh’s refusal is an interruption of Moses and Aaron at the first indication that his authority is threatened. While this possibility has not been discussed in the commentaries it does not seem intrinsically improbable given the nature of the power relations between Pharaoh on the one hand and Moses and Aaron on the other.

⁵³³ Propp’s argument that “the biblical author has probably cast Pharaoh in his own intolerant image. A true Egyptian (excepting Akhenaten and his circle) would not spurn foreign gods or their messengers. The Egyptians adopted many Asiatic deities (Helck 1971: 446-73), and the traveller Wen Amon respected Asiatic prophets (ANET 26).” Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 252, does not seem to take into account the narrative portrayal of the status of the Israelites as a despised, even feared, group of slaves.

The chain of conversation in Exodus 5:1-21 that I noted at the start of the section demonstrates the desperate state of the Israelite people.⁵³⁴ It is a grim picture of a defeated and despondent people who have no hope of release. YHWH's rescue of Israel will need to be more than simply a removal of the people from the land; it will need to be the re-identification of the people as belonging to YHWH.

I now return to the dialogues specifically between Moses and YHWH as they are portrayed in this next section of Exodus. Once again this is a section where the main characterisation is expressed through speech and interaction. I will first consider YHWH's main speeches and look at Moses' key speech in 5:22, before moving on to outline and analyse the dialogue.

4.2. CHARACTERISATION THROUGH SPEECH AND ACTION

4.2.1. YHWH

4.2.1.1. Deliverance Proclaimed, Land Promised: 6:1-8

In 6:1 YHWH's proclamation of deliverance begins with another use of the "hand" motif, where once again there is a potential ambiguity over whose hand is being referred to. YHWH's initial statement implies he is about to take action, but instead of the expected "by *my* mighty hand" YHWH leaves the hand's owner unspecified: "by *a* mighty hand". It is natural to suppose YHWH's hand is the referent (see Exod. 3:20). Other Old Testament texts where YHWH delivers his people with a mighty hand support this supposition. In the immediate Exodus context Pharaoh's hand could be the hand referred to in these verses,

⁵³⁴ In particular that their officials have no belief that Moses and Aaron can make anything better. They go directly to Pharaoh, and it is only after Pharaoh has refused them, that they then go to Moses and Aaron to curse them. The best YHWH can do, in their view, is kill Moses and Aaron for their meddling.

suggesting the concept of YHWH's hand forcing Pharaoh's hand.⁵³⁵ This possibility at least keeps the reader alert, as references are made to "hand" in the narrative, to the idea that the identity of the hand's owner is not necessarily obvious.

At 6:2 a transition is marked with "And God spoke" rather than "YHWH said". The opening lines of God's speech are often taken as P's version of the call narrative of Moses, often viewed as written later than the call narrative of chapter 3.⁵³⁶ Following Childs, however, many commentators have sought to read Exodus 6 not as a parallel account of Moses' call, but as a confirmation or reassurance of Moses' call.⁵³⁷

The speech begins with 6:3, a verse that has long puzzled scholars. The most obvious way to understand the verse is as saying that YHWH's name was not known in Genesis, but that he had shown himself to the patriarchs as El-Shaddai. This position has been held by those who see Exodus 6 as P's "call narrative". However, in and of itself it is arguable that Exodus 6 does not sound like the giving of a new name, but rather assumes that the name YHWH is already known.⁵³⁸ In the Exodus context this is unproblematic because YHWH's name has been revealed in Exodus 3:14-15, and even under a source critical reading it is possible to suppose with Durham that P's original account of the giving of the name has

⁵³⁵ Supporting the idea of Pharaoh is: Noth, *Exodus*, 56; and: Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 99; see alternatively: Durham, *Exodus*, 71.

⁵³⁶ See analysis from a source critical perspective: Driver, *The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version*, 41; and: Noth, *Exodus*, 58; in more recent discussions this has been disputed with Schmid arguing that Exodus 3-4 is actually later than Exodus 6, while Dozeman has argued conversely that Exodus 6 shows every sign of being dependant on Exodus 3 for its structure. Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*, 173-193; Dozeman, "The Commission of Moses and the Book of Genesis," 116.

⁵³⁷ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 114; Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 8; Seitz, "The Call of Moses and the 'Revelation' of the Divine Name", 156; Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 268; Fretheim, *Exodus*; Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:496-97.

⁵³⁸ Durham, *Exodus*, 75.

been omitted by the final redactor, because he is concerned in Exodus 6 to focus on the covenant.⁵³⁹

For the reader who knows Genesis, Exodus 6:3 is a difficulty because of the use of YHWH in Genesis. In particular, in Genesis 15:20 YHWH introduces himself to Abraham with the words “I am YHWH your God, who brought you out of Ur...” There are other references within the Genesis narrative, some of which are in YHWH’s own speeches. The reader of Exodus therefore has to seek how to understand this, given that the books of Genesis and Exodus are placed together. In what follows I will seek to argue that 6:3 is best understood against the background of the use of the divine name in Genesis, and in particular the way that the name YHWH tends to occur much less as Genesis progresses.⁵⁴⁰

The question becomes one of when the name was previously known, and to this at least two possible answers have been given. Scholars who have generally resisted source critical conclusions have argued that the biblical narrator understands the divine name YHWH as always being known (cf Gen. 4:26). Exodus 6:3 is therefore a question of the meaning of the divine name YHWH not being known before Moses, in other words, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob knew the name YHWH, but did not know what it meant.⁵⁴¹

However others argue it does not make sense to speak of knowing the name YHWH without knowing its meaning, and therefore Exodus 6:3 implies Abraham did not know the name; uses of “YHWH” in Genesis are therefore due to later retellings of the stories from the perspective of “Mosaic Yhwhism”.⁵⁴²

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 75–76 although this amount of redaction by the editor raises the question of why the editor still included the words about YHWH’s name not being known to the patriarchs if this is not an account of the giving of the name.

⁵⁴⁰ This will be discussed further below, but the distribution of divine names in Genesis is set out in: Wenham, “The Religion of the Patriarchs,” 159.

⁵⁴¹ Motyer, *The Revelation of the Divine Name*; Seitz, “The Call of Moses and the ‘Revelation’ of the Divine Name,” 158–159

⁵⁴² Wenham, “The Religion of the Patriarchs,” 183; Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 70.

This second position has the benefit of a seemingly more straightforward interpretation of Exodus 6:3, but there remain issues with whether it is an appropriate reading of Genesis, in particular of Genesis 15. Eslinger argues that Moberly's solution requires further examination: the uses of YHWH need investigation in the book of Genesis to see if they represent the narrator's perspective, or if there is any pattern to the use of the name YHWH.⁵⁴³ Eslinger links this issue in 6:3 to the wider question of the phrase "that you may know that I am YHWH", suggesting that the assumption behind the perceived problem is that to use the name YHWH requires "knowing" the name YHWH.⁵⁴⁴ He argues that characters can use the name YHWH without being said to know "that I am YHWH". For Eslinger "by my name Yahweh I was not known" is a negative variant of "you shall know that I am YHWH".⁵⁴⁵ For Eslinger the whole purpose of the Exodus is that YHWH will be known. Pharaoh provides a classic case of one using the name YHWH without knowing "that I am YHWH".⁵⁴⁶

While Eslinger overstates his case when he says that no one is ever said to "know YHWH",⁵⁴⁷ he does make the case that it would be possible to know the name YHWH as a collection of syllables without knowing "that I am YHWH" in the sense of having seen YHWH's saving or judging activity.⁵⁴⁸ In the context of the reader of Genesis it is noteworthy that the use of YHWH as a name for God appears to fade as the narrative of Genesis progresses. In this connection it is worth quoting den Hertog on Moses' question in Exodus 3:13:

⁵⁴³ Eslinger, "Knowing Yahweh," 192-193

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁵⁴⁷ Essentially because he does not take into account that there may be ways of describing the same reality as "knowing" without using the word "to know".

⁵⁴⁸ See discussion in first two essays of: Walther Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh* (John Knox Press, 1982); See also the discussion in Davies around names for gods for examples of deities whose name conveys little or nothing about them: Davies, "The Exegesis of the Divine Name in Exodus," 140.

The ancestral narratives of Genesis may also tell us something about the reason why in Exodus 3:13 a name is asked for. The multitude of divine names in these narratives indicates that the answer is not self-evident. It is in fact not completely obvious what is only a divine epithet, a byname and what a proper name, at least not on the level of direct discourse. The status of the name YHWH is also not clear, all the more because of its virtual absence from the last part of Genesis.⁵⁴⁹

If den Hertog is right a possible reading of Exodus 6 is that YHWH is saying he did not make his name, YHWH, known as the name which fundamentally determines his covenant, rather it was as El-Shaddai that he appeared to the patriarchs in the past.

Furthermore in Exodus 6:3 YHWH states that he appeared to the patriarchs as El-Shaddai, but breaks the parallel structure of the verse to say that he did not make his name YHWH known, or that he did not make himself known by his name, YHWH.⁵⁵⁰ One exception to this might be thought to be Genesis 15:7, where Abraham is addressed directly by YHWH and YHWH declares “I am YHWH who brought you out of Ur, to this land to possess it”. However Genesis 15 is followed by Genesis 17, where YHWH appears to Abraham and says “I am El-Shaddai, walk before me and be blameless”.⁵⁵¹ For the character of Abraham within the narrative there is no way to discern which of these revelations is primary.

By contrast Moses is addressed by YHWH, who identifies himself as YHWH at each stage of the narrative with the single aim that people might come to “know that I am YHWH”.

YHWH will both declare his intention to rescue and issue commands in the context of declaring that “I am YHWH” through the lips of Moses. From now on YHWH will be

⁵⁴⁹ Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 50; and see the table of the distribution of divine names in Genesis which shows that “YHWH” is used only 11 times in the Joseph cycle (by contrast with 65 times in the Abraham cycle): Wenham, “The Religion of the Patriarchs,” 159.

⁵⁵⁰ Depending on whether the Niphal is a passive, or carries a reflexive sense - for a comprehensive summary of the arguments in favour of a passive sense, and explanation of the construction see: W Randall Garr, “The Grammar and Interpretation of Exodus 6:3,” *JBL* 111, no. 3 (1992): 385–408, p395. Garr argues: “Exod 6:3b, then, signals that the whole God, “I,” was not known to the patriarchs, to the extent that his name Yahweh was not known. In other words, the subject of Exod. 6:3b—I = God—was not fully known.”

⁵⁵¹ It is of course, possible to “solve” these problems by recourse to source- and redaction- critical theories, but the issue still remains of the impact the final form of the text makes on the reader.

known definitively by the name YHWH, and what this name means will be explained in and through his relationship with Moses.

Exodus 6:2-8 amplifies what “I am YHWH” means.⁵⁵² As with 3:8-10 the speech of 6:2-8 refers back to Exodus 2:24-25, with reference to the fathers and to YHWH hearing the groaning of the Israelites.⁵⁵³ In chapter 6 the verbs הִסְתַּחֲפַח and זָכַר are missing in the *Qal*, although they do occur in the *Niphal* for YHWH’s action in self-revelation.⁵⁵⁴ YHWH reminds Moses of the covenant made with the patriarchs, and that YHWH has remembered his covenant, while the covenantal formula forms the centre of the speech that Moses is told to speak to the people.⁵⁵⁵ In the narrative contexts the setbacks experienced by Israel in chapter 5 make the need for a re-affirmation of the covenant a pressing one.⁵⁵⁶

The speech Moses is tasked to deliver to the people (6:5-8) is a long crescendo of verbs focused on YHWH’s action in delivering Israel out of Egypt and into the promised land in fulfilment of his covenant to the end that the people might know that “I am YHWH”.⁵⁵⁷ Such recognition comes, Zimmerli argued, after and through YHWH’s action.⁵⁵⁸ In this speech YHWH declares what he will do for Israel in a sequence of verbs of action: “bring you out”, “deliver you” and “redeem you”. These are followed by two verbs of covenant relationship: “I will take you” and “I will be your God”, and by “you will know that I am

⁵⁵² Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 115; Although Durham sees the speech as concerned rather with covenant than the meaning of the divine name. Durham, *Exodus*, 77.

⁵⁵³ The classical documentary hypothesis saw this passage as P, continuing on from 2:23-25 Driver, *The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version*, 41; Noth, *Exodus*, 58; However others have seen the passage functioning equally well as a reassurance of the call: Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 7–8; Seitz, “The Call of Moses and the ‘Revelation’ of the Divine Name”, 156; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 89.

⁵⁵⁴ Charles D. Isbell, “Exodus 1-2 in the Context of Exodus 1-14 : Story Lines and Key Words,” in *Art and Meaning*, ed. David M. Gunn, David J. A. Clines, and Alan J. Hauser (Sheffield, England: JSOT Pr, 1982), 37–61, pp55-56.

⁵⁵⁵ Durham, *Exodus*, 77–78; Rolf Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation*, Old Testament studies (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 16–17.

⁵⁵⁶ See the discussions in: Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, 27; Fretheim, 88-89, *Exodus*; Seitz, “The Call of Moses and the ‘Revelation’ of the Divine Name,” 156.

⁵⁵⁷ Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, 36.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 35.

YHWH”.⁵⁵⁹ Rendtorff observes that in this speech we have the first instance both of the full “bilateral covenant formula”, and of the “recognition formula, which is given its particular stress here through its direct link with the covenant formula.”⁵⁶⁰ This moves the knowledge of God beyond simply recognition of YHWH’s mighty deeds, and into the sphere of covenant relationship. It will be after YHWH has delivered them from Egypt, and when YHWH takes Israel for his people that Israel will know that YHWH is the God who brought them out of the land of Egypt. This process will be followed by YHWH completing his deliverance of his people by bringing them into the land which he had promised to the Patriarchs.

Therefore this speech portrays YHWH as the decisive actor in Israel’s redemption. When the speech is read in the context of the Exodus-narrative it is a resounding declaration of YHWH’s intention to rescue his people and to fulfil his covenant in order that they might come to know that “I am YHWH”. Yet this redemption does not occur without Moses, for Moses is given YHWH’s words to speak to the people, and plays a critical role in the following narrative.

4.2.1.2. Judgement Declared: 7:1-5

Once more YHWH’s mighty deeds are stressed, but this time with an emphasis on YHWH’s judgement of Egypt. YHWH’s words here shape Moses’ identity by his placing of Moses as “god”, which will be explored in more detail below. In this section I will focus on how his words concerning Pharaoh develop the characterisation of YHWH. YHWH is portrayed as deliberately acting to make matters worse before he acts decisively to bring Israel out from Egypt’s midst. His words are spoken to Moses in the context of the despair of the

⁵⁵⁹ See the detailed discussion of the rhetoric of this section, in far more detail than I have time to examine here: Pierre Auffret, “The Literary Structure of Exodus 6:2-8,” *JSOT*, no. 27 (1983): 46–54; Jonathan Magonet, “The Rhetoric of God: Exodus 6:2-8,” *JSOT*, no. 27 (1983): 56–67; Jonathan Magonet, “A Response to ‘The Literary Structure of Exodus 6:2-8’ by Pierre Auffret,” *JSOT*, no. 27 (1983): 73–74; Pierre Auffret, “Remarks on J Magonet’s Interpretation of Exodus 6:2-8,” *JSOT*, no. 27 (1983): 69–71.

⁵⁶⁰ Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula*, 17.

Israelites in chapter 5 and the unbelief on the part of the Israelites in chapter 6, and of the continuing oppression by Pharaoh in chapter 5. Moses and Aaron are to go back to Pharaoh, in the full knowledge that he will resist YHWH, and that YHWH will strengthen Pharaoh's resistance, but that this resistance will lead to YHWH performing his act of deliverance for the people. This deliverance will lead to the Egyptians knowing that "I am YHWH". Both the deliverance of chapter 6 and the judgement of chapter 7 lead to a knowing that "I am YHWH", but one is in the context of covenant fulfilment, the other judgement.

This provides a vital clue to what it means to "know that I am YHWH". Both deliverance and judgement can lead to a person or nation coming to "know that I am YHWH". This knowledge is not merely to know a name; it is to know that YHWH is the one who chooses to be with his people, and to rescue his people. If YHWH is the one who is present with his people, then to deny that people YHWH's desire for them is to face YHWH's action in judgement, as Pharaoh discovers in this narrative to his cost. Finally YHWH's speech reminds the reader that YHWH is not taken aback by Pharaoh's resistance, but that he has deliberately planned to increase that resistance.⁵⁶¹

4.2.1.3. YHWH's Characterisation through Speech: Conclusions

In these two major speeches of YHWH in this section the central purpose of YHWH's actions in delivering Israel is that both Israel and Egypt might know, albeit in different ways, that "I am YHWH". It is possible to read this as being a rather negative evaluation of a self-centred insecure YHWH who is concerned only that he is recognised by others.

Indeed Eslinger writes in the conclusion of his article regarding this subject:

⁵⁶¹ The philosophical and theological discussion around the issue of "hardening" is large, but the text remains largely uninterested in justifying YHWH's actions. For an overview of the discussion, and suggestion of a way forward see: William A. Ford, "Whose Explanation? Which Context? A Narrative Theological Study of the Rationale for Divine Action in the Exodus Plagues Narratives" (Ph.D., Durham University, 2005), 14.

Whatever the truth of the matter is, and whether or not this impartial objectivity is also a disguise for a hidden polemic, it is time to stop reading Exodus 1-15 through the eyes of its unwitting Israelites. We can understand why they celebrated God's mighty acts in song (Exod. 15); we should also understand and allow that the narrator and the narrative do not.⁵⁶²

David Gunn takes a similarly negative view of YHWH's character as revealed through this narrative:

Yahweh's demonstration of his power over the Egyptians is also bound up with his need to establish himself securely as Israel's God, the god of the covenant promise, in the eyes of Israel. At this point appears a curious hint of insecurity in God himself, paradoxically as it may appear in the context of this massive demonstration of his mastery.⁵⁶³

However, to reach this conclusion from the narrative is to treat the rhetoric of this particular section in isolation from the remainder of the Old Testament narrative. To decide if YHWH's desire that others should come to know that "I am YHWH" is a self-centred action undermining the liberation he performs for his people one must set this desire in the context of what it means for YHWH's people to know that "I am YHWH", and what it means for YHWH's people that their enemies know that "I am YHWH".

W. Ross Blackburn argues that to know YHWH's name is to know YHWH as both supreme overall and as the redeemer of Israel, indeed that "the supremacy of the Lord is the foundation for his redeeming of Israel."⁵⁶⁴ If this is correct, and it is a natural reading of Exodus 6, then for Israel to know YHWH means to know his rescue, and therefore for YHWH to desire that his people know him is to desire that they experience his rescue to the fullest degree. Thus YHWH's desire for his name to be known encompasses the redemption of his people, and is a reason for the implied reader of the text to celebrate YHWH's redemptive work.

⁵⁶² Eslinger, "Freedom or Knowledge," 58.

⁵⁶³ David M. Gunn, "The 'Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart': Plot, Character and Theology in Exodus 1-14," in *Art and Meaning*, ed. David M. Gunn, David J. A. Clines, and Alan J. Hauser (Sheffield, England: JSOT Pr, 1982), 72-96, p84.

⁵⁶⁴ W Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus*, New studies in biblical theology (Nottingham; Downers Grove, Ill: Apollos; IVP Academic, 2012), 56.

4.2.2. Moses

Here I will examine Moses' most lengthy speech thus far in the narrative as it occurs in 5:22, and look at the final description given of Moses and Aaron in 7:6-7, which provides a fitting conclusion to Moses' characterisation in this section.

4.2.2.1. Moses as intercessor: 5:22

Moses' intercession here is the first time that he takes the initiative to address YHWH. Up until now Moses' speeches towards YHWH have been in response to YHWH's commissioning, but here Moses takes the initiative to return to YHWH. This raises the question of what it means for Moses to "return" to YHWH. When did Moses leave YHWH? The reader is not given any information about what this "return" might involve, although Jacobs speculates that it means he returned to Sinai.⁵⁶⁵ There is, however, an immediacy about the following narrative that is lost if the reader has to picture Moses travelling to and from Sinai in between each command from YHWH to go back to the people.⁵⁶⁶ More likely the need to "return" implies that Moses has in some sense been absent from YHWH, and needs to consciously return to YHWH in order to address him.

Fretheim argues that Moses has not appropriated YHWH's message in 3:18-20 very well, otherwise he would not have made this complaint.⁵⁶⁷ However in the Old Testament there are many individuals who voice their complaints to God, without necessarily any negative evaluation of their character being implied.⁵⁶⁸ If Michael Widmer's argument that Moses is taking up a role he later carries out with some frequency as intercessor on behalf of the people is correct then Moses' complaint can be understood as a less developed version of

⁵⁶⁵ Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, 138–139.

⁵⁶⁶ Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 258.

⁵⁶⁷ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 89; see also: Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 106; and also: Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:485–6.

⁵⁶⁸ Indeed Childs compares Moses' complaint to that of Jeremiah: Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 106.

his intercession in Exodus 32-34 and Numbers 13-14.⁵⁶⁹ It is not necessary to conclude with Widmer that “Moses appears to have forgotten YHWH’s warning that the mission will not be a straightforward success (Exod. 3:19, 4:21)”.⁵⁷⁰ Instead Exodus 3:19 and 4:21-22 which both contain references to YHWH’s mighty deeds to bring judgement on Pharaoh should be remembered. YHWH’s mighty deeds are nowhere in evidence in chapter 5 and therefore YHWH’s response to Moses is not a rebuke but a promise of what is to come.

Widmer, in his discussion of 5:22, notes that YHWH’s response is both a re-affirmation of the divine plan, and also a fuller revelation of the divine name, a response that is paralleled by the later events of Exodus 32-34, where YHWH’s revelation of his name on Sinai is in response for Moses’ plea to see YHWH’s glory.⁵⁷¹ For Widmer this is part of the prophetic portrayal of Moses in the narrative, for “intercession is intrinsically linked to the prophetic ministry”.⁵⁷²

This may be so, although it will be noted below that Moses’ portrayal in the narrative is also as a figure who is more than simply a prophet. For our purposes in this study it is important to look at the words of Moses’ complaint, and in particular the central section where he reminds YHWH that he has come to Pharaoh in YHWH’s name, and YHWH has done nothing. There is an obvious link here to YHWH’s reputation (again appealed to in Exodus 32, and Numbers 14), but there is also a link to what YHWH will go on to say. Moses thinks that YHWH is doing nothing about his name, while YHWH’s response is entirely given over to explaining his actions in the framework of his name (6:2-8).

⁵⁶⁹ Widmer observes that in Exodus 5 the danger to Israel comes from the apparent absence of God, while in Exodus 32 the danger is a result of Israel’s sin. In Exodus 5 Moses’ complaint is that he has come speaking in YHWH’s name, but this has done no good: Michael Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Alten Testament 8 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 78.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., 79.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., 80.

⁵⁷² Ibid., 83.

Moses' return to YHWH is to challenge YHWH in the most direct way to do something about the problems faced by his people. Ironically, even though this is described as a return, it is not a return to something Moses has done previously in the narrative up to this point, where all his interaction with YHWH has been primarily about Moses' resistance to YHWH.

4.2.2.2. Complete Obedience and Maturity: 7:6-7

Under the characterisation of Moses there remains one further section to examine, Exodus 7:6-7. This provides a conclusion to the first section of Exodus by reporting Moses' and Aaron's complete obedience to YHWH's instructions: וַיַּעַשׂ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן כְּכָל־אֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֹתָם כִּן עָשׂוּ. This description of Moses' and Aaron's obedience is repeated at key points in Exodus (7:10, 7:20, 12:28, 12:50, and 39:43).⁵⁷³ The phrase "as YHWH had commanded Moses" occurs almost like a liturgical response in Exodus 40 as the book culminates with the narrative of the tabernacle consecration.⁵⁷⁴ The phrase reappears in Leviticus and Numbers multiple times to highlight the people's submission to YHWH's commandment, and in Deuteronomy and Joshua to highlight the people's and Joshua's obedience to Moses' commandments.

In the rest of the Old Testament after Joshua it appears only twice in relation to YHWH's commands.⁵⁷⁵ There are other occurrences of the verb in a similar formula to indicate complete obedience to a human authority also (a "completion formula"), but the vast

⁵⁷³ In Exodus 7 this relates to the narrative of Aaron's staff becoming a snake, and the Nile turning into blood. Although in 7:10 and 7:20 the order of the description is reversed "they did thus, as YHWH had commanded". In Exodus 12 the description of obedience is repeated, this time in relation to the keeping of the first Passover. In Exodus 39:43 it is used again, this time highlighting the manner in which the Israelites had constructed the tabernacle in accordance with YHWH's instructions.

⁵⁷⁴ Exod. 40:16: "Moses did everything as YHWH had commanded him"; while the phrase "as YHWH had commanded Moses" comes in Exod. 40:19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29 and 32. In Genesis 7:9 Noah's obedience is recorded with the words "as God commanded"

⁵⁷⁵ 2 Sam. 24:19, where David is commanded to build an altar, and obeys, and Jeremiah 13:5, where Jeremiah hides a loin cloth as YHWH had commanded. In Genesis 7:9 records Noah's obedience with the words "as God commanded"

majority of instances of this formula occur with Moses as either the receiver of the command (from YHWH) or the giver of the command (to Israel, on YHWH's behalf). This emphasises his "unique role as mediator and spokesperson for God", and the test of a true prophet becomes similarly that he speaks "everything which I command him" (Deut. 18:18).⁵⁷⁶ The formula is most common in the writings usually described as "priestly", and relates to the concept of holiness as closely related to the fulfilment of the divine will.⁵⁷⁷

This complete obedience fulfils YHWH's command to Moses in 6:10 (and indeed 3:10). With this formula the suspense created from 3:11 with Moses' first objection to YHWH's command is resolved. Moses acts as the one sent by YHWH to deliver Israel. In the narrative following, the formula governs how the reader should read the character of Moses, telling the reader that in terms of obedience to YHWH's command to go to Pharaoh Moses and Aaron can be assumed to be following YHWH's instructions unless there is good reason in the text to suggest otherwise. At the end of the plague narratives there are two verses, 11:9-10, that recapitulate YHWH's words to Moses and can be seen as forming an *inclusio* defining the beginning and end of the plague narrative.⁵⁷⁸ The tension in this new section of narrative will revolve around how YHWH will display his mighty power and what his "strengthening of Pharaoh's resolve" will look like.⁵⁷⁹

The perception of Moses and Aaron as YHWH's obedient servants is strengthened by the detail regarding Moses' and Aaron's ages. This seems an unnecessary detail, but if 40 years can be an approximate way of indicating a generation, then 80 may be used to indicate that Moses has the seniority and experience necessary to represent the people.⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁶ T.F. Williams, "הָצַד", *NIDOTTE* 3:773-777

⁵⁷⁷ G. Lopez, "הָצַד", *TDOT* 12:276-296

⁵⁷⁸ Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 144.

⁵⁷⁹ A more idiomatic English translation of the word traditionally translated "hardening": See the useful discussion in: Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel*, 1:351.

⁵⁸⁰ See comments regarding forty years in: Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 283.

In other words, the reader is not to imagine Moses and Aaron confronting Pharaoh from the impetuosity of youth, but rather men of experience, suited to representing the elders of the people.⁵⁸¹ Moshe Greenberg points out the manner in which the life spans given in the genealogy of Exodus 6:14-25 are similar to the genealogies of Genesis for the patriarchal life spans, and thus the line of Moses and Aaron is linked to that of the “ancient worthies reaching back behind Abraham to Noah and Adam”.⁵⁸² The ages also serve to remind the reader of Exodus how long Israel has suffered.⁵⁸³

4.2.2.3. The Disappearing Prophet?

For our particular focus on how the relationship between Moses and YHWH reveals more of the meaning and significance of the divine name it is important to look at how Moses and Aaron’s roles are presented in the narrative. The way in which Aaron “disappears” from the plague narratives is sometimes commented on, and the reader needs to decide whether the narrative guides us to see Aaron’s disappearance as a function of his role being assumed by the narrative, or whether that disappearance is supposed to be read as if it reflects Moses and Aaron moving away from their commanded roles.⁵⁸⁴ One approach to the issue is to suggest, with Houtman:

in the conception of the editor of Exodus, Aaron was appointed to convey the demand to release the people (specifically) at the imminent confrontation with Pharaoh. If one admits this supposition, then it is not surprising that Moses himself later addresses Pharaoh.⁵⁸⁵

This is possible, but if the reasons behind Moses’ excuses reflect any kind of actual defect in Moses’ speech it is odd that Moses now feels able to speak. There is nothing in the text

⁵⁸¹ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 118.

⁵⁸² Greenberg, *Understanding Exodus*, 137.

⁵⁸³ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 118.

⁵⁸⁴ So 7:14-18 has YHWH telling Moses that Moses will speak to Pharaoh and stretch out his hand, while in 7:19 Aaron is the one who stretches out his hand, and the staff. Exod. 8:1, 20 both instruct Moses to Pharaoh, 9:1 instructs Moses to Pharaoh, 9:8 breaks the pattern and instructs Moses and Aaron, 9:13 has Moses instructed to Pharaoh, while 10:1-2 has Moses and Aaron speaking. The final plague is announced by Moses to Pharaoh.

⁵⁸⁵ Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:527.

to specifically suggest Houtman's hypothesis, so alternative explanations should be considered.

As I noted above 7:6-7 provide the essential context for the following narrative, at least as far as 11:10 in that they demonstrate that Moses and Aaron are acting in obedience to YHWH unless there is strong evidence to the contrary. The question is why Aaron's role as spokesman is not specifically denoted in the narrative, and why his role in carrying out the plagues is gradually taken over also.

A helpful concept from studies of biblical narrative is that of the "vanishing character", which Jonathan Grossman sets out in a useful article.⁵⁸⁶ He summarises his conclusions as follows, using the example of Hathach, the messenger between Mordecai and Esther, and Moses' family in the narrative of the wilderness wanderings:

The presence of a vanishing character can be assessed based on two conditions: great emphasis is put on the character before disappearing; and the character vanishes before fulfilling a literary role. There may be various objectives in using this technique, most notably clearing the stage for the characters who remain (as in the case of Hathach), and accentuating the protagonist's detachment from what the minor characters represent (in the case of Moses' family).⁵⁸⁷

For our purposes it is the first of these objectives which is in view in the plagues narrative. The emphasis in the plague narratives is on the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh, and Aaron's actions serve to highlight this confrontation. The lack of specific mention of Aaron's speech does not necessarily mean that he no longer spoke for Moses. Instead it can be read as implying that Aaron's role is assumed. Aaron is Moses' prophet who speaks the words of Moses, so that "Moses said" can be taken, within the overall context, to mean "Moses said to Aaron, and Aaron said to Pharaoh". I will look further at this issue below in the context of the interrelationship of Moses' and YHWH's actions.

⁵⁸⁶ Jonathan Grossman, "The Vanishing Character in Biblical Narrative: The Role of Hathach in Esther 4," *VT* 62, no. 4 (2012): 561–71.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 571.

4.2.2.4. Characterisation of Moses: Conclusions

Thus in Moses' narrative portrayal we see Moses beginning to be portrayed as a prophetic intercessor on behalf of the people, and as an obedient ambassador of YHWH, doing all that he has been asked to do. Moses' narrative portrayal is relatively positive, which comes as something of a surprise after his reluctance in chapters 3-4, and the oppression of chapter 5. In order to understand more of how this positive portrayal emerges I will examine more closely the way in which the dialogue's portrayal of Moses and YHWH functions.

4.3. ANALYSIS OF THE DIALOGUES

4.3.1. "I am YHWH": 5:22-6:9

⁵*And Moses returned to YHWH and said:*

A1 QUESTION "O Lord, why have you brought this trouble on this people? Why have you sent me, ²³for since I came in to Pharaoh speaking in your name he has brought evil on this people and you have done nothing to deliver your people?"

⁶*And YHWH said to Moses:*

A2 ANSWER "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh, for by a mighty hand he will send them away and by a mighty hand he will drive them from his land."

²*And God spoke to Moses, and he said to him:*

B1a STATEMENT "I am YHWH, ³and I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as El Shaddai, but by my name YHWH I was not known to them.⁵⁸⁸ ⁴And also I made my covenant with them – to give to them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as wanderers. ⁵And I heard the groaning of the Israelites because of Egypt oppressing them, and I remembered my covenant.

B1b COMMAND ⁶Therefore say to the Israelites:

B1c PROMISE: "I am YHWH, and I will bring you out from under the burden of Egypt and I will deliver you from their service and I will redeem you by an outstretched arm and by mighty judgements. ⁷And I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you will know that I am YHWH your God who brought you out from under the burden of Egypt, ⁸and I will bring you in to the land which I have promised to you,⁵⁸⁹ to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, and I will give it to you as a possession, I am YHWH."

B2b/C1 ⁹*And Moses spoke thus to the Israelites (OBEDIENCE)*

B2c/C2 But they did not listen to Moses because of exhaustion and hard service. (UNBELIEF)

⁵⁸⁸ See Garr, "The Grammar and Interpretation of Exodus 6:3," 395. Equally plausible is "by my name YHWH I did not make myself known" (see many English versions). For this study it does not make a big difference to my interpretation of the dialogues.

⁵⁸⁹ Lit: lifted my hand to give you

4.3.1.1. Moses Returns to YHWH

The first section of the dialogue is a straightforward question and answer pair, with Moses bringing the officials' anger against Moses and Aaron to YHWH. As argued in the study of Moses' speeches above (4.2.2.1.) this does not necessarily paint Moses in a negative light; rather it is a usual response to suffering within the Old Testament. Moses' question regarding YHWH's inaction gives Moses' perspective on YHWH's seeming lack of action in chapter 5, and the reader sees that Moses has no understanding of the reasons for this.

This is the first time that Moses begins a conversation pair in his dialogue with YHWH. At each point in chapters 3-4 Moses' interactions with YHWH were initiated by YHWH, but here Moses returns to YHWH and begins the conversation. Moses seeks to influence YHWH's actions by reminding him that his name is at stake. The reader may wonder if Moses could have gone back to YHWH sooner, when Pharaoh first increased the burdens on the people. It would be possible to conclude that YHWH's delay in acting is because YHWH is waiting for Moses' intercession.

However YHWH gives no explanation for the events of chapter 5 in A2, and does not even seem to acknowledge them. Rather YHWH's response begins with "now you will see what I will do", and YHWH speaks words of reassurance to Moses and gives fresh instructions regarding both Israel and Egypt. Although Houtman suggests that YHWH "disregards Moses' questions" as he states how deliverance will be accomplished, YHWH's speeches do revolve around the idea of YHWH's action and YHWH's name, two features raised by Moses' speech.⁵⁹⁰ Moses' assumption may be that YHWH has given up, but YHWH's reply assures Moses that he is ready for action.

⁵⁹⁰ Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:486.

4.3.1.2. YHWH promises rescue

A new speech introduction for the same speaker is not particularly unusual in these chapters of Exodus.⁵⁹¹ Here a new speech introduction is appropriate because YHWH moves from answering Moses' objection to commanding Moses. The speech introduction "and God said, 'I am YHWH'" fits with the theme of the beginning section of the speech in 6:3, where different names for God are referred to, and is almost a mirror image of Genesis 17:1, "And YHWH said, 'I am God Almighty'". In 6:3-8 YHWH sets out an explanation of his name in more detail.

YHWH's speech to Moses can be broken into three sections which have slightly different roles in the dialogue. First is YHWH's self-introduction to Moses in B1a, where he declares his name, reminds Moses of the covenant made with the patriarchs, and affirms the description of God in Exodus 2:24 as one who has heard Israel's groans, and remembers his covenant. This speech reminds Moses of Israel's identity as God's covenant people, and God's past interaction with the patriarchs. YHWH's identity is defined in terms of covenant loyalty. Some have read this as a rather negative feature:

Yahweh therefore is Providence, the Provider of a future, a future that has already been promised in the past. The story could have emphasized the motivating power of pity, compassion, love; rather it singles out plan, promise, obligation. As Isbell emphasizes, the story is about mastery, control⁵⁹²

This creates an unnecessary polarisation between "pity, compassion, love" and "plan, promise, obligation", which are certainly held together in the Exodus narrative.⁵⁹³ YHWH's speech to Moses reminds him that the people of Israel are the recipients of YHWH's promise and blessing.

⁵⁹¹ Compare our analysis of Exodus 3:4-6 and 3:14-15, where it highlighted the importance of what was said.

⁵⁹² Gunn, "The 'Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart,'" 82.

⁵⁹³ There does not appear any need for such a polarisation, and indeed further on in the Exodus narrative these themes and their intertwining are portrayed in vivid narrative detail (Exodus 33-34).

Second is B1b, his command to Moses, an instruction to speak to Israel, with which Moses complies. Finally is B1c, YHWH's words which Moses is to speak to Israel. YHWH's word speaks to a broken, dispirited people of the covenant. YHWH speaks directly to the people of Israel to recreate them, to bring them out of Egyptian bondage, into his land. The goal of this is that they would know that "I am YHWH". YHWH's words through Moses will be the first time the Israelite people have heard YHWH declare "I am YHWH" to them.

YHWH's words reiterate the promises made in chapter 3, with an added emphasis on the relationship between YHWH and Israel.

Moses responds with obedience to B1b, which forms the first part of his dialogue (C1) with the Israelites. In the speech Moses is told to speak God's words in the first person, as Israel's prophets usually did, and as Moses began to do to Pharaoh in 5:1. Here the whole speech is summed up in the words "Moses spoke thus to the Israelites". This abbreviation of speech is a relatively common feature of Old Testament narrative.⁵⁹⁴ Here it is presumably employed to highlight that Moses conveyed exactly what YHWH says.

Moses' obedience to YHWH's command is the first part of a new exchange between Moses and the Israelites. Here, as in chapter 5, are a set of exchanges which involve a third party, but in which there is a distinct chain of speech. Here the speech goes from YHWH to Moses to Israel, and back from Israel to Moses to YHWH. In 5:21 the people go to Moses, who goes to YHWH (5:22). YHWH speaks to Moses (6:1, 2), and instructs him what to say to the people (6:6-8). Moses goes back to the people (6:9), who in turn refuse to listen to Moses (6:9).

⁵⁹⁴ See comments from the perspective of literary artistry in: Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 78; and also the categorisation of this speech in Miller, where she notes that the content represented by "thus" is entirely recoverable from the context: Miller, *Representation*, 135.

One of the effects of the way the different speeches within this chain are reported is to draw attention to particular sections of the narrative. Here the effect of reporting “Moses said thus” rather than having Moses repeat the words is to keep the focus on YHWH’s words in 6:6-8.⁵⁹⁵ In their context these words are a strong affirmation of YHWH’s character and identity. They remind Moses of what YHWH has already said in 3:8-22, and supply content for the benefit of Israel to the concept that YHWH is their God.

The Israelites respond to Moses (C2) and therefore to YHWH (B2c) with unbelief. Moses’ words are YHWH’s words to the people, but the people, like their officials in chapter 5, appear to have lost hope in YHWH’s power and his willingness to save. Once again the people are voiceless. The reader is told their reaction of despair and unbelief, but does not hear their words. Since the characterisation in this section is mostly through dialogue this keeps the people themselves in the background, and the focus on the dialogue between Moses and YHWH.

4.3.2. A Further Excuse: 6:10-12

6¹⁰And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying:

D1 ¹¹“Go in; speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt so that he may let the Israelites go free from his land.”

¹²But Moses spoke before YHWH saying:

D2 “If the Israelites will not listen to me then how will Pharaoh listen to me, for I have uncircumcised lips?”

This short exchange breaks the chain of speech observed above. However, now rather than Moses reporting the people’s unbelief to YHWH, YHWH simply sends Moses to Pharaoh. By contrast with later narratives such as the golden calf and wilderness grumblings YHWH does not blame the Israelites for their response. The Israelites’ despair is not here a reason for accusation, but simply another feature of the situation they are delivered from.

⁵⁹⁵ Conversely it could be argued in the plague narratives that Moses is sometimes presented as speaking YHWH’s words, without previously having received them, to emphasise the conflict between Moses and Pharaoh.

Moses' reply to YHWH is introduced in a rare way. Usually in the Exodus narrative Moses is reported as speaking to YHWH in terms such as "Moses spoke", but here the phrase "before YHWH" is added. Often this detail is passed over by the commentaries but in the context of dialogue where speech introductions have a particular significance it is worth considering the importance of the issue. Werner Schmidt raises the question of whether this phrase is used here either in a similar way to appearances of YHWH, such as Abraham in Genesis 18:22 standing before YHWH and interceding for Sodom, or because of the Priestly writer's reticence in suggesting that Moses would present a complaint to God, although he does not resolve the issue.⁵⁹⁶

The second of Schmidt's suggestions would imply that "before YHWH" might be seen as less direct, but this does not seem to be borne out by usage of the phrase elsewhere in the Old Testament. A survey of the phrase within the biblical literature reveals that various biblical characters are described as praying "before YHWH" (1 Sam. 1:10, 1:15; 2 Sam 7:18; 2 Kgs 19:15; Dan 9:20), but none of these use the exact form of speech introduction found here, and Moses' speech here is not described as a "prayer". Probably the closest is Numbers 36:1-2, where a group of leaders from the tribe of Manasseh are said to "speak before Moses" and the leaders of Israel following which the narrative reports "and they said". This is analogous to "Moses spoke before YHWH saying". Thus it may indicate that Moses is presenting a complaint somewhat akin to that of a plaintiff to a judge, which, if so, suggests that the writer of Exodus 6 was not reticent about presenting Moses as complaining to YHWH.

⁵⁹⁶ Schmidt, *Exodus*, 1:289.

Moses' reply does not move the discussion forward. His reply is similar to 4:10 where he described himself as "heavy of mouth and heavy of lip". Here the term "uncircumcised" moves the objection up a further level of seriousness. The concept of "uncircumcision" is applied metaphorically to a number of different body parts (hearts, lips and ears) in terms of a basic unresponsiveness such that they are "functionally deficient".⁵⁹⁷ Goldingay argues that circumcision signifies the need to be trained and disciplined if one is to live well.⁵⁹⁸ He suggests that here "uncircumcised lips" signify lips which are "untrained to speak".⁵⁹⁹

Moses' claim is unique in that other descriptions of metaphorical uncircumcision are about another, but here Moses makes the claim about himself.⁶⁰⁰ The claim shows once again Moses contesting YHWH's placement of him as a speaker. YHWH may have appointed Moses as his spokesperson, even his ambassador, but by the declaration that he has "uncircumcised lips" Moses is claiming to be unfit for purpose.

The text leaves the reader in suspense. Rather than report YHWH's response it reports the lineage of Moses, and I will suggest the reason for this below. The dialogue is taken up again in 6:29-30 with a repetition of 6:10-12, a classic example (according to Propp) of *Wiederaufnahme*, "concluding a digression by repeating the words preceding it" to remind the reader of the context.⁶⁰¹ Propp points out that while this can be evidence of an interpolation it need not be and it is also a natural feature of everyday conversation.⁶⁰²

⁵⁹⁷ Athena Gorospe, *Narrative and Identity: An Ethical Reading of Exodus 4*, Biblical Interpretation Series 86 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2007), 125.

⁵⁹⁸ Goldingay, "The Significance of Circumcision," 15.

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁶⁰⁰ They are usually made by God, except in Deuteronomy, where Moses describes the Israelites in terms of uncircumcision.

⁶⁰¹ Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 267.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*; See also discussion in: Raymond F. Person, "Restarts in Conversation and Literature," *Language and Communication* 16, no. 1 (1996): 61-70.

4.3.3. Identity Restored: 6:26-7:7

²⁶ To this same Moses and Aaron YHWH had said:

SUMMARY “Lead the Israelites out from the land of Egypt by their armies.”⁶⁰³

- ²⁷They were the ones speaking to Pharaoh, King of Egypt, to lead out the Israelites from Egypt – the same Moses and Aaron.⁶⁰⁴

²⁸And on the day YHWH spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, ²⁹then YHWH spoke to Moses saying:

E1 COMMISSION “I am YHWH: speak to Pharaoh, king of Egypt all which I am speaking to you.”

³⁰But Moses said before YHWH:

INS.A1 QUESTION “But I am of uncircumcised lips – how would Pharaoh listen to me?”

⁷¹And YHWH said to Moses

INS.A2 ANSWER “See I have made you god⁶⁰⁵ to Pharaoh and Aaron your brother will be your prophet. ²You will speak all which I command you and Aaron your brother will speak to Pharaoh that he is to let the Israelites go free from his land. ³But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart and I will multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, ⁴and Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lead out my armies, my people, the Israelites, from the land of Egypt by great acts of judgement, ⁵and the Egyptians will know that I am YHWH, when I stretch out my hand over Egypt and lead out the Israelites from their midst.”

E2 OBEDIENCE ⁶And Moses and Aaron did according to how YHWH commanded them, thus they did.

⁷Now Moses was 80 years and Aaron 83 years when they spoke to Pharaoh.

In the framing of YHWH’s speech in 6:26 the identity of Moses and Aaron is heavily emphasised, with their names repeated before and after the summary statement of YHWH’s commissioning. This verse links the genealogy with the narrative, and gives the reason for the inclusion of the genealogy. Moses is seen as one who can trace his ancestry back to Levi, who has standing as part of the Israelites and a clear lineage back to the patriarchs.⁶⁰⁶ Moses’ mother’s name Jochebed can be read as meaning “Yo (= Yahweh) is glorified”.⁶⁰⁷ This is a fitting epitaph for the Exodus narrative as a whole, but is also suggestive of Moses’ identity as one who will show YHWH’s glory to Egypt and Israel in the Exodus

⁶⁰³ Traditional English translations (e.g. ESV) have “hosts”, but see discussion on following page.

⁶⁰⁴ This reads somewhat clumsily in English, but the intention in the Hebrew appears to be to emphasise that the same Moses and Aaron who were descended from Aaron in the preceding family tree are the Moses and Aaron who go to Pharaoh.

⁶⁰⁵ HALOT 𐤍𐤍 no.13- “to turn someone into something”, in this case Moses into “god” in relation to Pharaoh. See discussion in section 4.4.2. below.

⁶⁰⁶ Thomas L. Thompson, *The Origin Tradition of Ancient Israel*, Journal for the study of the Old Testament 55 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 14.

⁶⁰⁷ Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 276.

events. This provides part of the answer to Moses' initial objection to YHWH in 3:11 "Who am I?"⁶⁰⁸

The speech summary in 6:26 is not a direct quote of any previous statement of YHWH but contains the important word הוֹצִיאָהּ "lead out", which was a part of YHWH's original instruction to Moses in 3:10, and YHWH's promise in 6:7, where the Israelites will know that "I am YHWH your God, who brought you out from the slavery of Egypt". The speech reminds the reader that Moses is still YHWH's chosen instrument to carry this out.⁶⁰⁹

A further feature of interest is that YHWH describes how Moses will lead out the Israelites עַל-צְבָאָתָם. This description of Israel is a new one. The word צבא is usually used of armies, earthly or heavenly, and it continues to be used of the people of Israel as they journey out of Egypt and through the wilderness.⁶¹⁰ The description is in stark contrast to the portrayal of the Israelites in the narrative, where they are despairing and unbelieving, and marks a shift of identity for the Israelites. In relation to Egypt Israel may be a downtrodden race of slaves, but in relation to YHWH they are an army, ready to march; YHWH's words mark the beginning of a process of transformation.⁶¹¹

Following the re-affirmation of Moses' identity in 6:27, the narrative repeats the dialogue of 6:10-12. In the sequence of dialogue this forms another "insertion sequence" where, rather than obey YHWH, Moses asks a question. This time, rather than a genealogy, YHWH answers, and I have already examined what the content of the speech says about YHWH.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 269; Thompson, *The Origin Tradition of Ancient Israel*, 14.

⁶⁰⁹ This seems closer to the text than the view that chapter 6 presents a contrast between 3:6-10 and 6:2-8: Utzschneider, *Gottes Langer Atem*, 52–53.

⁶¹⁰ T. Longman III, "צבא", NIDOTT.

⁶¹¹ See the discussion in McCracken for other examples of the way characters are redefined in relation to others: McCracken, "Character in the Boundary," 31.

In essence here is another example of a “re-orientating reply”, as can be seen if the reply is set out as follows:

| | Exodus 6:30-7:5 |
|---|---|
| Moses' question | “Who am I ... ?” |
| General statement regarding YHWH | “I will make you god... |
| Specific instruction | You shall speak all I command you, and Aaron your brother shall tell Pharaoh... |

Here the striking feature of the reply is that the general statement regarding YHWH and his purposes is a statement about how he will make Moses god to Pharaoh. I will look at this in more detail below, but it is important to recognise now that this is a further answer to Moses' question “who am I?” in addition to being an answer to “why should Pharaoh listen to me?”

4.3.4. Dialogue Analysis: Conclusions

This analysis of the dialogue has helped to demonstrate that a central theme of this section is the creation of a new identity for Moses through YHWH's words to him. Moses' resistance is at last overcome through the new status that YHWH designates for Moses, as god to Pharaoh. The analysis of the dialogue also helps us to see how this identity creation works in Moses' character, as he moves to taking the initiative with YHWH in conversation, by interceding for Israel (5:22). He speaks YHWH's words with obedience to Israel (6:9), and finally to Pharaoh (7:6). Taking the dialogues as a whole YHWH speaks at length (6:2-8, 7:1-5), while Moses' questions and speech are generally shorter. As with chapters 3-4, Moses seeks to wrest the initiative back from YHWH with his excuse for not confronting Pharaoh, but YHWH reforms Moses' identity through YHWH's words.

YHWH's words also demonstrate YHWH's identity, and his goal, that Israel and Egypt may both know that “I am YHWH”. If the phrase “I will be who I will be” tied YHWH's name to

the concepts of freedom to be who he is and of his free choice to be present with Israel in the way he chose, then the declaration “I am YHWH” evokes these concepts as YHWH declares his mission to rescue Israel, and to be Israel’s God so that they might know “I am YHWH”. In other words YHWH is known through his speech declaring and interpreting his deeds. For Moses to come to know YHWH it is not enough to see YHWH’s deeds; the ambiguity of the episode “on the way”, or the darkness of Exodus 5 shows that clearly. Instead he must hear YHWH’s speech and see what YHWH does in the light of his speech. YHWH’s lack of action in chapter 5 can be interpreted as YHWH’s lack of concern, but the speech of 6:1-8 suggests that other factors are at work, and that YHWH is actually extremely concerned to act for his people.

4.3.5. Comparison with Exodus 3-4

In Exodus 3-4 the narrative portrays YHWH seeking to re-orientate Moses away from his isolation and his reluctance, and towards an understanding of YHWH’s name and character that would enable him to be the means by which Israel would hear YHWH’s word and be delivered from their Egyptian bondage. One of the signs that this has been largely successful is that there is no such speech in chapters 5-6. Instead Moses’ first speech to YHWH in 5:22 is one of intercession for the people as they suffer, and it is only when he is ordered to return to Pharaoh (6:10) that he complains. I have shown that YHWH’s response (7:1-5) fits the pattern of “re-orientation” discovered in chapters 3-4, with its striking feature being the making of Moses as god to Pharaoh.

A further difference in 5:22-7:7 is that there is no sequence of sustained dialogue as in chapters 3-4. Instead there are smaller exchanges involving Moses, YHWH, Israel and Pharaoh. This difference does not alter the way that, as in Exodus 3-4, YHWH’s speeches come in response to Moses’ questions and objections. In 6:1 YHWH’s speech is in response to Moses’ complaint on behalf of the people, and in 7:1 it is in response to Moses’

objection regarding his lips. In each case YHWH's speech reminds Moses of something that has been said in chapters 3-4 but takes the matter further. In 6:1-8 YHWH reminds Moses of 3:16-22, but adds detail about YHWH's covenant relationship with Israel. In 7:1 YHWH is reminding Moses of what was said regarding Moses being "god" in relation to Aaron, but now this is extended to Moses being "god" in relation to Pharaoh. Thus, as in Exodus 3-4, the Moses-YHWH dialogues help to demonstrate that "questioning and challenging the Deity can build human understanding".⁶¹² Further in both sections of dialogue (3-4 and 5-7) YHWH's speech has the ability to re-form the identity of the hearer, in this case Moses.

4.4. YHWH'S EXALTATION OF MOSES

This leads to the final stage in the study of these chapters: an examination of the way in which YHWH re-forms Moses. I will begin by examining the nature of what is ascribed to Moses' hands, and go on to consider the way that YHWH designates Moses as god, and consider how these aspects relate to YHWH's promise to be with Moses, and the declaration that "I will be who I will be".

4.4.1. Hand and Speech of Moses

David Seely notes that "the hand of God is a central theme of the book of Exodus, and indeed of the Exodus narratives throughout the Hebrew Bible, as a metaphor of God's power to intervene in history".⁶¹³ In a study of the hand of God in the Exodus narrative Seely describes the interplay of the different hands in the Exodus narrative (God, Moses, Aaron, Pharaoh). His study is comprehensive and useful, and draws out nicely the interaction of the different hands. He suggests that "in the Exodus narrative the metaphor

⁶¹² Tracy, *Dialogue in Genesis*, 160.

⁶¹³ David Rolph Seely, "The Image of the Hand of God in the Book of Exodus," in *God's Word for Our World: Biblical Studies in Honor of Simon John De Vries*, ed. J. Harold Ellens et al., vol. 1, 2 vols., Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 389 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 38.

seems to be played out by humans stretching out their hands and striking in order to release the divine power.”⁶¹⁴ However his final conclusion is that

all of the instances of the intervention of the hand of God in the Exodus narratives are direct manifestations of divine power and are in no way connected with the efforts of mortals ... This theological concept is dramatized in the Exodus narratives by the image of the hand of God in a contest against Pharaoh – who claimed divinity – and his magicians.⁶¹⁵

This is somewhat overstated in the light of Seely’s analysis of the different texts regarding “hands”, and in the light of texts such as Exodus 14:31 where there is a strong link between believing in YHWH and trusting Moses.⁶¹⁶ A study of the texts of the various hands at work in the narrative reveals a much closer link between human and divine action, particularly as seen in the person and work of Moses.

The word “hand” features heavily in 4:1-9, where the first two signs YHWH gives to Moses are based around Moses’ hands. Moses is told to take the staff in his hand to do the signs when he is sent back to Egypt (4:17), and in 4:20 returns to Egypt with the staff in his hand. In 4:21 he is told to do all the wonders which YHWH has put in his hand to do. These wonders will be fruitless in persuading Pharaoh, however, and it will require the final act of YHWH taking the life of Pharaoh’s firstborn before Pharaoh will let the people go.

Discerning who is acting, or even speaking, at different points in the narrative continues to be problematic as evidenced in chapter 7 where the question of whose staff is stretched out (Moses’ or Aaron’s) appears to have different answers. An observation by Houtman, who notes “the word of God and of his messenger are often inseparable”,⁶¹⁷ provides a possible

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., 1:43.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 1:53; This is intriguingly close to von Rad’s description of J’s view of Moses: Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 192–193.

⁶¹⁶ See review of discussion in: Coats, *Moses*, 66, 71.

⁶¹⁷ Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, trans. Sierd Woudstra, vol. 2, 4 vols., Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), 34. In 7:17 the distinction between the words of Moses and the words of YHWH becomes “somewhat blurred”: Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 97.

explanation for the problem. If Aaron is Moses' messenger then his action can also be ascribed to Moses. It is Moses who personifies YHWH's presence to Pharaoh, and Aaron who acts as his prophet, speaking his words and performing his deeds.

On this reading, Moses is YHWH's authorised ambassador, who carries YHWH's presence and YHWH's words. In the plague narrative Moses sometimes speaks YHWH's words without the narrator providing us with YHWH's direct speech. One explanation for this is that Moses is YHWH's ambassador authorised to speak directly for YHWH, and thus YHWH speaks the words which Moses speaks to Pharaoh.⁶¹⁸

4.4.2. Moses as God to Aaron and Pharaoh

The understanding developed above is strengthened by a consideration of the two texts where Moses is described as "god" by YHWH. Firstly 4:16 where Aaron's assistance for Moses in the matter of speech is first set out, when YHWH says: **וְאַתָּה תִּהְיֶה-לּוֹ לֵאלֹהִים** "and you will be his god". This phrase is translated in various ways by the commentators: "and you shall be to him as God",⁶¹⁹ somewhat in the way of paraphrase as "you will play the role of God for him",⁶²⁰ or more directly as "*und du wirst ihm Gott sein*"⁶²¹, or "*und du sollst sein Gott sein*" (Luther Bible 1545), by contrast with most English translations, which take the *lamed* to be comparative, rather than possessive, or "in reference to", which may be the intention behind Fischer's translation. The more literal rendering is "you will be his god". This is particularly striking because the way in which Moses is described as being god to Aaron is a third person version of the covenantal language elsewhere with

⁶¹⁸ This concept is based on that developed by Wolterstorff in his discussion of divine speech and scripture. My application of it here is to how divine speech might work within the world of the text: Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 54.

⁶¹⁹ Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 51; with "a god", see also NRSV "you shall serve for him as God": Durham, *Exodus*, 47; or similarly with "Deity" for God: Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, 182.

⁶²⁰ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 49.

⁶²¹ Fischer, *Jahwe Unser Gott*, 11; see also: Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, 92.

which YHWH describes his relationship with his people (cf. Exod. 6:7, Zech. 8:8).⁶²²

While Aaron will be Moses' "mouth", Moses is declared to be Aaron's "god", and Aaron will speak the words of Moses to the people. These words will be the words of God, and through Moses who is god to Aaron. Therefore there is also a sense in which Moses is god to the people, who hear his words through Aaron.

Moses is also placed as god in relation to Pharaoh in 7:1, where YHWH says to Moses: **וְאֶל־פָּרֹעֹה** **אָמַרְתִּי אֱלֹהִים לְפָרְעֹה וְאַתָּה אָחִיךָ יְהִיָּה לְפָנָי** "see I have made/I make you god to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother will be your prophet".⁶²³ In this case the language does not here reflect covenantal terms because the verb "to be" is avoided when YHWH makes Moses "god" to Pharaoh, although it still comes in Aaron's designation as Moses' prophet.

It is important for this study to take the full impact of these designations seriously. In order to understand what it might mean for Moses to be designated as **אֱלֹהִים** I will consider the handful of cases in the Old Testament where the term **אֱלֹהִים** is applied to a human individual. BDB lists a number of possible references to **אֱלֹהִים** as meaning something other than divine beings, suggesting "judges or rulers" as one possible translation in Exodus 21:6, 22:8-9, 22:28, 1 Samuel 2:25, Judges 5:8, Psalm 82:1,6 and Psalm 138:1. However, HALOT suggests that the references in Exodus could be "to bring cases before God", and lists the Psalms references as references to gods, a translation followed by the NRSV, which also translates Judges 5:8 as gods. One further reference to

⁶²² For a description of the formula see: Rendtorff, *The Covenant Formula*, 13.

⁶²³ The use of the imperative **וְאֶל־פָּרֹעֹה**, together with the perfect form of **אָמַרְתִּי** could suggest that this designation is something which has already been accomplished by YHWH but of which he is now being informed. See discussion in 30.5.1.b: Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 486–88. Alternatively, and probably preferable in the narrative context it could be a declaration which makes Moses "god" to Pharaoh. Williams describes this type of perfect as "the action denoted by the verb occurs by means of speaking the sentence (or other linguistic unit) in which the verb occurs" (category 164): Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 68; See also discussion on 30.5.1d in: Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 488.

אֱלֹהִים as a non-divine being is 1 Samuel 28:13, where Samuel's "spirit" is referred to as אֱלֹהִים. These references do not give strong support to any view that Moses is being designated as something other than "a god".

Perhaps the most common way of understanding these verses is that the word "god" is being used as a simple analogy. Moses is to Aaron (or Pharaoh) as God is to Moses in terms of the words which Moses is to speak. George Coats, commenting on 4:16, asserts that just as Aaron functions as a mouth for Moses, so Moses functions as "god" for Aaron, in that:

when Aaron, who is not literally Moses' mouth, functions as a mouth for Moses, saying the words Moses gives him to say in the way that his person gives his own mouth words to say, then Moses functions as a god for Aaron, and only for Aaron, giving him words to speak.⁶²⁴

Commenting on Exodus 7:1 Durham also indicates that Moses being described as "god" to Pharaoh is to do with Moses' speech:

That Moses is to be a god to Pharaoh will be Yahweh's doing, not his, and Yahweh will bring that about through a combination of word and deed, both originating in himself. Moses is to speak what Yahweh speaks, and Aaron, in turn is to communicate that message to Pharaoh.⁶²⁵

One problem with this perspective is that it leaves unresolved the significance of the uniqueness of this description of Moses within the Old Testament. It would seem that it would be entirely plausible for YHWH to say something like "I will be with your mouth, I will teach you what to say, you will tell Aaron what I have said and he will tell Israel", and add various strengthening reassurances without using the term "god" to describe Moses, a description given by God to no other human being.

An alternative perspective is outlined by Fretheim: "One must not weaken this so as to say only that Moses is to God what Aaron is to Moses. In some sense the word of God becomes so embodied in Moses that in and through what Moses says (and does!) *God*

⁶²⁴ Coats, *Moses*, 69; see also, Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 49.

⁶²⁵ Durham, *Exodus*, 86.

himself becomes active in that situation.”⁶²⁶ Fretheim’s comments on 7:1 are more striking still:

God gives up sole rights to the word ‘God’, giving it to one who is not God. This is a striking form of divine *self-effacement*, in which the achievement of divine purpose is allowed to be clothed in human form. God deigns to be embodied in Moses before Pharaoh. In and through what Moses says and does in what follows, God himself is present and active. In Moses, God’s work will be done.⁶²⁷

In order to fully appreciate this concept, the ancient reader’s understanding of someone being called “god” in a narrative context needs to be taken into account. Here a suggestion, outlined by Stephen Herring, regarding the status of Moses is helpful to build up an understanding that takes into account the ancient context. Herring argues, from Exodus 32-34, initially from the making of the golden calf as a divine image, that Moses is considered in some ways “on par with a divine cultic image of YHWH”.⁶²⁸ Herring argues that this understanding of Moses as a divine image is validated by Exodus 34:29-45, where a “‘horned/radiant’ Moses now serves as the sole visible manifestation of YHWH”.⁶²⁹ He cites Exodus 4:16 and 7:1 as further examples of the Exodus narrative which elevate Moses to “divine status”.⁶³⁰ This divine status is also highlighted by Danny Mathews in a study on royal motifs in the portrayal of Moses, where he highlights the “exalted portrayal of Moses as a royal and semi-divine figure” in early Jewish Hellenistic sources such as Sirach, which describes Moses as “equal in glory to the holy ones” (Sir 45:2), where “holy ones” is most likely אֱלֹהִים.⁶³¹

⁶²⁶ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 75.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, 90–1 emphasis original; “Moses becomes a vehicle for divine immanence”: Terence E Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective*, Overtures to Biblical Theology 14 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 151.

⁶²⁸ Stephen L. Herring, “Moses as Divine Substitute in Exodus,” *CTR* 9, no. 2 (2012): 62; Stephen L. Herring, “Divine Substitution : Humanity as the Manifestation of Deity in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East” (University of Aberdeen, 2011), 223 see also discussion on p152.

⁶²⁹ Herring, “Divine Substitution,” 159.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁶³¹ Mathews, *Royal Motifs in the Pentateuchal Portrayal of Moses*, 6–7.

Herring's comments are part of his wider study on the concept of the "image of God" in the Hebrew Bible and in other ANE literature. From his survey of the ancient literature he concludes that the term "image" does not refer to a

replica but is more like a repetition or an extension of the referent's very presence, conventionally and arbitrarily motivated by means of a rite of constitution, or transformation... after the transformational ritual, the separation between the image and referent is not at all apparent.⁶³²

He argues that the Hebrew Bible demonstrates that the Hebrews understood this conception of "image", in relation to different aspects of worship within ancient Israel, in relation to some traditions relating to the Ark of the Covenant, and in relation to the prophetic and Deuteronomic polemic against idols and objects functioning as images of deity.⁶³³ According to Herring the image

actually made manifest the presence of its referent; becoming what it represented. It functioned as a valid substitute of the referent when the referent was not physically present. Therefore, the image did not merely symbolise power or dominion; it was actually empowered to accomplish tasks.⁶³⁴

Thus, according to this understanding, Moses is a carrier of the divine presence, not in himself divine, but one who makes the divine really present.⁶³⁵ Early in his discussion Herring uses the Eucharist as an analogy for something ordinary that becomes the "real presence of the divine Jesus".⁶³⁶

Fretheim's comments on these passages fit well with Herring's perspective. Elsewhere, in a discussion of the prophet's role Fretheim argues that the prophet in the monarchical period of ancient Israel continues the role of the divine messenger (the angel of YHWH) who appears in writings concerning the pre-monarchical period.⁶³⁷ Fretheim states:

⁶³² Herring, "Divine Substitution," 36.

⁶³³ See the discussion in chapter 3 of: *Ibid.*, 37–78.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁶³⁵ For a parallel perspective on the prophet Ezekiel see: C. A. Strine, "Ezekiel's Image Problem: The Mesopotamian Cult Statue Induction Ritual and the Imago Dei Anthropology in the Book of Ezekiel," *CBQ* 76, no. 2 (2014): 252–72.

⁶³⁶ Herring, "Divine Substitution," 9; See also: Thorkild Jacobsen, "The Graven Image," in *Ancient Israelite Religion: Essays in Honor of Frank Moore Cross*, ed. Patrick D Miller, Paul D Hanson, and S Dean McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress Pr, 1987), 15–32, p29.

⁶³⁷ Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 149–50.

The prophet's life is an embodiment of the Word of God; the prophet is a vehicle for divine immanence. The prophet's life is thus theomorphic. By so participating in the story of God, his life is shaped into the image and likeness of God. The people thus not only hear the Word of God from the prophet, they see the word enfleshed in their midst.⁶³⁸

Yet in the midst of this, according to Fretheim: "the prophet's life as embodied Word of God is partial and broken", God is not, in the Old Testament, "incarnate in a human life in complete unbrokenness or in its entirety".⁶³⁹

If these conclusions regarding the concept of images and the prophetic role as applied to Moses are accepted, then the language of "god" applied to Moses, in conjunction with the Exodus 32-34 narrative, indicates that Moses was indeed a carrier of YHWH's presence to Aaron, to the people, and to Pharaoh. My analysis of Exodus 3:13-15 has demonstrated just how closely the divine name is tied to the sending of Moses. Exodus 3:8 tells Moses that God has come down to rescue Israel, while 3:10 tells Moses to go and bring Israel out of Egypt. If the understanding of Moses prompted by our discussion of 4:16 and 7:1 is correct, then 3:10 "I will send you", rather than being "an abrupt and odd turn"⁶⁴⁰ is actually an anticipation of what is to come. YHWH's presence in rescuing his people is conveyed by Moses.⁶⁴¹ This supports Polak's argument that 3:12 and 3:14b can be read in parallel, both as statements that begin "I will be", but with the second halves "I will be with you" to Moses, and "has sent me to you" addressed to Israel being equivalent.⁶⁴² In other words YHWH's presence is conveyed in his sending of Moses.

4.4.3. Moses as a Carrier of YHWH's Presence

The way in which Moses' hand sometimes works as YHWH's hand and YHWH's declaration to Moses that Moses is Aaron's "god", and Aaron his mouth, is a strong affirmation of Moses as the carrier of the divine presence. This affirmation comes in close

⁶³⁸ Ibid., 165.

⁶³⁹ Ibid., 166.

⁶⁴⁰ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 364.

⁶⁴¹ See discussion in: Ibid.

⁶⁴² Polak, "Theophany and Mediator," 123.

connection with YHWH's name suggesting that Moses as the carrier of the divine name is the carrier of YHWH's presence. Thus YHWH's freedom to be who he is, is expressed by his being present with and in Moses for the people's deliverance.

4.5. FINAL CONCLUSIONS FOR EXODUS 5:1-7:7

Through an analysis of the way in which the narrative portrays the main characters in the narrative of chapters 5-7 I have shown that YHWH is portrayed through his speech as one whose presence for his people is manifested at the time of his choosing in order that his people and their enemies might recognise that "I am YHWH". This recognition that they need to come to can be seen as a public recognition of YHWH's statement in Exodus 3:14. YHWH's revelation of more of the significance of his name in 6:2-8 was made in response to Moses' challenge regarding that name in 5:22. This revelation that "I am YHWH" came in the context of YHWH promising to fulfil his covenant promises to the patriarchs, to bring the people into the land, and his promise that they would be his people, and he their God. Furthermore this rescue would be despite the unbelief of the people, and the continued unwillingness of Moses. YHWH would act to enable Moses to confront Pharaoh, by designating him god to Pharaoh. YHWH promised to enact judgement on Egypt and bring out the people. In the speeches of chapters 6 and 7 YHWH declared that he would indeed be present with his people, to deliver them and carry out the words of chapter 3, and that they would see what YHWH's declaration, "I will be who I will be" meant for them.

Furthermore I showed by an analysis of the narrative of the dialogues, that YHWH accomplishes these plans by his speech, and especially by the way his speech re-designates and reshapes those he is speaking to and of. In particular his dialogue with Moses refuses all Moses' attempts to wrest control of the dialogue and brings Moses to the point where he is the means by which YHWH's presence and YHWH's words come to Israel and Egypt.

YHWH also begins this same reshaping process for the Israelites. They are portrayed as utterly bereft of leadership, and utterly despairing in chapters 5 and 6, yet at the end of chapter 6 YHWH is described as commanding Moses and Aaron to lead out the Israelites “by their armies”, a portrayal which would be continued through the wilderness, and especially into Joshua.

Chapter 5

Moses and YHWH on the Mountain: Exodus 19-24

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will examine the dialogue between Moses and YHWH in Exodus 19-24, and argue that a number of the difficulties in understanding the narrative are because it portrays an intrusion of heaven onto earth, and attempts to describe the divine presence. The actual response of the people and of Moses to YHWH's commands is usually appropriate. As usual I will look at the way in which YHWH and Moses are characterised by their actions, and by their speech. In this section it will be important to pay particular attention to the way in which the physical location of the characters, especially in relation to each other heightens the reader's appreciation and understanding of the text. Finally I will analyse the interaction between Moses and YHWH.

Chapters 19-24 are the first section of the narrative regarding Israel's encampment at Sinai.⁶⁴³ This section is by no means straightforward, containing as it does a mixture of narrative and law-code. The efforts of literary-source critics and traditio-historical critics to identify sources and traditions behind the text have not produced any consensus on the origins of the Exodus 19-24 narrative.⁶⁴⁴ Furthermore, even within the section it is often difficult to discern the sections of the narrative and trace the development of the plot within it. Dozeman argues that within Exodus 19-24 repetition portrays the central focus on YHWH appearing to Israel at Sinai from a number of different angles.⁶⁴⁵ Initially Israel

⁶⁴³ Exodus 18 can of course also be seen as beginning the narrative, indeed as being a "bookend", see: John I. Lawlor, "The 'At-Sinai Narrative': Exodus 18-Numbers 10," *BBR* 21, no. 1 (2011): 23–42, p24. However for our purposes of analysing the dialogue between YHWH and Moses, Exodus 19 is the place where the dialogue begins, so it is here I will begin.

⁶⁴⁴ See for example the discussions in: Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 347; Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, trans. Sierd Woudstra, vol. 3, 4 vols., Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 425–435; William Henry Propp, *Exodus 19-40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (New York, NY ; London: Doubleday, 2006), 141–142.

⁶⁴⁵ Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 433–4.

is on a journey and then encamps at the mountain. At this point rather than moving forward temporally, Dozeman argues, there is a “more circular movement around the central core subject”.⁶⁴⁶ My examination of these chapters from a narrative perspective will help to show to what extent Dozeman’s model for these chapters is helpful.

5.2. CHARACTERISATION BY ACTION

I will begin by analysing how the characters are portrayed through their actions. Most obviously in these chapters this is by means of their movements, but there will be other activities to consider as well. Firstly I will consider YHWH’s actions and movements within the narrative.

5.2.1. YHWH in action

5.2.1.1. YHWH descends: Exodus 19-20

The first verb, unrelated to speech, of which YHWH is the subject comes in 19:18 where, once the people have been brought out to meet YHWH, he descends (יָרַד) on the mountain in fire, such that the mountain is wrapped in smoke, and shakes violently. There is a discrepancy between 19:18 and 19:3 in that YHWH descends on the mountain in 19:18, but is positioned on the mountain in 19:3. This difference has been understood as a result of the different understandings of YHWH’s presence and the role of the mountain in different sources, with E understanding the mountain as YHWH’s dwelling place, while J records YHWH descending on the mountain.⁶⁴⁷ My concern is this study, however, is with the effect on the reader of the present form.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., 434; See also his article: Thomas B. Dozeman, “Spatial Form in Exodus 19:1-8a and in the Larger Sinai Narrative,” *Semeia*, no. 46 (1989): 87–101.

⁶⁴⁷ See the discussions in the following works for a sample of the solutions provided by source and redaction critics. Essentially seeing the chapters divided between E and J on an alternating basis is: Driver, *The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version*, 167; Noth sees some of the chapter as belong to E and J, but also a longer process of forming the chapter, meaning that there are a number of later additions: Noth, *Exodus*, 153–155; arguing that divine names are not a reliable guide to sources, and that 19-24 reflect two different traditions

For this reader, the discrepancy forces consideration of whether there might be different ways of speaking about YHWH's presence to different people. A large amount of material in Exodus 19-20 concerns YHWH's descent onto the mountain, while he has already spoken to Moses from the mountain. YHWH's call to Moses "from the mountain" is reminiscent of his call to Moses "from the bush" in chapter 3. This allusion has the effect of reminding the reader that YHWH's presence can take different forms, some more concentrated and "dangerous" than others.⁶⁴⁸ Therefore YHWH is present to Moses on the mountain but makes his presence manifest in a different form to the Israelites by coming down on the mountain. YHWH's purpose in coming down in a thick cloud here is so that the people will trust in Moses forever (19:9).

Exodus 19:18 portrays YHWH's appearance as a highly dangerous and explosive scene, in imagery that for the modern reader evokes something like a volcanic eruption. YHWH's speech has made it clear to Moses that the people are not to come near the mountain while YHWH descends on the mountain in the view of the people. In this sequence YHWH has to descend twice in order to call Moses up to the top of the mountain. This demonstrates YHWH's exalted position vis-à-vis Moses, and even more so the people. This reinforces a sense of separation, which Dozeman identifies as a key marker of YHWH's holiness.⁶⁴⁹

regarding Mosaic office (one which has Moses as mediator appointed by the people, the other that sees his role appointed by God): Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 349–350; Propp sees 19:1-2 and the end of chapter 24 as belong to P, with the rest of the narrative a contrast between J and E. Regarding 19:6-8 he makes an important comment: "I would admit, and even emphasize, however, that without evidence external to chap. 19 about the significance of the names for the Deity and for the mountain, I would not have partitioned vv16-18 between sources at all. I would rather have imputed the redundancy to deliberate dramatic effect." Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 2:142; Dozeman's approach is somewhat different; he divides the chapters into "P" and "not P" Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 425.

⁶⁴⁸ See discussion of this theme in: Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Faith*, 2:96–108; and specifically in relation to Exodus: Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel*, 1:385–408. Here the implied reader of the Primary History knows that YHWH is the creator of the world, and that "even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you" (1 Kgs 8:27), and that any appearance of YHWH in the world is therefore in some sense "limited".

⁶⁴⁹ Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 414–5. This theme of separation, of course, also marks YHWH's speeches to Moses regarding Israel's position.

5.2.1.2. Seeing God: Exodus 24

In Exodus 24, after the law codes of Exodus 20-23, the narrative describes the ascent of the elders to God, and the meal eaten by the elders in the presence of God. The elders are described as seeing and gazing on God, with the narrator making the important point that God did not “lay a hand” on them. This seems to contradict Exodus 33, where YHWH tells Moses that no-one can see him and live. It is also striking compared to Exodus 19-20 where YHWH’s presence has been so powerful and terrifying, and where YHWH has been described as dwelling in “a dark cloud”.⁶⁵⁰ It is not surprising that various interpreters have found Exodus 24 problematic. The LXX translated 24:10:

καὶ εἶδον τὸν τόπον, οὗ εἰστήκει ἐκεῖ ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ
 “and they saw the place where the God of Israel stood”

and 24:11:

καὶ ὤφθησαν ἐν τῷ τόπῳ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ἔφαγον καὶ ἔπιον
 “and they appeared in the place of God and ate and drank”.

This may reflect a degree of nervousness regarding the manner in which seeing God is described in such a matter of fact way.⁶⁵¹ I will note in my consideration of the dialogue the importance of the silence of God at this point.

⁶⁵⁰ See Nicholson who argues that the tradition of Exodus 24:9-11 “differs strikingly” to Exodus 19-20: Ernest W. Nicholson, “Interpretation of Exodus 24:9-11,” *VT* 24, no. 1 (1974): 77–97, p95.

⁶⁵¹ Vriezen notes this, and also argues that later Jewish translations and comments reflect a similar hesitation to the LXX: Th C. Vriezen, “The Exegesis of Exodus xxiv 9-11,” in *Witness of Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 100-133, pp101–102; Wyckoff notes that the LXX translator for Exodus tends to “preserve the distance between God and humans” by expansions that are “as small as possible” (he also notes the addition of “angel of” in 4:24b, and “the mountain” in 19:3a). Intriguingly he also argues that the introduction of “place” into 24:11 not only links the passage to Exodus 33:21, but also provides a linkage through the term “place” to the description of the tabernacle, and that therefore while in the MT the passage readers as legitimising Israel’s leaders through an encounter with YHWH, in the LXX the text is a revelation of Israel’s sanctuary to its leaders, and invites a connection between Sinai and Zion: Eric John Wyckoff, “When Does Translation Become Exegesis? Exodus 24:9-11 in the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint,” *CBQ* 74, no. 4 (2012): 675–693, pp685–8 and pp692–693.

YHWH describes how he has written commands in order to teach the people (24:12), which is again odd when compared to 24:4, where Moses writes all YHWH's words. Finally YHWH's glory descends on Sinai and Moses goes up once more to YHWH's glory.

5.2.1.3. Conclusions regarding YHWH's characterisation through actions

In the narrative there are a series of paradoxes in the portrayal of YHWH's actions and location. YHWH speaks from heaven, and from the mountain. YHWH is on the mountain, yet descends to the mountain. Once YHWH has descended onto the mountain he descends (further?) onto the mountain. YHWH's presence is terrifying to the point of shaking mountains and no-one can come near on pain of death. Yet Israel's elders can have a meal in the presence of God as they look on God and he does not strike them for it. YHWH speaks directly to the people, yet the reader never learns what he says, and the people are so terrified by the experience of YHWH's descent that they request Moses as a mediator rather than hearing the voice of God and perishing. YHWH speaks to Moses, and Moses writes the law, and yet YHWH writes words to teach the people. YHWH calls Moses up the mountain, yet each time he speaks to Moses he calls him further up the mountain.

All this is difficult to make prosaic sense of as a narrative, and yet when one considers the difficulty in speaking of the divine at all in a narrative, it is perhaps not surprising that the high point of Israel's proximity to YHWH's presence is marked by an abundance of paradox. Michael Kibbe argues that "the apparent incoherence of Exodus 19-20 corresponds (inversely) to the degree to which God has accommodated himself to Israel in that initial Sinai theophany."⁶⁵² YHWH's disclosure to Moses of his name in 3:13-15 is prefaced by the somewhat paradoxical "I will be who I will be". I have argued that this is linked to the idea of divine presence, that YHWH will be really present, but in such a

⁶⁵² Michael H. Kibbe, "'Present and Accommodated for': Calvin's God on Mount Sinai," *JTI* 7, no. 1 (2013): 115-31, p123.

manner as he chooses. I have also argued that the reader will come to understand something of what this means in practice by playing close attention to the narrative, particularly to the manner in which YHWH and Moses interact, since Moses is the means by which YHWH has chosen to be present with Israel (at least for the first half of the book of Exodus) and the means by which YHWH's name is to be declared to the people. Exodus 19 offers a further emphasis on the importance of Moses' role, with YHWH's declaration in 19:9 that the purpose of the theophany is that the people might hear YHWH speaking to Moses and so trust in Moses for ever. I will therefore consider the characterisation of Moses in action, before looking more closely at the dialogues between Moses and YHWH.

5.2.2. Moses in Action

5.2.2.1. Moses the mediator: Exodus 19-20

As with YHWH's characterisation, much of Moses' reported action is movement. In the case of Moses this is either up or down the mountain to approach God or gather the people. The first action of Moses in Exodus 19 is that, while Israel is camped at Sinai, Moses approaches God as anticipated in the dialogues in Exodus 3.⁶⁵³ Moses' experience at the burning bush provided him with the assurance from YHWH that "when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you (plural) will worship me on this mountain". Moses' coming up the mountain to God demonstrates that Moses comes as one who has carried out his initial task and now awaits the fulfilment of YHWH's promised "sign" (3:12).

Moses goes to gather the elders of the people together to instruct them, before he comes back to YHWH. He is then commanded to go to the people to sanctify them (19:10), which he does (19:14). Having done this he leads the people out to meet God. Once more Moses is called up to the mountain, before being immediately sent down to warn the people. He

⁶⁵³ Christoph Dohmen, *Exodus: 19-40*, Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament (Freiburg im Breisgau: Verlag Herder, 2004), 54.

is told to come up with Aaron and the priests. Moses goes down once more, and the narrative flow is broken by the Ten Commandments, which have an unusual speech introduction which I will discuss below. After the Ten Commandments there is a further description of the theophany, and of the people's terror. Then Moses once more approaches God, this time in "a thick darkness" and receives the "covenant code" section of laws.

5.2.2.2. Moses ratifies the Covenant: Exodus 24

After the laws have been given to Moses (20-23), he is once more (24:1) told to come up to YHWH, although here it is possible that the verb should be read (with NRSV) "had said to Moses". In this case the command may refer back to 19:24, and YHWH's instruction at that point to Moses to come up. In the second half of 24:1 and into 24:2 the order to Moses to come near is contrasted with the rest of those called up, who may not come near, and the people who may not ascend. Following this, Moses comes and proclaims YHWH's words to the people. He builds an altar, commands sacrifices and sprinkles blood on the altar, he takes the scroll of the covenant, he calls the elders of the people, and they commit to obeying YHWH in a reprise of 24:3, albeit with the additional "and we will listen". Moses sprinkles the blood of the covenant on the people.⁶⁵⁴ I will examine these words and the responses of the people when I move to my analysis of the dialogue.

The most important thing for this study here is that Moses does this without any direct command from YHWH. There is no command to enact this covenant ceremony; it is just something that Moses does. There is no hint, however, of the narrator recording any disapproval of YHWH for Moses' action. The following scene, indeed, suggests that

⁶⁵⁴ See the various discussions of the details of the text in: Ronald S. Hendel, "Sacrifice as a Cultural System: The Ritual Symbolism of Exodus 24:3-8," *ZAW* 101, no. 3 (1989): 366-90; Nicholson, "Interpretation of Exodus 24"; Ernest W. Nicholson, "Antiquity of the Tradition in Exodus 24:9-22," *VT* 25, no. 1 (1975): 69-79; Bernard P. Robinson, "The Theophany and Meal of Exodus 24," *SJOT* 25, no. 2 (2011): 155-73; Amy Peeler, "Desiring God: The Blood of the Covenant in Exodus 24," *BBR* 23, no. 2 (2013): 187-205.

Moses' action, together with the response of the people, has accomplished some kind of closer relationship to YHWH. 24:9 describes the elders of Israel going up to the mountain and "seeing the God of Israel", an event which is in some tension with 24:2 where everyone except for Moses is told to stay at a distance.

Moses is called up the mountain, seemingly from the events of 24:9-11, which already take place "on the mountain", and, together with Joshua, Moses once more ascends, telling the elders and Aaron to stay in position. Moses ascends into the cloud, and finally in 24:18 the reader is told one final time that Moses ascends the mountain. In 24:13-18 it appears that Moses ascends the mountain three separate times. It may be that the final mention is a summary statement of the chapter to explain how events have reached this point. Whether this is so or not, the effect of the repetition of the command is to highlight YHWH's continued distance from the people and Moses, despite the events of 24:9-11.

5.2.2.3. Conclusions regarding Moses' characterisation

In these chapters the reader sees Moses taking some initiative both in approaching God in Exodus 19 and in the details of the covenant ceremony in 23:3-8, yet still being directed by YHWH very precisely in terms of how he and the people may approach YHWH. Moses is thus seen as acting for YHWH both on his own initiative and at YHWH's orders. By comparison with chapters 3-7 Moses is here obedient to YHWH, although he does in 19:21-25 disagree with YHWH over how often the people need to be reminded of YHWH's holiness. Moses also contributes towards YHWH's shaping of Israel on his own initiative. When I analyse further the dialogue I will show how this initiative of Moses forms and shapes the people, and see what it is that enables Moses to act in this way.

5.2.3. Characterising Through Action: Conclusions

In these chapters the characters are seen at the high point of their actions. YHWH displays his glory, provides guidance and grants access, all the while protecting his people from the full range of his glory. Moses acts as an obedient servant, and as YHWH's representative before the people, and gives the mark of the covenant to the people. Moses argues with YHWH briefly in 19:20-25, which serves to remind the reader at this critical point of Moses' fallibility, but also reminds the reader of Moses' intercessory role. The people act in accordance with YHWH's will and with Moses' instructions, with the major point of discussion arising from the narrative being whether or not the people are right to say what they do in 20:19.

5.3. CHARACTERISATION BY SPEECH

5.3.1. Speech of YHWH

In Exodus 19-24 it is only YHWH who has any speeches of length which stand out from the dialogue, 19:4-6 and 20:1-17. Both of these sections have been the focus of many studies, and a resolution all of these discussions is beyond the scope of this study. However, I will discuss briefly the implications of each speech for YHWH's characterisation in this section of Exodus.

5.3.1.1. "On eagles' wings": 19:4-6

YHWH's speech in 19:4-6 provides a contrast to his speech in 6:2-8, where YHWH spoke of his covenant with the patriarchs and of his promise to deliver Israel. Here in 19:4-6 YHWH can speak of what he has done for Israel, in bringing them out of Egypt, with the metaphor of "eagles' wings" suggesting his care for his people. The aim of this rescue from Egypt is a people who will be with him (19:4), and who will obey him and keep his covenant. This obedience will mean that the once oppressed and broken Israelites of chapter 5 have

become YHWH's very own possession, YHWH's priestly kingdom and YHWH's holy nation.⁶⁵⁵ Once more YHWH's speech is designed to redefine Israel. This gift requires careful obedience and covenant keeping, which at this stage is not developed further, although the Ten Commandments and the following Covenant Code make sense as explanation of this in the narrative of Exodus 19-24.

5.3.1.2. The Ten Commandments: 20:1-17

I will discuss below (5.4.4) the issue of whether the people hear YHWH or Moses speak the Ten Commandments, but even if it is Moses they hear, he is still presented as quoting YHWH. Therefore it is as the speech of God that I will very briefly survey the section in which the "name" features (20:1-7). The Ten Commandments begin with the self-introduction formula "I am YHWH your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt."⁶⁵⁶ Now that Israel is out of Egypt and has experienced YHWH's provision on the way YHWH provides them with the laws they need to be his holy nation. In this context they learn from the first commandment that YHWH requires exclusive loyalty.

YHWH's "jealousy" is made a further reason for exclusive loyalty in 20:5-6.⁶⁵⁷ In modern English jealousy most often conveys a negative sense, related to envy.⁶⁵⁸ However YHWH's jealousy is manifested in 20:5-6 in two quite different participle phrases,

⁶⁵⁵ See various discussions around the exegesis of these verses in more detail than I have space for here: John A. Davies, "A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19:6," *TynBul* 53, no. 1 (2002): 157–59; Terence E. Fretheim, "'Because the Whole Earth Is Mine': Theme and Narrative in Exodus," *Int* 50, no. 3 (1996): 229–39; Brooks Schramm, "Exodus 19 and Its Christian Appropriation," in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, ed. Alice Ogden Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 327–52.

⁶⁵⁶ This is a regular feature of YHWH's self-introduction throughout the Old Testament, and in the Exodus context relates to 6:6 "I am YHWH and I will free you from the burdens of Egypt": Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*, 4.

⁶⁵⁷ I have enclosed jealousy in inverted commas to highlight that the translation of the word is somewhat problematic

⁶⁵⁸ Indeed Elliott observes that jealousy can be used almost interchangeably with envy in modern English: John Hall Elliott, "God--Zealous or Jealous but Never Envious: The Theological Consequences of Linguistic and Social Distinctions," in *Social Sciences and Biblical Translation*, ed. Dietmar Neufeld (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 79-96, p80.

“punishing sin” and “showing steadfast love”.⁶⁵⁹ YHWH’s jealousy is therefore a characteristic of his nature which implies both punishment of sin and performance of steadfast love to those loving him and keeping his commands.⁶⁶⁰ That YHWH “shows steadfast love” to thousands, while punishing sin to the third and fourth generation, places the emphasis on his steadfast love.⁶⁶¹

This is summed up in YHWH’s name, so it is not surprising that the third commandment concerns the right use of YHWH’s name.⁶⁶² The prohibition in Exodus 20:7 is somewhat problematic with various proposals having been suggested for what particular actions are covered: oath making,⁶⁶³ all wrong uses of the divine name,⁶⁶⁴ using YHWH’s name in idolatrous worship,⁶⁶⁵ or any action or speech that could bring YHWH’s name into

⁶⁵⁹ Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 842.

⁶⁶⁰ cf Brueggemann: “so the jealousy of Yahweh can also provide a ground for Yahweh’s passionate positive commitment to Israel.” Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 294. Thus even divine “jealousy” can become a positive feature for the one who comes under the protection of such jealousy, Jacob could write: “The imagery of marriage was also basic to this phrase... God’s impatient jealousy was the opposite of ethical weakness and indifference.” Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, 553. See also Elliott’s use of the phrase “zealous vigilance”: Elliott “God Zealous or Jealous but never Envious: The Theological consequences of Linguistic and Social Distinctions,” 79-96. The attempt by Amzallag to understand divine jealousy as related to a furnace for smelting metal that destroys in order to rebuild is an interesting one, but perhaps errs in presenting too positive a portrayal of jealousy. Divine jealousy in Exodus 20 has two definite sides, positive experience for those who love YHWH, while those who hate him receive punishment: Nissim Amzallag, “Furnace Remelting as the Expression of YHWH’s Holiness: Evidence from the Meaning of Qannā’ (קנָה) in the Divine Context,” *JBL* 134, no. 2 (2015): 233–52.

⁶⁶¹ See: Kürle, *Appeal*, 50.

⁶⁶² At least, the third commandment by Protestant (and Orthodox) tradition, while the Catholic tradition counts this the second commandment. See overview of the numbering in different traditions in: Dohmen, *Exodus*, 99.

⁶⁶³ because נִשְׁבַּח is understood as alluding to standard oath formulae, and thus the commandment prohibits the deceptive use of the divine name in oath making. See, for example: Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, 558; Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 410–411; “It seems that the plain meaning of the verse is swearing falsely”: Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 5 (New York ; London: Doubleday, 1991), 300; Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:36–37; Herbet Huffmon, “The Fundamental Code Illustrated: The Third Commandment,” in *The Ten Commandments: The Reciprocity of Faithfulness*, ed. William P. Brown (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 205–212, p212; Dozeman also suggests a possible prohibition on “the magical use of the power of God for evil purposes”: Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 487.

⁶⁶⁴ Concerning נִשְׁבַּח מִלִּפְּיָהּ מִלִּפְּיָהּ Miller argues from a parallel passage in Psalm 16:4b that the commandment concerns speech (taking up the name of YHWH on one’s lips) but that נִשְׁבַּח מִלִּפְּיָהּ covers a wider range of possible negative actions than merely deception. Miller concludes that the commandment prohibits all uses of “the divine name that do not take account of its weight ... its character as the name of the Lord.” Patrick D Miller, *The Ten Commandments, Interpretation* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 103.

⁶⁶⁵ See McConville who argues for a broader application than oaths, “‘Lifting up the name of Yahweh to emptiness’ ... probably means using it in the context of the worship of other gods, or perhaps simply in a false manipulative way.” J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, Apollos Old Testament commentary (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 128.

disrepute.⁶⁶⁶ The fundamental point about the need for YHWH's name not to be misused remains clear under any of these possibilities. At the third commandment the speech switches from referring to YHWH in the first person to the third person, probably for rhetorical effect of the impact of the phrase "the name of YHWH".⁶⁶⁷

5.3.1.3. Characterisation from YHWH's Speeches: Conclusions

YHWH's first speech was a forming of Israel and her identity in 19:4-6. In Exodus 20:1-17 YHWH's speech directs Israel how to live as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, with certain standards expected. YHWH is thus seen to be intimately concerned with Israel and with every area of her life, and passionately devoted to her well-being and to her obedience. For YHWH to be who YHWH is, requires that YHWH set out how his people are expected to live as his holy nation. These speeches come in the context of YHWH revealing himself in an unparalleled way to the whole nation. The sights and sounds of YHWH's theophany speak of a God who cannot be approached, and who causes the earth to shake. These sights and sounds provide the backdrop against which YHWH's calling Israel his personal possession and giving them the law is seen. YHWH's words explain how it is possible for Israel to live as the people of the terrifying God of Sinai.

5.4. ANALYSIS OF THE DIALOGUES

I will now examine each section of the dialogue in terms of how the dialogue between Moses and YHWH deepens our understanding of YHWH's character. As this is done the merit of Dohmen's observation that chapter 19 is driven by the speeches will be clear.⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶⁶ For Block the name functions as a sign of divine ownership, and the commandment therefore prohibits taking this name-carrying function lightly. Daniel I. Block, "Bearing the Name of the Lord with Honor," *BSac* 168, no. 669 (2011): 20–31.

⁶⁶⁷ Weinfeld notes that this switch was "the basis of the rabbinic view that the first two "words" were proclaimed directly from God to the people, whereas the rest was transmitted by Moses (*b. Mak. 24a*): Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, 300. Dohmen suggests the reason for the switch is rhetorical effect, because "the name of YHWH" has more impact than a simple "my name" in the context of the misuse of the divine name, YHWH: Dohmen, *Exodus*, 113.

⁶⁶⁸ Dohmen, *Exodus*, 49.

5.4.1. The People of God Commissioned: 19:3-9

19 ³And Moses went up to God,

and YHWH called to him from the mountain, saying:

A1 COMMAND “thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and you are to tell to the Israelites

⁴“You saw what I did to Egypt, and I lifted you up on ⁶⁶⁹eagles’ wings and brought you to me. ⁵And now if you carefully listen to my voice and keep my covenant then you will be my possession, out of all the peoples, because ⁶⁷⁰the whole earth is mine. ⁶You will be my kingdom of priests and holy nation”

– these are the words which you are to speak ⁶⁷¹to the Israelites.”

⁷ A2 OBEDIENCE So Moses came and he called to the elders of the people,

B1 COMMAND and he set before them all these words which YHWH had commanded him.

⁸And all the people answered together, and they said,

B2 OBEDIENCE – PROMISED “All that YHWH has spoken we will do”

so Moses took the words of the people back to YHWH.

⁹And YHWH said to Moses,

C1 INFORM “see (emphasis), I am coming to you in a thick cloud so that the people may hear when I speak with you, and even they may trust in you for ever.”

C2 INFORM *And Moses told the words of the people to YHWH.*

In this sequence of dialogue Moses is, as in Exodus 6, the intermediary between YHWH and the people, bringing the message of the people to YHWH, and returning YHWH’s response to the people. Each of YHWH’s and Moses’ speeches concerns the people. The scene began with Moses going up “to God”. The terminology used for God, **הָאֱלֹהִים**, links this scene with Exodus 3:1-4:17, especially by consideration of Exodus 3:2 and 3:11-13 where Moses specifically is said to speak to **הָאֱלֹהִים** and is told that he, together with all the people, will worship God on “this mountain”. ⁶⁷²

The introduction to YHWH’s speech in 19:3b, “thus you are to say to the house of Jacob, and thus you are to tell to the Israelites”, highlights the importance of the occasion with its poetic parallelism. The importance of these words is further stressed with YHWH’s

⁶⁶⁹ LXX has “as on...”

⁶⁷⁰ Commentators differ over the exact force of the **וְ** here, but some sort of causal link seems best. So Propp: Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 2:157; so also: Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 89; and also, suggesting: Because (ki) all the earth is mine, so you, you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. This links this text up with the missional purpose of God, which is first articulated in Genesis 12:3b.": Fretheim, “Because the Whole Earth Is Mine,” 229–239, p237; the alternative, whereby the emphasis is placed on Israel’s special status is found in: Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 445.

⁶⁷¹ Suggesting “speak again and again” is: Durham, *Exodus*, 257.

⁶⁷² Dohmen, *Exodus*, 54.

command at the end of the speech to “speak these words” to the Israelites. The speech is also of vital importance because, as with YHWH’s previous speeches concerning Israel in Exodus 6 and 7, it acts to redefine Israel. In relationship to YHWH Israel is not only rescued from Egypt, but also reconstituted as a holy nation, a priestly kingdom, YHWH’s treasured possession. These words are a commissioning to Israel, giving Israel a reason for being.

Moses obeys, gathering the elders to proclaim to them YHWH’s words. It is unlikely that the reader is meant to be suspicious of Moses gathering the elders rather than all the people, because the next line describes how “all the people” declare their intention to obey. Sometimes “the elders” and “people” are used almost interchangeably,⁶⁷³ and it may be that the reader is to imagine the elders gathering the people, especially in the light of Exodus 18’s comments on the new ordering of Israel.

Moses is described (B1) as “setting all these words before them”, a slightly unusual choice of words to describe speech. The phrase “set before them” is used of the laws in Exodus 21, but apart from that it is used of providing food, and setting it before a guest (Gen. 24:33, 1 Sam. 8:24, 1 Sam.28:22). Perhaps Moses is pictured as setting before the people a rich feast, a feast which consists of God’s words of promise for the people and their transformation. The people respond (B2) with an affirmation of their intended obedience and Moses “brings back” their words to God. Usually returning a word to someone is an expression for answering, but here it is used of Moses returning the people’s answer to YHWH.

⁶⁷³ See comments on 4:30 in: Houtman, *Exodus*, 1:452.

Once Moses has “returned” the people’s words YHWH informs Moses of the next stage of the Sinai event. YHWH emphasises (C1) that he will come to Moses in a thick cloud, so that the people will trust in Moses forever. This time YHWH’s words are directed at Moses, and reinforce to Moses that he is the one in whom the people are to trust. YHWH’s words designate Moses as YHWH’s chosen ambassador to the people, the one through whom YHWH’s will is made known to the people. There is something of a seeming *non sequitur* as Moses proceeds to tell YHWH the words of the people.⁶⁷⁴ Within the narrative this functions as a “resumptive repetition” to conclude this stage of the dialogue, and to emphasise the willingness of the people to obey YHWH.⁶⁷⁵ Further it also means that in terms of the descriptions of speech in chapter 19 YHWH maintains his position as the initiator of each conversation pair.

In this section YHWH’s speeches to Moses contain words which give a new identity and purpose to Israel as a holy nation and kingdom of priests in relation to the world, and a new validation for Moses before the people. Up to this point in the Exodus narrative Moses’ validation has come through signs given by YHWH for him to perform, and through his role in the plagues and Red Sea deliverance. Now Moses will be directly validated by YHWH speaking to Moses in the hearing of all Israel. Thus Moses’ role is reinforced by direct divine intervention. In addition in each conversation pair in the dialogue YHWH speaks and Moses obeys, or Moses speaks YHWH’s words and Israel obey.

⁶⁷⁴ This final section of 9 has puzzled commentators, and many have concluded that it is a “misplaced variant of v.8b”, for example: Driver, *The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version*, 172; Childs discusses various options but ultimately concurs with Driver and others: Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 374. It seems possible to make some sense of 9b without recourse to this hypothesis however.

⁶⁷⁵ Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 2:160. It is also conceivable that the phrase “bring back the words of the people” refers to Moses coming back up the mountain, ready to answer YHWH, but before he can open his mouth YHWH speaks. Moses then finally gets to tell YHWH the people’s words after YHWH has spoken to him.

5.4.2. YHWH Descends: 19:10-19

¹⁰And YHWH said to Moses:

D1 COMMAND

“Go to the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their cloaks ¹¹And be ready on the third day, for on the third day YHWH will come down in the sight of all the people on Mt Sinai. ¹² And you shall set bounds all around for the people, saying:

‘take care not to go onto the mountain,⁶⁷⁶ or to touch its edges - anyone who touches the mountain must surely be put to death. ¹³ But no hand shall touch him, for he must surely be stoned, or shot with arrows - whether cattle or man, he shall not live.’

When the ram’s horn sounds they may go up on the mountain.”

¹⁴D2 OBEDIENCE And Moses went down from the mountain to the people, and he sanctified the people, and they washed their garments.

¹⁵ And he said to the people:

E1 COMMAND “be ready on the third day - do not have sexual relations with⁶⁷⁷ a woman.”

E2 OBEDIENCE (Assumed?)

¹⁶And on the third day when morning came, then the thunder⁶⁷⁸ and lightning and heavy cloud were on the mountain and the sound of a trumpet was very loud, then all the people who were in the camp trembled. ¹⁷ And Moses led the people out from the camp to meet God, and they stood⁶⁷⁹ at the foot of the mountain. ¹⁸ Now all of Mt Sinai was wrapped in smoke because⁶⁸¹ YHWH came down on it in fire, and smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain shook violently. ¹⁹While the sound of the trumpet got louder and louder⁶⁸³

a1 Moses spoke,⁶⁸⁴

a2 and God answered him by a voice.⁶⁸⁵

In this section the first conversation pair (D1/D2) consists of YHWH’s instructions to

Moses and Moses’ obedience. Here YHWH begins his instructions with the imperative אָל.

This is reminiscent of his commissionings of Moses in chapters 3-4, but Moses here

complies unhesitatingly by contrast with his previous objections. YHWH’s instructions are

⁶⁷⁶ Lit: “watch yourselves going up to”

⁶⁷⁷ Lit: “Do not touch”

⁶⁷⁸ cf 9:23, 29, 33

⁶⁷⁹ Technically “positioned themselves”, might reflect the reflexive more closely, but the most obvious English is “stood”

⁶⁸⁰ Literally “in the lower part of the mountain” - BDB

⁶⁸¹ Durham translates this preposition “literally” “from the presence”, but a causal sense is more usual - cf Williams S376 Durham, *Exodus*, 266–267.

⁶⁸² “violently” is an attempt to put “extremely” in more idiomatic form. A number of manuscripts, plus LXX have “people” instead of mountain.

⁶⁸³ Literally “the sound of the trumpet going, and it was very strong, Moses spoke” – Childs (341, 343) thinks it should be “as the sound of the horn grew louder and louder” – “the frequentative sense of the two verbs should be observed”

⁶⁸⁴ Durham thinks that the 10 commandments fit here in the narrative. In comment on 20:1 he says “this verse and all that follows is best read in direct sequence to 19:19a ... Yahweh speaks, addressing all the people assembled at the perimeter of holiness around the mountain’s base.” Durham, *Exodus*, 283.

⁶⁸⁵ For “by a voice” (בְּקוֹל) see Childs, *Exodus*, 343 who points out that it is not so simple to dismiss voice- to assume a voice may not be right, but – “on the other hand, to render the word by “thunder” is to determine arbitrarily what sound is intended, as if a thunderstorm was really what the chapter was all about anyway!” See also Dozeman, *Exodus*, 455.

reasonably straightforward until the end of v13 which stands in some tension with the previous instruction that anyone who approached the mountain would be put to death. However it is plausible to read everything up to the end of v13 as instructions for the preparation, during which time the mountain was utterly out of bounds. When the trumpet sounded the people were able to go to the mountain, which they do in v17, when Moses leads them out of the camp to stand at the foot of the mountain.⁶⁸⁶ Alternatively the instruction relates to a command to sacrifice in the vicinity of the mountain, the obedience to which is not recorded until chapter 24.⁶⁸⁷ In the narrative context of chapter 19 it seems best to prefer the simplicity of the first explanation.

Following Moses' obedience to YHWH's instructions in 19:14 he commands the Israelites to be ready on the third day and instructs them not to "touch a woman". This instruction is not contained in YHWH's original instructions to Moses, but may be regarded as an expansion of what it means to sanctify the people, as a "special act of separation".⁶⁸⁸ Moses carries out YHWH's instructions, and the narrative records the events as they unfold.

The final piece of dialogue recorded here (a1/a2) does not contain any record of what was said, simply that Moses spoke to YHWH and YHWH answered him with a voice. It would be possible to translate voice as "thunder" but it seems better, especially in the light of v9, to understand this as the words between YHWH and Moses that were promised and which will validate Moses' ministry and cause the people to trust in Moses forever. In this unrecorded conversation it is Moses who speaks first and YHWH who answers, by contrast

⁶⁸⁶ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 369.

⁶⁸⁷ Thomas B. Dozeman, *God on the Mountain: A Study of Redaction, Theology, and Canon in Exodus 19-24* (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1989), 24. "Sacrifice" makes sense as a possible alternative to "ascend" because the *Qal* and *Hiphil* imperfect 3mp forms of אָזַע are indistinguishable.

⁶⁸⁸ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 369; Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 230; see also Dozeman, who highlights the requirement for holy warriors to be in a state of sexual purity (citing 2 Sam. 11:11 and Deut. 23:10-14), as well as Lev. 15: Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 455; Fretheim gives 1 Sam. 21:4-5 as a parallel Fretheim, *Exodus*, 217.

with all the other speech pairs examined in this section thus far. This heightens the emphasis on the importance of Moses and YHWH speaking together, and on Moses' role within this. The lack of any summary of what was said gives the reader the perspective of the Israelites at the foot of the mountain, who know that Moses is meeting with YHWH, but do not know what is being said.

5.4.3. Guarded Presence: 19:20-25

²⁰ And YHWH came down to Mt Sinai, to the top of the mountain,
 b1 COMMAND and YHWH called Moses to the top of the mountain,
 b2 OBEDIENCE so Moses went up.

²¹ *Then YHWH said to Moses:*

F1 COMMAND "Go down, to warn the people, lest they break through to YHWH in order to see, otherwise many of them will fall. ²² And even the priests, who are approaching to YHWH, must consecrate themselves, lest YHWH break out against them."

²³ *And Moses said to YHWH:*

F2 OBJECTION "The people are not able to go up to Mt Sinai because you warned us, when you said: 'set bounds for the mountain, and consecrate it.'"

²⁴ *So YHWH said to him*

G1 COMMAND "Go down, then come up – you, and Aaron⁶⁸⁹ with you, but the priests and the people must not break through to go up to YHWH, lest he break out against them"

²⁵ G2 OBEDIENCE (at least begun) So Moses went down to the people and he said to them

The next section begins apparently oddly in the light of 19:18 which has already said:

"YHWH came down on it".⁶⁹⁰ How can YHWH descend to the top of Sinai, when he has already descended in 19:18? It could be thought that perhaps YHWH has left the mountain in the meantime, but there is then difficulty over 20:18-21. These verses suggest that the same auditory and visual features of the narrative as 19:16-18 continue until the Ten Commandments have been spoken.

An alternative is that the difficulty can be somewhat resolved by a consideration of the point of view from which the scene is portrayed. Exodus 19:16-19 can be said to give the reader the perspective of the people in this episode. The people see fire, smoke and clouds,

⁶⁸⁹ Mult mss add "your brother"

⁶⁹⁰ Because of the oddity of this text Durham suggests that these verses (together with 19b) may have originally belonged with 24:1-2 or even 32:29-35 rather than their present context, Durham also sees the ten commandments as following more naturally from 19:19a: Durham, *Exodus*, 270, 272.

and hear thunder, and YHWH and Moses speaking. In 19:18 YHWH descended “in fire” on the mountain to make himself present to the people in the appearance of fire on the mountain. In 19:20-25 YHWH is present to Moses at the top of the mountain in a different manner. The narrative disjunction can be explained because 19:20-25 brings the focus back to the Moses-YHWH relationship, perhaps here from YHWH’s perspective, with the concern focused on the requirement that the people not break through to YHWH.

The focus of the narrative switches from YHWH’s burning presence with the people, to YHWH’s commanding and commissioning presence with Moses on the mountain top. YHWH chooses to call Moses up the mountain at this point, because rather than speaking with Moses (as in 19:19) he wishes to give orders concerning the people. His instructions concern the need for distance between YHWH and the people, and so it is fitting that Moses will have to descend from speaking with YHWH to the people at the foot of the mountain.

The narrative demonstrates that YHWH’s presence is dangerous and any person breaking through to see it risks YHWH breaking out against them.⁶⁹¹ YHWH’s response to Moses’ disagreement is to reinforce the warning, and add the instruction that after Moses has gone down, he is to come back up with Aaron, but the priests must not break through to go up to YHWH. The restrictions on the priests are therefore tightened, almost as if Moses’ words make YHWH consider the need to restrict matters still further. In Exodus 3-4 Moses’ questions elicit further information, and even the provision of signs and helpers for his mission. Here the question simply produces a greater restriction. This seems to indicate that with regard to YHWH’s holiness and his presence with the people there is no room for

⁶⁹¹ The narrative of Uzzah in 2 Samuel 6:6-8 provides an example of an individual paying the price for transgressing YHWH’s boundaries. Moses thinks the people have had sufficient warning and explains this to YHWH.

negotiation, and YHWH's response demonstrates that Moses has more to learn about his presence.⁶⁹²

Finally Moses obeys YHWH's orders and returns to the people and, the reader assumes from 19:25, tells them the divine instructions.⁶⁹³ Thus the pause at 19:20-25 gives further emphasis to the idea of divine holiness and danger from the divine presence. They also heighten the special role of Moses who is allowed to ascend the mountain to meet God in a way that no other Israelite, even if a priest, does. They emphasise the divine authority and highlight for Israel that Moses' commands are received from the top of the mountain, a mountain which YHWH has to come down to, even to speak with his people.

5.4.4. YHWH speaks, the People fear: 20:1-21

20¹ And God spoke all these words saying:

² "I am YHWH your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from a house of slavery ³ No other God shall be yours before me⁶⁹⁴. ⁴ You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any form which is in the heavens above, or the earth below, or the waters below the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them for I am YHWH your God, a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the sons to the 3rd and the 4th (generation) of those hating me⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands for those loving me and keeping my commandments. You shall not misuse the name of YHWH your God, for YHWH will not leave unpunished anyone who misuses his name⁶⁹⁵ ..."

¹⁸ And when all the people saw⁶⁹⁶ the thunder and the lightning and the sound of the trumpets and the mountain smoking then the people saw⁶⁹⁷ and they trembled and they stood at a distance.

¹⁹ *So the people said to Moses –*

H1 REQUEST "you speak with us so that we may listen, but do not let God speak with us lest we die".

²⁰ *And Moses said to the people:*

H2 REASSURANCE "Do not be afraid, for God has come in order to test you, so that the fear of him may be on you, and so that you may not sin."

⁶⁹² Indeed Childs sees 19:20-25 in their present context as preparation for the high point of 20:1-17 which emphasise the "dimensions of divine holiness" which the people and even Moses do not yet appreciate: Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 370.

⁶⁹³ So see: Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:461; however, for the view that Moses here introduces the ten commandments, which are then heard as Moses speaking God's words rather than the direct speech of God to Israel: Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 477.

⁶⁹⁴ LXX "but me"

⁶⁹⁵ A relatively standard English translation that highlights the concern with correct speech, see earlier discussion for more detailed discussion.

⁶⁹⁶ Samaritan Pentateuch has "hearing" (perhaps unsurprisingly) – NRSV translates "witnessing" which seems reasonable – a verb of perception used to cover all the possibilities.

⁶⁹⁷ MT, other versions (e.g. LXX) have "they were afraid" (different pointing, same consonants), Childs supports "fear": Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 344. However because "see" is the harder reading it seems better to prefer "see".

²¹And the people stood at a distance, but Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

The Ten Commandments are presented in Exodus as the speech of God (20:1): “And God spoke all these words”. However, the immediately preceding verse (19:25) is “Moses went down to the people and he spoke to them.” No further speech of Moses is given, so it is plausible to suggest that the verses be translated: “Moses went down to the people and he said to them: ‘God spoke all these words saying...’”.⁶⁹⁸ This potential ambiguity, together with the fact that 20:1 unusually does not say to whom God spoke these words and the ambiguity in Exodus 20:18-21 regarding when the events narrated therein occurred, leads Sommer to suggest that this ambiguity is deliberate and designed to force the reader to wonder whether the law at Sinai was given “directly and exclusively from the deity, or through human speech”.⁶⁹⁹ If YHWH’s words are here addressed directly to Israel then that, of course, is a first in the book of Exodus. However the more normal way for Moses to relay YHWH’s speech to the people in Exodus is to begin with: “thus says YHWH”. Furthermore it is more usual in Exodus 19-24 to have YHWH’s words to Israel spoken to Moses, and have Moses reported as saying those words (see 19:3, 10; 20:22; 21:1; 24:1).

Therefore it is most probable that YHWH speaks directly here to the people for the first, and only, time in the narrative of Exodus. The striking feature of the narrative here is that the people do not respond to any of the words YHWH gives, rather the emphasis is placed on the effects of the theophany: the thunder, lightning, trumpets and smoke and the result of these effects on the people. The impact of the whole scene on the people is that they stand at a distance out of fear. This fear makes YHWH’s concern regarding the people’s eagerness to “break through” seem somewhat redundant in the immediate context,

⁶⁹⁸ e.g. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 467; while arguing for a deliberate ambiguity by the redactor of the final form is: Benjamin D. Sommer, “The Source Critic and the Religious Interpreter,” *Int* 60, no. 1 (2006): 9–20, p12–13.

⁶⁹⁹ Sommer, “The Source Critic and the Religious Interpreter,” 13.

although it may be that later events (Ex. 32-34) demonstrate the need for such a warning.⁷⁰⁰

The people turn to Moses and request that he act as mediator for them.⁷⁰¹ This is the people's affirmation of Moses' role, and indeed the first example of how the people will come to trust in Moses. Moses response to the people is to say that YHWH has come to test them (20:20) so that they would fear YHWH and not sin. The exact nature of the test is somewhat cryptic,⁷⁰² but the purpose is clear: to create a "fear of him", so that "you may not sin". Moses seeks to replace the people's sense of fear and terror with a more specific fear that leads to obedience to YHWH.⁷⁰³

This is the first mention of sin in relation to the people in the book of Exodus. While the people have grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness they have not explicitly been said to sin. This speech by Moses demonstrates his role as mediator, and highlights a new concern that the people be kept from sin. There is no mention at this point of Aaron, but the people obey the injunction of 19:24.

5.4.5. Covenant and Meeting: 20:22-24:11

Ex. 20²²

And YHWH said to Moses

A1 COMMAND "Thus you shall say to the Israelites:

"you have seen that from heaven I have spoken with you.

²³Do not make gods of silver alongside me...

...21¹ These are the judgments which you are to set before them..."

Ex. 24¹

...And he said to Moses,

⁷⁰⁰ See comments on the impact of the vision of Exodus 24 on the people in: Peeler, "Desiring God."

⁷⁰¹ This has sometimes been thought to derive from a different tradition to Ex. 19:9, which emphasises YHWH's appointment of Moses. Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 351.

⁷⁰² Is the test related to the bounds set on the mountain, Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 162. Or to the Ten Commandments, or is it to do with the people's response of fear in 20:19?

⁷⁰³ This suggests that those commentators who stress the ethical dimension of "fear of YHWH" in this text are right to do so: Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 373.

B1 COMMAND “Come up to YHWH - you, and Aaron and Nadab, and Ebihu,⁷⁰⁴ and 70 of the elders of Israel, and you⁷⁰⁵ shall bow down at a distance.⁷⁰⁶ ²And Moses is to come near on his own, to YHWH,⁷⁰⁷ but they may not come near, and the people may not come up with him.”⁷⁰⁸

A2/C1 COMMAND ³And Moses came, and he proclaimed to the people all YHWH’s words and all his judgments

and all the people answered with one voice, and they said –

C2 OBEDIENCE “all the words which YHWH has spoken we will do.”⁷⁰⁹

⁴And Moses wrote all YHWH’s words, and he rose early in the morning, and he built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and 12 memorial stones, for the 12 tribes of Israel. ⁵And he sent young men of the Israelites and they offered sacrifices and they sacrificed peace offerings of oxen⁷¹⁰ to YHWH. ⁶And Moses took half of the blood and put (it) in the (ritual) bowls and scattered half of the blood on the altar.

⁷And he took the scroll of the covenant and summoned the elders of the people,

D1 IMPLIED COMMAND

and they said

D2 PROMISED OBEDIENCE “all that YHWH has spoken we will do, and we will listen.”⁷¹¹

⁸ And Moses took the blood and sprinkled (it) on the people and said:

“Look! The blood of the covenant which YHWH has made with you in accordance with⁷¹² all these words.”

B2 OBEDIENCE ⁹And Moses, and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu,⁷¹³ and the 70 from the elders of Israel went up.¹⁰ And they saw the God of Israel⁷¹⁴ - and under his feet was something like a construction of bricks of sapphire which was as clear bright as the sky.¹¹ And he did not stretch out his hand against the “eminent ones of the Israelites”, even they looked on⁷¹⁵ God, and they ate and they drank.

This section of the narrative follows from the end of the legal instructions of Exodus

20:22-24:1. YHWH commands Moses and the others to ascend in 24:1-2, and they obey in

24:9-11. This simple narrative is interrupted by Moses’ covenant ceremony in 24:3-8,

which follows from the end of 23 quite naturally.⁷¹⁶ The command to ascend the mountain

in 24:1-2 would fit more naturally after 24:8. Dozeman suggests that 24:1-2 and 9-11 are a

⁷⁰⁴ Sam Pen has Eliazer and Ithamar as well

⁷⁰⁵ LXX has 3rd plural (they shall...)

⁷⁰⁶ LXX has “to the Lord”

⁷⁰⁷ LXX has “to God”

⁷⁰⁸ LXX has “with them”

⁷⁰⁹ LXX has “and hear” (cf v7)

⁷¹⁰ This is a rare construction - only found elsewhere in the OT in 1 Sam. 11:15 - usually a construct form is expected - see: Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 561.

⁷¹¹ Samaritan Pentateuch inverts the order (logically enough)

⁷¹² Waltke & O’Connor suggest this use of על : 11.2.13 Bruce K Waltke and Michael Patrick O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 218.

⁷¹³ See note on v1.

⁷¹⁴ LXX has “they saw the place where the God of Israel stood”.

⁷¹⁵ LXX changes the verb to a passive – “and they were seen in the presence of God.”

⁷¹⁶ See the comments of Driver in: Driver, *The Book of Exodus in the Revised Version*, 251.

frame created by the P historian of “divine command and fulfilment” around the “covenant ceremony” of 24:3-8.⁷¹⁷ Whether or not this is correct, it is an important point that for the reader of the text 24:1-2 and 9-11 are indeed a frame for 24:3-8, as my analysis of the dialogue also demonstrates. Moses’ obedience (24:9-11) to YHWH’s command (24:1-2) frames Moses’ obedience to the divine command to speak YHWH’s words to Israel, and Moses’ initiation of the covenant ceremony.

Exodus 24:3 narrates the Israelite response to Moses, and Moses’ subsequent obedience to YHWH’s command. The people promise to obey YHWH’s words and Moses writes down YHWH’s words.⁷¹⁸ Moses writes the “scroll of the covenant”, arranges sacrifices at the foot of the mountain, scatters the blood on the altar and summons the elders of the people, who respond by once more promising obedience and additionally to listen, or perhaps “obey”.⁷¹⁹ Moses sprinkles the blood on the people and declares that this is the blood of the covenant made through all YHWH’s words which Moses has spoken to the people.⁷²⁰

Following the sprinkling of the blood, Moses and the other named people ascend to meet with God, in obedience to 24:1-2. Here there is a vivid contrast with the inability to approach YHWH in Exodus 19.⁷²¹ The text states specifically that the elders see God, and look at God, that he does not attack them, and they eat and drink in his presence.

However, there is no description offered of God, beyond explaining the clear bright floor under his feet. There are likewise no words recorded, the event appears to unfold in

⁷¹⁷ Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 563.

⁷¹⁸ This is the first mention of writing in the narrative: *Ibid.*, 564.

⁷¹⁹ Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:291.

⁷²⁰ Dozeman points out that the only other reference to blood sprinkled on both altar and the participants is at the ordination of the priests (Lev. 8:22-30): Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 566. In the light of 19:6 this could perhaps be seen as the “ordination of the nation” as a priestly kingdom; see also: Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:287.

⁷²¹ Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 566.

complete silence.⁷²² At the height of Israel's intimacy with God at Sinai sight and words fail. There is no description, and no conversation recorded. The reader therefore does not know how much of God is seen in this scene. The silence of narrator and characters leaves an air of mystery over the scene, and the narrator's description of the pavement below the feet of God as "like..." has parallels with other scenes of divine appearance where exact description appears to be impossible.⁷²³ There may be a dramatic contrast between the light of Exodus 24 and the darkness of Exodus 20, but the essential similarity that neither permits description is also important.

5.4.6. Further Up and Further In: 24:12-18

¹² And YHWH said to Moses:

C1 COMMAND "Come up to me, to the mountain, and be there, and I will give to you the stone tablets and the law and the commandment which I have written to teach them.

¹³ *And Moses rose, and Joshua his servant,*

C2 OBEDIENCE and Moses⁷²⁴ went up the mountain of God.

¹⁴ *And he said to the elders*

D1 COMMAND "Stay here until we return to you – and see Aaron and Hur are with you, whoever has a legal case⁷²⁵ may go to them."

D2 OBEDIENCE ASSUMED⁷²⁶

Once more Moses is commanded to come up the mountain so that YHWH can give him the stone tablets and the law and commandments, which YHWH has written for the people.⁷²⁷

In the dialogue between Moses and YHWH there is a simple pattern of command and response; YHWH commands and Moses ascends. The interactions between Moses and YHWH here demonstrate that Moses is still the mediator between YHWH and the people, even if the elders have seen God.

⁷²² Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:287.

⁷²³ E.g. Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1-2 et. al.

⁷²⁴ LXX has Joshua and Moses both going up the mountain.

⁷²⁵ BDB suggests the idea of legal case, Durham simply goes for "whoever has a lot to say" - "Lord of words" Durham, *Exodus*, 340.

⁷²⁶ At this point the narrative switches to focus on the glory of YHWH in the cloud with Moses, but the assumed obedience in fact turns into the worst of disobediences, see Exodus 32:1-6.

⁷²⁷ This is intriguing because Moses has just written words. Presumably the reader is expected to understand that YHWH will be giving the tablets with the Ten Commandments while Moses writes the Book of the Covenant. Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:300; Dozeman, *God on the Mountain*, 579.

In the light of all that has happened it is appropriate that YHWH's final words in Exodus 19-24 to Moses are "come up to me, to the mountain..." Moses comes up the mountain, and enters the cloud and YHWH gives Moses the instructions for the tabernacle, each section introduced with "YHWH spoke to Moses". This section concludes in 31:18 with Moses being given the stone tablets, written by the finger of God.

5.4.7. Dialogue Conclusions

In these chapters the dialogue between Moses and YHWH follows a straightforward pattern of YHWH commanding and Moses obeying. Breaks in this pattern are found in 19:19 where Moses and YHWH have an unrecorded conversation which is initiated by Moses, and in 19:23 Moses objects to YHWH's instructions. This objection simply leads to a reinforced instruction rather than further dialogue and Moses complies.

In this section Moses also has extensive dialogue with the people, conveying YHWH's instructions to them. He also presides over a covenant ritual in 24:3-8 which does not have explicit instruction from YHWH, but which seems to fit well into the narrative, and demonstrates Moses' role as YHWH's representative even when a particular detailed instruction has not been given.

5.5. EXODUS 19-24: CONCLUSIONS

Exodus 19:1-24:18 shows through various means the way in which YHWH manifested himself to the people and to Moses at Mount Sinai. Exodus 19-24 describes the first time in the biblical narrative that YHWH has made himself known by speaking directly to Israel as a nation. The descriptions in Exodus 19-24 are sometimes difficult to follow because the narrated events are portraying an intrusion of the divine presence onto earth. This difference in descriptions of divine presence is an expected result of YHWH's declaration to

Moses in Exodus 3:14a; אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה carries the nuance that while YHWH assures Moses of his presence he also affirms that he is free to be present as and how he chooses in any given situation.

The actual response of the people and of Moses seems usually to be appropriate, and reasonably predictable. This stands out by way of contrast with previous dialogues in Exodus (3-4) and ones to come (32-34), where the response of Moses and the people is often not straightforward. In Exodus 19-24 commands are obeyed and a covenant is initiated. I will go on to see how this straightforward world is broken up and restored in the next sections.

Chapter 6

Dialogues of Intercession: Exodus 32:1-33:11

6.1. INTRODUCTION

In this study of YHWH's name in relation to the Moses-YHWH dialogues in Exodus a key point in the narrative has been reached. The nation of Israel is in peril, not this time from oppression, but as a result of YHWH's threatened judgement on them for the manufacture of the golden calf to represent the god(s) who brought them out of Egypt.

For ease of analysis I will divide Exodus 32-34 into two sections, 32:1-33:11 and 33:12-34:35.⁷²⁸ The first section takes in the first two of four distinct dialogues within the chapters, Exodus 32:7-14/15 and 32:30-32:35; with 33:12-23; and 34:1-28 falling into the second section.⁷²⁹ I will argue that the dialogues in Exodus 32:1-33:11 between YHWH and Moses demonstrate how Moses is seeking to rescue Israel from YHWH's anger, and how YHWH is seeking to show Moses the state to which Israel has sunk, the danger YHWH's presence is to an idolatrous people and the certainty of YHWH's punishment of sin, even as the timing of that punishment remains unknown. Yet these dialogues also take place in a context of friendship between Moses and YHWH, and when Moses is with Israel he embodies YHWH's spoken attitude.

As in previous chapters I will begin our study with an analysis of the characterisation of YHWH and Moses through action and speech. I will then examine the dialogue to assess the impact that an understanding of the dialogue has on a reading of the narrative.

⁷²⁸ Although this is an artificial divide I will show that this division comes at a natural point in the narrative.

⁷²⁹ This division is also found in Suomala, although I have extended the fourth dialogue to conclude it with YHWH's instructions to Moses to write the laws: Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue*, 21.

6.2. CHARACTERISATION THROUGH ACTIONS

6.2.1. YHWH's Actions

6.2.1.1. YHWH's Relenting: 32:14

YHWH's first "action" is to relent in response to Moses' intercession for the people.

Whether this is because he simply changes his mind,⁷³⁰ or because there is a more subtle dynamic involving the divine intention to change a previously declared plan in response to repentance from the people (see Jeremiah 18:1-12),⁷³¹ needs to be decided on the basis of an examination of the ongoing narrative and in particular of the complex dynamic of the dialogue between Moses and YHWH.

6.2.1.2. YHWH's Striking: 32:35

In this verse YHWH's action is to "strike" the people. The word used for "strike" is that used of the plagues earlier in Exodus (cf Exod. 7:27, 12:23, 27), and also of God striking people elsewhere in the Old Testament, sometimes with the result of death, sometimes with sickness. YHWH's striking here is not the final destruction previously threatened, but is some type of punishment. It is possible to read YHWH's striking as supportive of the Levites killing of their fellow Israelites; equally it could suggest that the Levites action had been unnecessary and when I analyse the dialogues I will consider these questions in more detail.

6.2.1.3. Conclusions regarding the narrated portrayal of YHWH's activity

In this section YHWH is directly portrayed as doing only two actions: relenting (from destroying Israel) and striking (Israel because they had made the calf), and the second of

⁷³⁰ Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:646.

⁷³¹ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 102.

these actions is hard to reconcile with the first. Taken together they suggest that, while YHWH may be determined not to destroy the people, they still face his punishment.

6.2.2. Moses' Actions

6.2.2.1. The Descent from the Mountain: 32:15-29

The first we see of Moses in action is his descent from the mountain, holding the tablets which contain the words, written by God, of the covenant. The function of 32:15-16 is presumably to highlight the nature of the tablets as divine writing concerning YHWH's instructions, which have been so clearly flouted in 32:1-5 by the human manufacture of an idol.⁷³² As such they contain a high degree of irony:

This intense dwelling upon the two tables seems meant to underscore the vast privilege of Israel in having this gracious divine deposit; yet at the same time it most effectively conveys to us the sense of utter tragedy, for the reader already knows that the covenant has been bartered away for a bastard bull.⁷³³

At this point there is a brief exchange between Moses and Joshua regarding the nature of the noise from the camp below which demonstrates that Moses has a greater grasp of the situation than Joshua, recognising the sound from the camp for what it is. Moses' statement is somewhat cryptic and has puzzled commentators. The first two lines are reasonably clear where Moses explains that the noise he hears is nothing like the sound of battle going well or badly, but the final line simply has the participle of *הִנָּח* without any descriptor.

Some commentators have concluded that there must be a word missing.⁷³⁴ Dozeman prefers the option, following Delcor, that the final line should be translated as “the voice of

⁷³² Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 53.

⁷³³ Dale R. Davis, “Rebellion, Presence, and Covenant: A Study in Exodus 32-34,” *WTJ* 44, no. 1 (1982): 71-87, p74.

⁷³⁴ Suggesting either “to laugh” or that a repetition of the verb “to sing” is missing: Francis I. Andersen, “Lexicographical Note on Exodus 32:18,” *VT* 16, no. 1 (1966): 108-12; or suggesting “festival” (albeit admitting this is “rather arbitrary”) is: Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:656.

Anat”, the Canaanite goddess.⁷³⁵ In contrast Christoph Dohmen argues for a different use of the root ענה to mean “humiliation” or “oppression”.⁷³⁶ Herbert Brichto suggests that the lack of any word modifying ענה is simply to say “the sound I hear I cannot make out”.⁷³⁷ More simply still Propp advocates a translation of “singing”.⁷³⁸

There are a number of reasonable explanations that work with the current form of the text, so it is not necessary to posit that a word has dropped out. Dohmen’s argument should not be neglected and creates the possibility that the reader can suppose in the narrative world that Joshua would understand the verb to be “to sing”, while Moses interprets it, in the light of what he has heard from YHWH, as “humiliation”.⁷³⁹ In this brief exchange between Moses and Joshua the reader sees that Joshua does not understand the significance of what he hears, but that Moses has a more solid grasp of the situation. However the full significance is only fully comprehended when Moses “sees” the calf and it is to Moses’ actions that I now turn.

6.2.2.2. Tablet Breaking; Calf Destruction: 32:19-20

Up to this point in the narrative Moses has taken the side of the people against YHWH’s intention to destroy. The turning point for Moses comes as he “sees” the calf and the

⁷³⁵ He argues in support of this that there are parallels between the description of Moses’ destruction of the calf and Canaanite depictions of Anat’s holy war defeat of Mot (burning, grinding and scattering) that add to the attractiveness of this option: Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 709–710. Dozeman’s preferred option also relates to the story of the calf’s destruction, which, I will show below, appears to be told in ways which mirror other accounts of the destruction of gods from across the ANE. I will also show, however, that the simplest explanation is that the narration of Moses’ actions in regard to the calf’s destruction are told to emphasize Moses’ complete destruction of the calf, rather than drawing any particular parallel.

⁷³⁶ “Dann nämlich ergibt sich, dass Israel sich durch die Herstellung und Verehrung des Goldenen Kalbes selbst Gewalt angetan hat, sich gedemütigt und sich in gewisser Weise selbst wieder in Unterdrückung und Unfreiheit gebracht hat”: Dohmen, *Exodus*, 307.

⁷³⁷ Herbert Chanan Brichto, “The Worship of the Golden Calf: A Literary Analysis of a Fable on Idolatry,” *HUCA* 54 (1983): 1–44, p10.

⁷³⁸ He cites parallels with Psalm 88 for the use of the *Piel* form of ענה as “to sing”: Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 2:557; see also Durham who favours the translation “the disorganised, conflicting answering of random singing”: Durham, *Exodus*, 430.

⁷³⁹ The two possible meanings of ענה, in this narrative context, direct the reader to consider how both meanings might add something to the characterisation of Moses and Joshua.

dancing of the people. The description of Moses' anger matches YHWH's speech in 32:7-10, where YHWH instructs Moses to leave him alone so that "my anger may burn".⁷⁴⁰

Moses' breaking of the tablets is sometimes understood as a spontaneous reaction due to anger overtaking him.⁷⁴¹ However there is also a deliberate aspect to Moses' action demonstrated by his actions of throwing down and breaking the tablets in the very place where Moses and the Israelites had ratified the covenant.⁷⁴² The breaking of the tablets "symbolically demonstrates the true meaning of what he sees: the bond between YHWH and Israel is broken; the constitution, the basic law of covenant relationship, has been violated."⁷⁴³ In Exodus 25:21 Moses is told to put a copy of the testimony YHWH will give him in the ark. In Exodus 31:18 Moses is given the two tablets of the testimony, written on by the finger of God. Therefore in the context of Exodus the shattering of these tablets is a shattering of the possibility of the covenant.⁷⁴⁴

Thus there is an irony in the narrative, since it is only when Moses "sees" the events YHWH has previously told him about that he comes to act and think as YHWH did when Moses was opposing him.⁷⁴⁵ Both Houtman and Dohmen emphasise the impact on Moses of his sight of the calf. According to Houtman, "the wording of the current text conveys the

⁷⁴⁰ Dohmen, *Exodus*, 307.

⁷⁴¹ "his first action is one of rage, underscoring his volatile personality from the opening chapters of Exodus": Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 709-710.

⁷⁴² "At the foot of the mountain", cf Ex. 24:4: Dohmen, *Exodus*, 307.

⁷⁴³ Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:658; Noth, *Exodus*, 249; as both dissolution of the covenant and Moses' anger see: Van Seters, *The Life of Moses*, 303.

⁷⁴⁴ Compare the account of the importance of the tablets as structural markers in: Edward G. Newing, "Up and Down--In and Out : Moses on Mount Sinai: The Literary Unity Of Exodus 32-34," *AusBR* 41 (1993): 18-34, pp23-24; and see also: Craig Evan Anderson, "The Tablets of Testimony and a Reversal of Outcome in the Golden Calf Episode," *HS* 50 (2009): 41-65, p44.

⁷⁴⁵ An alternative explanation is put forward by Brichto, who explained Moses' change of attitude by suggesting that Moses was not told about the calf itself in the dialogue with YHWH, but that the narrator used a form of "free direct discourse", where the narrator puts words in the mouth of a character to "alert the reader to a key element of the story": Brichto, "The Worship of the Golden Calf," 38. However Brichto did not highlight any structural markers in the discourse that would support his point and since Hatav argues that the infinitival לָאֵלֶּיךָ, rather than the conjugated form is a marker of "free direct discourse" in Hebrew narrative then there is nothing in the formal speech introductions in Exodus 32:7-10 to indicate that it should not all be taken as the direct speech of YHWH to Moses: Galia Hatav, "(Free) Direct Discourse in Biblical Hebrew," *HS* 41 (2000): 7-30, p26.

effect that for Moses the reality turned out to be much more serious than he had imagined it to be on the basis of what YHWH had told him”.⁷⁴⁶ Dohmen connects this idea to the

leitwort אָרָא:

*Sich dem Lager nähernd nimmt er wahr, was v5-6 beschreiben hatten, nämlich das Fest im Angesicht des Goldenen Kalbes. Mit dem Wahrenehmen (אָרָא) ist ein Leitwort des Textes wieder aufgenommen (vgl. V1.5.9), nun die Perspektive des Mose erfassend.*⁷⁴⁷

The description of Moses’ actions in destroying the calf appears incoherent, but the simplest explanation of this lies in Begg’s survey of comparable ANE literature on the destruction of idols where he concludes:

In both the biblical and the Ugaritic material, the concern appears to be rather with heaping up every imaginable sort of destructive action without regard for the factual applicability of those actions to the object in question, or to the possibility of all the various actions being successively employed against one and the same entity.⁷⁴⁸

Essentially, the description in the text is simply a way, which any ANE reader would have comprehended, of saying that the calf was utterly destroyed, and the details do not need to be pressed beyond this.

Moses forces the Israelites to drink the water. Some see this text as relating to the ordeal described in Numbers 5, where a similar drinking ritual is used to determine guilt.⁷⁴⁹

Against the idea that such a ritual is unnecessary here because every Israelite is guilty, Cassuto and Brichto both argue that in 32:1-6 “all” need not be taken to mean literally “every Israelite”, simply that a large number of Israelites were involved.⁷⁵⁰ Evidence for this suggestion is however lacking in the text itself, and the word “all” in the context of the

⁷⁴⁶ Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:658.

⁷⁴⁷ Dohmen, *Exodus*, 307.

⁷⁴⁸ Christopher T. Begg, “The Destruction of the Calf (Exod 32,20 and Deut 9,21),” in *Das Deuteronomium: Entstehung, Gestalt Und Botschaft*, ed. Norbert Lofink (Leuven, Netherlands: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1985), 208-252, p214; see also: Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 710.

⁷⁴⁹ See discussion in: Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:659.

⁷⁵⁰ Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 412, 419; Indeed Brichto suggests that in this case the drinking would have produced a visible mark on the guilty that was then recognised by the Levites when they killed their fellow Israelites: Brichto, “The Worship of the Golden Calf,” 16.

narrative is better taken as emphasising the whole people's complicity in the event.⁷⁵¹ The drinking of the water containing the remains of the calf is part of a punishment on the people as a whole.⁷⁵² The total destruction and removal of the calf in this way is a powerful demonstration of the emptiness of idol worship.⁷⁵³

In this section Moses takes on the characteristics of YHWH in judgement in a rather striking, and potentially unsettling manner. There is no word of YHWH recorded, and yet Moses becomes angry at the same set of actions as YHWH, once he fully perceives them. He breaks the symbol of the covenant, written by YHWH, at the place where the covenant was made. Furthermore he destroys the idol and forces the people to drink its remains. Is Moses acting for YHWH, or is he simply angry and taking matters into his own hands? The resolution of this question will need to await an analysis of Moses' speech with YHWH.

6.2.2.3. Moses' Return Exodus: 32:30

Here Moses says that he will return to YHWH, with the aim of somehow making atonement for the people. This recalls how Moses "returned" to YHWH at the end of chapter 5, when Israel has suffered in Egypt as a result of Pharaoh's reaction to his intervention. This time Israel has sinned, rather than been sinned against. At the critical point in the narrative now Moses returns to YHWH to intercede for the people.

⁷⁵¹ Mark A. O'Brien, "The Dynamics of the Golden Calf Story (Exodus 32-34)," *AusBR* 60 (2012): 18-31, p24; Or indeed, as Clines points out "all the men" - because they remove the ornaments of their wives and sons and daughters: David J. A. Clines, "Dancing and Shining at Sinai: Playing the Man in Exodus 32-34," in *Men and Masculinity in the Hebrew Bible and beyond* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Pr, 2010), 54-63, p56.

⁷⁵² Dohmen, *Exodus*, 308; Begg, "The Destruction of the Calf (Exod 32,20 and Deut 9,21)", 230-233; see also discussion in: Christopher T. Begg, "The Destruction of the Golden Calf Revisited (Exod 32,20/Deut 9,21)," in *Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic Literature: Festschrift C. H. W. Brekelmans*, ed. M Verenne and J Lust (Louvain: Leuven Univ Pr, 1997), 469-79; Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:659.

⁷⁵³ Herring, "Moses as Divine Substitute in Exodus," 62.

6.2.2.4. Conclusions regarding Moses' characterisation through action

From this brief survey it can be seen that Moses' descent from the mountain mirrors YHWH's words to Moses on the mountain. Moses perceives the rebellion of the people before Joshua does, and reacts with the same anger that YHWH has already threatened. Moses executes punishment as YHWH had threatened. Only then does Moses return to intercede for the people to attempt to make atonement for their sin. Moses' actions here reflect YHWH's anger, and raise the question of how these actions match his attempt to mediate in 32:7-14. Dozeman argues that the "abrupt shift in character signals that Moses' loyalty to Yahweh will now take precedence in his character development over his previous role as mediator for the people."⁷⁵⁴ It is arguable that it is better to say that, since Moses is the means by which the people and YHWH interact throughout these chapters, Moses is acting as mediator in both situations. While he is with YHWH, his representation of the people is in view, but while he is with the people, his carrying of YHWH's presence is in view.

6.3. CHARACTERISATION THROUGH SPEECH

6.3.1. YHWH's Speeches

6.3.1.1. YHWH's Anger: 32:7-10

YHWH's speech is divided into two parts, each beginning "and YHWH said to Moses" (v7, v9). The first part opens with a direct command to Moses to descend the mountain because "your people" have made a calf, worshipped it, sacrificed to it and described it as the "god(s)"⁷⁵⁵ who brought you up out of the land of Egypt". This description of Israel as

⁷⁵⁴ Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 710.

⁷⁵⁵ See discussion in Moberly and others regarding whether the calf was intended to represent YHWH, or intended to be a different deity. The issue, while clearly of some importance does not directly impact on the dialogue here, but will be returned to at a later point in our discussion: Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 46.

“your people” to Moses has the effect of distancing YHWH from the people.⁷⁵⁶ One aspect of the narrative that it will be important to examine is to what extent this distancing is reversed.

YHWH observes that Israel has been *quick* to turn aside “from the way that I commanded them”. YHWH’s perspective on the people’s action contrasts with Exodus 32 where the Israelites “saw that Moses *delayed* to come down the mountain.” Furthermore this initial speech of YHWH describes in detail, mirroring the narrator’s description in Exodus 32:1-6, exactly what is going on at the foot of the mountain.⁷⁵⁷ YHWH does not need to “go down” to obtain this knowledge, nor is it something he is said to have “seen”; rather he is described as simply having it.⁷⁵⁸

The second part of YHWH’s speech begins “I have seen”. In this case YHWH has seen the stubbornness of the people: רָאִיתִי אֶת־הָעַם הַזֶּה וְהִנֵּה עִם־קִשְׁיָה־עַרְףְּ הוּא. Here the וְהִנֵּה clause draws the attention of the reader to YHWH’s perception. The verb רָאִיתִי becomes something of a *Leitwort* within the narrative (already having been mentioned in v1 and v5 with the people and Aaron as subjects respectively).⁷⁵⁹ Here רָאִיתִי highlights that YHWH’s perception runs deeper than mere external actions, YHWH knows the actions of the people and as a result perceives that they are indeed “stiff-necked”, which becomes something of a theme (33:3, 33:5, 34:9) on the lips of both YHWH and Moses.⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁵⁶ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 94; Fretheim and Childs both note that the “your people” mirrors Israel’s description of the calf as “these are your gods O Israel”: Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 567; and: Fretheim, *Exodus*, 283.

⁷⁵⁷ Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue*, 23.

⁷⁵⁸ Unlike Babel or Sodom, where YHWH is said to come down in order to see: Howell, *In the Eyes of God*, 197.

⁷⁵⁹ Dohmen, *Exodus*, 303.

⁷⁶⁰ Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 49.

YHWH's perception leads him to instruct Moses to "leave me alone, so that my anger may burn against them", and to his threat to destroy Israel. Moses alone would remain, and YHWH would make Moses into a great nation. The implication of YHWH's statement is that if Moses does not leave him alone then YHWH's anger may be quenched. YHWH's anger is therefore something that YHWH has control over. It is not a sudden rage that overcomes him; rather it is a decision he takes to allow his anger to burn.⁷⁶¹

However YHWH does not simply do this, rather he first tells Moses to "leave him alone" so that he can do it. This implies that YHWH wants Moses to know what he is doing, and to understand his thoughts, and also that YHWH is correctly anticipating Moses' reaction. YHWH does not simply destroy and then explain, but explains first, and any giving of an explanation invites, in one sense, questions and challenges. I will investigate this dynamic further in the analysis of the dialogue below.

6.3.1.2. YHWH's Angel: 32:20-33:3

The details of this speech will be examined later in the context of the dialogue, but in this context it is important to note that YHWH's words affirm divine sovereignty with respect to the people's sin, and a rebuff of Moses' attempts to change how YHWH might punish Israel. YHWH instructs Moses to lead the people to the land in 32:34 with the assurance that "my angel shall go before you". This instruction is repeated in 33:1-3, where God reiterates the promise of the land, and of protection, and affirms that he will send an angel

⁷⁶¹ Herion likens God's anger to descriptions of a king's anger in ANE accounts, and states "Royal 'wrath' is not necessarily a personal or idiosyncratic emotion but rather a programmatic orientation and, indeed, duty; it is more a matter of official policy than private sentiment": Gary A Herion, "Wrath of God (OT)," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, vol. 6, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 994-5. Further investigation of the narrative will help us see how far "official policy" and "private sentiment" can, or cannot, be separated in the character of YHWH, but the main point that wrath is not an emotional reaction, but rather the righteous opposition of a just ruler to rebels against his good rule seems a useful one.

before Israel. However, the promise of presence is withdrawn, God will now provide for his people “remote help, rather than an intimate presence”.⁷⁶²

6.3.1.3. Conclusions regarding the portrayal of YHWH through Speech

YHWH’s first speech declares his anger with the people, and his desire to destroy them. The reader does not hear about YHWH’s relenting from YHWH’s lips, which means the reader does not yet understand what YHWH’s relenting will entail for Israel, especially when it is followed by Moses’ fierce anger. The second speech contains YHWH’s promise to lead his people by means of an angel, YHWH’s promise of a day of punishment and YHWH’s declaration that his presence will not go with them. YHWH’s speeches show YHWH’s anger and disapproval of the people’s idolatry but in themselves are difficult to interpret. YHWH states that he will punish sin, but does not specify how or when. Moberly comments, “in the light of v14 the reader knows that Yahweh has not rejected his people. Therefore the covenant is not abrogated, despite the people’s unfaithfulness, but somehow God will be merciful and restore his people.”⁷⁶³ It is this “somehow” that YHWH’s speeches demonstrate YHWH’s own wrestling with.

6.3.2. Moses’ speeches

6.3.2.1. Moses Intercedes: 32:11-13

Here Moses refuses YHWH’s offer which would make him a new patriarch of a new people, and argues with YHWH. Moses here is shown as a bold negotiator, implicitly risking YHWH’s anger, and pleading on the basis of YHWH’s reputation and promise for YHWH to turn from his anger and relent. Moses is shown as a key figure in ensuring the survival of Israel, and a partner in YHWH’s relationship with the people.⁷⁶⁴ I will discuss the

⁷⁶² Davis, “Rebellion, Presence, and Covenant,” 76.

⁷⁶³ Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 53.

⁷⁶⁴ Fretheim, *Exodus*, 286.

interaction of Moses' speech with YHWH's in further detail below in the analysis of the dialogue between Moses and YHWH.

6.3.2.2. Moses Seeks to Make Atonement: 32:30-31

Moses addresses both the people and YHWH. "The next day", after the intensity of his descent and the ensuing events, he returns to YHWH to make atonement. The "perhaps" indicates he is not certain of success, and may reflect the way in which his previous conversation with YHWH finished in 32:14. Moses ascends once more to intercede for the people, but this time he will do so with the full knowledge of their "great sin". There is some degree of irony in Moses' appeal to YHWH in 32:31, where he recounts the sin of Israel to YHWH in similar words to those with which YHWH told him about the sin originally. Moses' sight of the people and the calf has enabled him to understand YHWH's perspective on events more fully, and roused Moses to the same anger that YHWH had threatened. However Moses also displays a concern for, and identification with, the people as shown by his prayer.

Just how strong this identification was is shown by his offer to be blotted out, either instead of, or along with, Israel.⁷⁶⁵ Moses begins with what can be read as the first part of a conditional statement "If you will forgive their sins", where the apodosis is then omitted, with something like "then do so" implied.⁷⁶⁶ This is more naturally translated into English as "please forgive their sins", with the second part added to strengthen the request by offering his own status in YHWH's scroll as a bargaining counter, so that he is saying "if you will not forgive their sins, then wipe me out too".⁷⁶⁷

⁷⁶⁵ See the following for the former view: O'Brien, "The Dynamics of the Golden Calf Story (Exodus 32-34)," 25; Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 423; Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 333; or, for the latter see: Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 700, 712; and Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, 955-956.

⁷⁶⁶ See: #697 Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 211.

⁷⁶⁷ Kürle, *Appeal*, 187.

Thus by this speech and his preceding actions Moses is portrayed as having the same view of Israel's sin that YHWH does. Yet Moses still has a passionate desire, to the point of wanting to share their fate, to see Israel saved from divine punishment. He knows that Israel's fate hangs in the balance, and that up the mountain the scene has not moved on. YHWH has relented, the reader knows, from destroying the people but it is possible that Moses does not know this. Moses, having seen the calf, knows that YHWH has every right to be angry.

6.3.2.3. Conclusions Regarding the Portrayal of Moses' speech in the narrative

In this brief overview of Moses' speeches Moses is portrayed as the mediator *par-excellence*, knowing and appreciating the perspective of both parties and offering himself to ensure his people's survival. I turn now to analyse the dialogues between YHWH and Moses themselves in order to see what they add to YHWH's characterisation.

6.4. ANALYSIS OF THE DIALOGUES

6.4.1. Intercession and Relenting: 32:7-15

⁷And YHWH said to Moses:

A1a COMMAND : "Go, go down because your people whom you brought up from the land of Egypt have behaved corruptly. ⁸They have quickly turned away from the way which I commanded them, they have made for themselves a bull-image, they have bowed down to it, they have sacrificed to it, and they have said:

'these are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt.'

⁹So YHWH said to Moses:

A1b COMMAND: "I have seen that this people are indeed a stiff necked people. ¹⁰So now: leave me alone, so that my anger may burn against them and consume them and I will make you into a great people.

¹¹But Moses implored YHWH his God, and he said:

Ins.A1 INTERCESSION (PREF): "Why, O YHWH, will you let your anger burn against your people whom you brought out from Egypt by your great strength and by a mighty hand? ¹²Why should the Egyptians say:

"with evil (intent) he led them out, to slay them in anger and to wipe them from the earth"

Turn from your burning anger and relent over this evil to your people!

¹³Remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel your servants to whom you swore by yourself and said to them

‘I will make your seed as the stars of the heavens and all this land which I promised, I will give to your seed and they will take possession of it forever.’”

Ins.A2 COMPLIANCE⁷⁶⁸ (PREF) ¹⁴So YHWH relented from the evil which he had spoken to do to his people.

A2a OBEDIENCE⁷⁶⁹ (PREF) ¹⁵Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand – tablets that were written on both sides, on front and back they were written.⁷⁷⁰

In this set of dialogues YHWH’s first speeches are relatively straightforward in terms of dialogue; both are commands to Moses. YHWH’s first command begins with the same word as in the call narrative of Exodus 3, “Go!” This time the command is not to go and rescue the people but to go down and leave YHWH alone so that he can destroy the people. YHWH’s command defines Israel according to their speech in 32:1-6. They have described the golden calf as “these are your gods, O Israel”, thus disassociating themselves from YHWH, who has outlawed all idolatry (Exodus 20). YHWH responds by describing them as “your people” as he tells their sin to Moses.⁷⁷¹

YHWH’s second command to Moses, “now leave me alone”, has the opposite effect of its obvious meaning. However it may well be that this opposite effect is actually its intended impact all along. Houtman argues YHWH’s words are a genuine request to be left alone and therefore mean YHWH is “fully determined to carry out his plan”. Houtman suggests this explanation is not often favoured because commentators do not like the implication that then arises from 32:14: “that a human being can change YHWH’s mind”.⁷⁷² However, through the centuries a number of commentators have seen YHWH’s request as an implicit

⁷⁶⁸ At least in some limited sense, see discussion below.

⁷⁶⁹ At least in new altered circumstances

⁷⁷⁰ A clumsy English sentence, but it reflects the repetition of the Hebrew, and the emphasis of writing that continues into the next verse.

⁷⁷¹ The effect this has of distancing YHWH from the people has been noted by (among others): Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 94; Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 567; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 283.

⁷⁷² Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:646.

invitation to Moses to intercede for the people.⁷⁷³ Recently Kürle has argued that YHWH's "leave me alone" carries the "rhetorical intent to invite Moses' intercession: the reader, as well, expects Moses to interfere".⁷⁷⁴ He argues that Tiemeyer's survey of Jewish and Christian interpretations through the centuries of Noah and the flood, Abraham and Sodom, and Moses' intercession at Sinai demonstrates that when a character in the narrative is given foreknowledge of imminent judgement it creates an expectation in the reader's mind of intercession to come.⁷⁷⁵ Tiemeyer also argues that when YHWH is finally determined to punish he specifically forbids intercession (e.g. Jer. 7:16).⁷⁷⁶

A consideration of the nature of everyday conversation is useful here because it is possible in everyday conversation to mean the opposite of the "theoretical" meaning of the words, and it is certainly possible that certain types of speech forms mean something different to what the words seem to mean.⁷⁷⁷ The question is whether it is possible to see YHWH's stated intention as actually also containing an implicit invitation to action. It is here that the analogy offered by Widmer is of help. Widmer cited Jeremiah 18:1-12 in support of the idea that YHWH's declaration of judgement always invites repentance followed by a "change of mind" by YHWH.⁷⁷⁸ In the Old Testament there are examples of characters who averted declared judgement by YHWH because of their remorse or repentance (e.g. Ahab in 1 Kgs. 21:27-29; the King of Nineveh in Jon. 3:1-10).

Against the usefulness of this it could be objected that there is no repentance in 32:10-14 by the people, simply the intercession of the mediator. However, Widmer also makes the

⁷⁷³ See discussion in: Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 567; Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 50; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 283–5; Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 98–102.

⁷⁷⁴ Kürle, *Appeal*, 74.

⁷⁷⁵ *Ibid.*; and see discussion in: Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "The Compassionate God of Traditional Jewish and Christian Exegesis," *TynBul* 58, no. 2 (2007): 183–207.

⁷⁷⁶ Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "God's Hidden Compassion," *TynBul* 57, no. 2 (2006): 191–213, p204.

⁷⁷⁷ See for example the fascinating discussion in Boyle regarding a study of responses to the question "how are you?" which demonstrates that in modern English this is a question that does not always "prefer" the correct answer: Boyle, "Whatever Happened to Preference Organisation?" 595–597.

⁷⁷⁸ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 102.

case that Psalm 106:23, which speaks about Moses “standing in the breach before YHWH” and Ezekiel 22:30 where YHWH speaks about how he looked for someone to “stand in the breach” so that he would not need to bring about the exile, taken together suggest that even when judgement has been declared YHWH looks for a mediator who will “stand in the breach” created by the people’s sin.⁷⁷⁹

Therefore Moses’ refusal to leave YHWH alone is the “preferred” response in terms of divine-human relationships. The description of Moses’ action in response to YHWH’s speeches is: וַיַּחַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת־פְּנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו.⁷⁸⁰ Widmer notes its use elsewhere in the Old Testament to precede petitions (1 Kgs. 13:6; 2 Kgs. 13:4; Jer. 26:19).⁷⁸¹

Moses’ response begins with the deferential introduction noted above, and moves on to address YHWH’s rejection of the people. Moses says nothing about the sin of the people, but argues entirely on the basis of the people’s identity as “your people” (i.e. YHWH’s people), whom “you brought up from the land of Egypt”.⁷⁸² Thus Moses seeks to re-connect YHWH to the people by words that remind YHWH of his actions for Israel in the Exodus, as they evoke the language of 6:2-8.⁷⁸³ This is an inversion of the initial calling dialogues where YHWH sought to connect Moses to the people he was some distance from.⁷⁸⁴

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid., 102–103.

⁷⁸⁰ Lit: “to soften the face of”, see: “*daraufhin besänftigte Mose das Angesicht JHWHs, seines Gottes*” Dohmen, *Exodus*, 289.

⁷⁸¹ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 107.

⁷⁸² Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue*, 24–25.

⁷⁸³ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 109.

⁷⁸⁴ As previously see: Seitz, “The Call of Moses and the ‘Revelation’ of the Divine Name”, 151; and see comments of: Polak, “Theophany and Mediator,” 145.

Moses argues on the basis of what the Egyptians will say, when they hear of Israel's destruction, in an explicit appeal to YHWH's reputation.⁷⁸⁵ This is not simply an appeal to YHWH's vanity, as if Israel's destruction would show him to lack power.⁷⁸⁶ Rather it is to avoid the Egyptians slandering YHWH's reputation for compassion and justice by attributing evil design to YHWH.⁷⁸⁷ Moses boldly calls on YHWH to "turn" from his anger, "relent" of his threatened punishment and to "remember" his promise to the patriarchs.⁷⁸⁸

This speech of Moses has the immediately desired effect, and in Ins.A2 YHWH relents and does not bring about the threatened disaster. In the analysis of the dialogue I have considered Moses' intercession and YHWH's relenting as forming an insertion sequence. Moses goes down the mountain, in obedience to YHWH's initial command. This is different to Suomala's analysis where YHWH's speech and Moses' reply is one pair, and YHWH's relenting and Moses' descent is the second pair.⁷⁸⁹ Suomala argues that Moses' descent is a simple response to YHWH's relenting: "Although there is initial contention between God and Moses, they both ultimately respond in line with the commands and concerns of the other."⁷⁹⁰ However, Widmer observes that the narrative makes explicit only that YHWH has relented from punishment, while saying nothing about whether the people are forgiven and how the relationship will work in future.⁷⁹¹

Furthermore the narrative does not record how, or even whether, YHWH's relenting from his punishment was heard by Moses. This forms something of a mirror image of Exodus 4, where YHWH becomes angry with Moses but the reader is not told how the anger was

⁷⁸⁵ Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue*, 24.

⁷⁸⁶ Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 2:555.

⁷⁸⁷ Moses has the Egyptians saying when they hear of the Israelite demise: "it was with evil intent...", i.e. they would slander God's design and intentions, not his power; see similarly: Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 110–111.

⁷⁸⁸ Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue*, 25.

⁷⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷⁹¹ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 122.

experienced. This silence is particularly striking by comparison with Numbers 14 where YHWH immediately declares his pardon in line with Moses' request. It is therefore difficult to read Moses' descent as a response to YHWH's relenting, especially given subsequent events. Instead Moses' descent is in obedience to YHWH's initial instruction, and the reader reads on to discover (or not) how far Moses has been taken into YHWH's counsels.

Thus this section provides the reader with a somewhat enigmatic portrayal of the Moses-YHWH relationship. YHWH involves Moses in his thoughts and there is boldness on Moses' part before YHWH; both of these speak of a degree of intimacy. Yet there is no description of what YHWH's relenting will mean, and no instructions on what Moses is to do next. As the reader moves on through the narrative it will be important to understand to what degree and for what reasons the portrayal remains enigmatic.

6.4.2. Moses, Aaron and the People: 32:16-30

I will comment briefly on Moses' dialogues with Aaron and interaction with the people in order to understand Moses' portrayal better. In this study of the narrative I want to see how far Moses in this scene can be understood as acting in accordance with YHWH's plans and intentions,⁷⁹² and indeed also how Moses' actions and speech can be understood as carrying out YHWH's actions and speech, even when the narrative has not given the reader any prior warning of this.

6.4.2.1. Moses and Aaron in Dialogue: 32:16-24

Moses turns to Aaron for an explanation of his actions. Aaron's answer begins with a plea for Moses not to be angry, but unlike Moses before YHWH (and like Adam blaming Eve)

⁷⁹² In other words we will see how far Kürle can be said to be correct when he suggests that the introduction of Moses into the book of Exodus can be seen as a "deconstruction of an idealised Moses" and then as the narrative progresses the "rehabilitation of Moses" takes place so that Moses is "an exemplary character, at least when it comes to his obedience. In this respect, Moses appears as a paradigmatic character in Exodus". Kürle, *Appeal*, 172.

he places the blame on the people.⁷⁹³ He follows this by an accurate account of what the people had said, and what he had said in response, although his conclusion “and out came this calf” sounds rather weak.⁷⁹⁴ Childs points out the contrast between Moses’ intercession for the people and Aaron’s blaming of the people.⁷⁹⁵ Moses establishes Aaron’s guilt and the people’s guilt in a manner analogous to how YHWH questions people (see for example Genesis 3).⁷⁹⁶ It is to the people that Moses’ focus now turns.

6.4.2.2. Moses and the Levites: 32:25-29

Here Moses once more “sees”, as he takes decisive action to regain control of the camp.⁷⁹⁷ Moses declares “thus says YHWH, God of Israel”, but no word of God is recorded by the narrator to validate this, and the Levites are said to act “according to the word of Moses.”⁷⁹⁸ On the other hand neither is it suggested that Moses’ claim is false. In the context of YHWH’s declared displeasure at the sin of Israel there Moses’ claim is not implausible.

This action of judgement assuages Moses’ wrath, and he returns to YHWH to attempt to make atonement for the people. Moses imagines that YHWH is still angry to some degree.

⁷⁹³ Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 54.

⁷⁹⁴ Cassuto, Brichto and Jacob, to differing degrees, provide a more positive reading of Aaron. Brichto suggests that the reader is supposed to take Aaron’s account of the production of the calf as accurate, even suggesting that the calf was in fact a miracle designed to test the people, a test they failed: Brichto, “The Worship of the Golden Calf,” 13, 15; Cassuto does not suggest a miracle, but does suggest that Aaron is indicating that the event was something where Aaron’s control was limited: Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 420; Jacob points out that Aaron’s guilt would have been the same whatever object had emerged at the end of the process so that “out came this calf” is simply the end of Aaron’s statement rather than an additional attempt to escape guilt: Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, 951.

⁷⁹⁵ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 570; See also: Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 54. While Aaron’s initial attempt to blame the people does not reflect well on his character, his final words reflect Herring’s summary of investigations into ANE installation rituals for gods, where when the idol was installed in the temple the priest would swear words to the effect “I did not make the statue”. Thus Aaron’s words reflect his role as a priest, and as such are not a clumsy attempt to avoid guilt, but indicate his involvement in the process: Herring, “Moses as Divine Substitute in Exodus,” 58.

⁷⁹⁶ Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 54.

⁷⁹⁷ Dohmen, *Exodus*, 310.

⁷⁹⁸ Leslie Brisman, “Sacred Butchery : Exodus 32:25-29,” in *Theological Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 162–81, pp165, 169; According to Clines the formulation “according to the word of Moses” comes only twice elsewhere, once in relation to God in Exodus 8:13, and once in relation to the people in Leviticus 10:7, a similarly sombre text of judgement. Clines, “Dancing and Shining at Sinai.”

While the reader knows that YHWH will not destroy the people it is possible that Moses does not know this. Furthermore neither the reader, nor Moses, knows what will change as a result of the sin, especially as the tablets have now been smashed. I turn now to the dialogue.

6.4.3. Moses pleads for forgiveness: 32:30-33:6

³⁰*And the next day Moses said to the people:*

A1 STATEMENT “You have sinned a great sin, but now I will go up to YHWH – perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.”

³¹*So Moses returned to the LORD and said:*

B1a REQUEST “This people have sinned a great sin, for they have made golden gods for themselves, so now please will you forgive their sins

B1b REQUEST ³²but if not, please blot me out from the scroll which you have written.”

³³*And YHWH said to Moses:*

B2b REFUSAL “Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot them out from my scroll.

B2a PARTIAL ACCEPTANCE ³⁴“But now go, lead the people to where I have spoken – for indeed my angel will go before you.

B2c WARNING But on the day I visit, I will visit their sins on them.”

Then YHWH struck the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made.

³³¹*And YHWH spoke to Moses:*

C1a COMMAND “Go, go up from this place –
you and the people whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt –
to the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob saying
‘To your seed I will give it’.

²And I will send an angel ⁷⁹⁹before you
and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites,
and the Hitites and the Perezites, the Hivites and the Jebusites
to a land flowing with milk and honey.

C1b WARNING But I will not go up in your midst, for you are a stiff-necked people, lest I consume you on the way.”

E1 STATEMENT - IMPLIED

⁴ E2 RESPONSE And when the people heard this hard word, they mourned and no-one put on his ornaments.

⁵*For YHWH had said to Moses:*

F1 COMMAND “say to the Israelites:

G1 COMMAND ‘You are a stiff-necked people, if for a short time I will go up in your midst then I might destroy you but now take off your ornaments so that I may know what I will do to you’

And Moses said (implied):

F2 OBEDIENCE it is implied, given Israel’s response, that Moses spoke YHWH’s words to them.

⁶G2 OBEDIENCE And the Israelites stripped off their ornaments from Mt Horeb.

⁷⁹⁹ LXX has “my angel”

6.4.3.1. Moses offers his life: 32:30-35

In his analyses of the dialogue in this section Suomala begins at 32:30 and ends at 32:35.⁸⁰⁰ He sees YHWH's striking of the people as a "dis-preferred" response to A1, with Moses failing to achieve what he set out to do.⁸⁰¹ However, Moses' statement in A1 is addressed to the people, and needs no response. Moses in B1 directly speaks with YHWH regarding the people's punishment, and receives a response (B2). I will consider the role 32:35 plays in the dialogue below

Suomala argues that the exclamations, $\aleph\aleph$ and $\aleph\aleph$, are used in Moses' speech to provide an impression of deference, but that Moses' actual speech with its ultimatum to God presents a sharp contrast.⁸⁰² He notes that Moses uses his own status to bargain with God, although ultimately unsuccessfully.⁸⁰³ The first part of Moses' speech is by now familiar to the reader in that each section of Exodus 32 relates to the making of the calf, and reactions of different individuals to the calf.⁸⁰⁴ In Exodus 32:30 when Moses speaks to the Israelites he simply mentions their "great sin", but when he speaks to YHWH he adds the explanation that they have made a golden god. This is a way of acknowledging that YHWH has spoken rightly about the sin of the people. It is also a summary of YHWH's words to Moses in 32:8, so there is a degree of irony in Moses coming back up the mountain and repeating them to YHWH.

Moses requests that if YHWH will not forgive the people, YHWH should blot Moses out of his book. This is a further negative response by Moses to YHWH's initial statement that he would in effect start again with Moses. Moses offers YHWH a choice: forgiveness or

⁸⁰⁰ Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue*, 26–27.

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁸⁰² *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁴ So 32:1-6 described the making of the golden calf, 32:7-10 described YHWH's reaction to the calf, 32:15-20 Moses' reaction to the calf and 32:21-24 Aaron's account of the making of the calf.

complete punishment. The reader has seen that Moses' request comes in two stages, the first being a request for Israel's sins to be forgiven, the second an attempt to use his own life to bargain with YHWH.

Suomala identifies three parts to YHWH's response: YHWH's affirmation that he will punish the sin of whoever sins against him, YHWH's charge to Moses to lead the people to the land, accompanied by an angel and finally YHWH's promise to punish Israel at some future time.⁸⁰⁵ The first part is a refusal to the second part of Moses' request and is a general statement regarding YHWH's ways; he will blot out from his scroll whoever sins against him. This general statement rules out Moses' attempt to be blotted out along with the people. YHWH follows this general statement with a more specific reply to Moses detailing what the next step will be. This is a similar pattern to YHWH's replies to Moses in 3:11, 13-15 and 4:11-12, where each time YHWH's statement relating to his character or general way of working is followed up by more detailed instructions regarding the particular case, as can be seen in the following table:

| | Exodus 32:30-34 | Exodus 3:14-15 |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Moses' objection | Forgive, and if not blot me out. | "They will ask, 'what is his name', what shall I say?" |
| General statement regarding YHWH | "I will blot out whoever sins against me." | And God said to Moses: "I will be who I will be." |
| Specific instruction | But now go; lead the people to where I have spoken – for indeed my messenger will go before you. But on the day I "visit", I will "visit" their sins on them. | And he said: "Thus you shall say to the Israelites: 'I will be has sent me to you'" And again he said to Moses: "Thus you shall say to the Israelites: 'YHWH, God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has sent me to you'". |

The answer YHWH gives is rarely straightforward, but his replies advance the understanding of his character. YHWH expands the horizons of Moses at each opportunity. Therefore while the response may be "dis-preferred" in the context of a conversation between two people, it fits a regular pattern in the context of the conversation between

⁸⁰⁵ Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue*, 28.

Moses and YHWH. In Exodus 32:31-34 the pattern of YHWH's response differs in that the general statement regarding YHWH's punishment of sin is revisited at the end of the statement in a strong warning about his punishment of sin. The impact of this will be seen below. I noted above (6.4.1.) that these dialogues demonstrate a role reversal of sorts in that Moses is now the one asking YHWH to identify with the people and save them. However this role reversal does not extend to the structure of the dialogues, where Moses is still the one asking questions or objecting to YHWH's plan, while YHWH re-orientates Moses.

The second stage of YHWH's response (B2a)⁸⁰⁶ is a partial acceptance of Moses' second plea for YHWH to forgive the people. Forgiveness is not mentioned but YHWH promises to send an angel "before you". The identity of this messenger has been a matter of much dispute among interpreters, but one possibility is that the words here allude to Exodus 23:20. The only difference would be that in 23:20 it is simply "an angel", while in 32:33 it is "my angel". This is not a major problem as the "my" suffix makes sense as a summary of 23:21's "for my name is in him". However because the angel in 23:21 is a carrier of the divine presence it is difficult to identify it with the angel in 32:33 and 33:2-3 which does not appear to carry the divine presence.⁸⁰⁷ However more likely is that the revoking of the presence is related to the abandonment of the tabernacle, as it is this that YHWH himself specifically links with the language of his presence in covenantal terms in Exodus 29.⁸⁰⁸ The reader here needs to be alert to the different possibilities implied in the concept of divine presence; YHWH can manifest himself in different ways depending on the circumstances. Thus the "angels" of 23:20-21 and 32:33 and 33:2-3 are the same.

⁸⁰⁶ This has been designated as B2a even though it is the second part of YHWH's response because it is a response to the first part of Moses' question.

⁸⁰⁷ Since YHWH specifically revokes his presence in 33:2-3: Durham, *Exodus*, 436.

⁸⁰⁸ See Moberly's helpful discussion of the issue in: Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 62-63.

There is a final statement of warning (B2c). YHWH promises that when he comes to “visit”, he will “visit” their sins on them. In this warning there is an ominous indefiniteness. YHWH will punish, but it is not clear when. O’Brien identifies this statement regarding divine “visiting” as one of three “codes of divine conduct” in Exodus 32-34 that are based on Exodus 20:5b-6, with 32:34 here reflecting 20:5b.⁸⁰⁹

As YHWH’s statements of self-disclosure are looked at further it will be seen that this indefiniteness has further parallels in other statements. The first parallel to note is to YHWH’s initial act of self-disclosure to Moses “I will be who I will be”. The indefiniteness here has the effect of keeping Moses and the reader in suspense regarding the eventual punishment of the people. YHWH’s reply promises that Moses will lead the people to the Promised Land, and that he will fulfil his statements in Exodus 23 regarding the way Israel will be brought into the land. Yet it also makes clear that there is a day of punishment to come, when the sins of the people will be punished. How this sharp tension is to be resolved is at the heart of this section of the book of Exodus.

One intriguing feature of this section of YHWH’s dialogue is the emphasis on the people’s responsibility. YHWH does not say that he will visit the sins of the current generation on a future generation, rather that he will punish the people because of their sin against him. This matches his reply to Moses. Moses cannot be blotted out of YHWH’s book unless Moses has actually sinned against YHWH. YHWH’s reply to Moses has the effect of affirming the responsibility of the current generation, and raises the expectation that they will still face some kind of punishment.

⁸⁰⁹ O’Brien, “The Dynamics of the Golden Calf Story (Exodus 32-34),” 26.

One further dimension to YHWH's statement in Exodus 32:34 can be understood by reading it as almost a play on the several meanings that נָקַם can have. In Exodus 3 the verb was used with a positive sense of YHWH paying attention to the suffering of the people. If the first use of נָקַם carries this overtone in 32:34, but the second has its usual negative overtone of punishment in the construction found there, then the verse could be translated "Yet on the day I come to them, then I will punish them for their sin." This matches the warning in 33:3 almost exactly; YHWH's presence is toxic within the context of a sinful people because when YHWH is in their midst he must punish their sin.

This ominous warning is followed by YHWH striking the people. I noted above that it does not seem that this striking functions as the final "punishment", spoken about in the earlier verse, but rather that it functions as a warning to the people of what YHWH is prepared to do.⁸¹⁰ YHWH striking the people comes at an unexpected place in the narrative. If my analysis of how YHWH's speech works is correct then one would expect some sort of acknowledgement by Moses, or even by the people once they hear YHWH's words, but YHWH strikes the people before any such response.

It is possible to understand YHWH's action as the fulfilment of his previous speech, i.e. that this is the day of punishment.⁸¹¹ It has been noted however that YHWH's action falls rather oddly in the flow of the narrative.⁸¹² YHWH's speech to Moses "on the day I punish, I will punish" seems to place punishment at a future point along the journey, rather than immediately (where something like "now I will strike" might be more obvious).

Therefore YHWH's action in striking the people seems most naturally construed as a

⁸¹⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹¹ Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 59.

⁸¹² Ruth Scoralick, *Gottes Güte Und Gottes Zorn: Die Gottesprädikationen in Exodus 34,6f Und Ihre Intertextuellen Beziehungen Zum Zwölfprophetenbuch*, Herders biblische Studien (Freiburg; Basel; Wien; Barcelona; Rom; New York: Herder, 2002), 98.

warning to the people, who might wonder if the Levites' action had been excessive. Here YHWH's narrated action forms a direct divine parallel to the action of the Levites, and while this does not necessarily constitute divine approval for their action, it does make clear that YHWH's anger is still an issue.

The text is very terse. No actual description is given of what YHWH did to Israel, other than "to strike" the people. This verb is used in the context of the plague narratives as describing YHWH's striking of Egypt, and it therefore places Israel in a similar category as those who oppose God's plan. The reader is not told the result of YHWH's "striking", whether it resulted in more deaths, or simply mass suffering of some kind. Whichever is correct, in the context of the threatened destruction of the people and the repeated instruction to Moses to lead the people before and after YHWH striking them (32:34, and 33:1-2), it gives greater force to YHWH's warning in 33:3,⁸¹³ and in that sense can be viewed as a severe form of mercy which encourages the people to have the correct response in 33:4.

It is in this way that YHWH's reply to Moses has the effect of re-orientating Moses' perspective. Moses seeks forgiveness for the people, and attempts to offer his own life if that will make the people's survival more likely. YHWH's reply contradicts Moses' belief that he will be able to barter his life for the people by asserting that he will punish the one who sins against him, and then directs Moses back to the task of leading the people to the land (as summarised in the phrase "my angel will go before you"), while warning Moses of the consequences should YHWH "visit" the people. Moses now knows that the people's future is assured (in terms of entering the land), but that YHWH's actual presence would be highly dangerous for the people.

⁸¹³ O'Brien, "The Dynamics of the Golden Calf Story (Exodus 32-34)," 26.

6.4.3.2. The People Mourn: 33:1-6

YHWH's speech follows, in the narrative, the striking of Israel by YHWH. YHWH can be said to be regaining the initiative, and once more commissions Moses to go down. The speech follows the form of YHWH's previous speech closely, with the addition of more detail. The people are described as "the people whom you brought up...", and the mention of the patriarchs demonstrates YHWH's commitment to the promises. The angel's work in driving out the people is affirmed (cf. Exodus 23) and the land is once more spoken of as "flowing with milk and honey". All this encourages the hearers and readers of the speech. The sting in the tale of the speech is YHWH's statement that he will not "go up in their midst".

This speech is regarded by Suomala as not part of the dialogue because Moses does not respond to it.⁸¹⁴ However, while Moses' response is not recorded, the speech must come to Israel mediated through Moses, and therefore Moses' speeches are implied by the narrator and therefore of interest. This pattern of speech occurred previously in Exodus 6, where YHWH spoke to Moses, and then Moses spoke to the people, but Moses' speech was just recorded with "and he said thus". Here the omission has gone a stage further and there is no reference to the words of Moses. However, given everything else that the reader has read in Exodus thus far, and the response of the people here, it is reasonable to suppose that Moses relays YHWH's statement to the people.⁸¹⁵ The effect of this non-recording of Moses' speeches is to show events and understandings from the perspective of the people and their relationship with God. This perspective is emphasised by the shift from Moses

⁸¹⁴ Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue*, 29.

⁸¹⁵ YHWH commands Moses to give a particular command to Israel. Israel obeys the command, which implies that Moses has obeyed YHWH's command even if the text simply does not record it. I noted earlier that the narrative often takes as read obedience in such situations.

as the addressee to the people by the end of the speech.⁸¹⁶ This is an example of the concept of the “disappearing messenger” observed earlier in this study.⁸¹⁷

There has been some discussion over when the removal of the “jewellery” from the people took place, but there is no need to examine the issue here.⁸¹⁸ For the purpose of the study it is enough to note that their removal is in mourning over the loss of the divine presence.⁸¹⁹

While Moses’ intercession appears to have secured the people safe conduct and possession of the land, this is at the cost of YHWH’s presence. It is simply too dangerous for a holy God to go with his sinful people “lest he destroy them on the way”.

YHWH’s final words “so that I may know what to do with you” add additional uncertainty into the equation. The fate of the people hangs in the balance, as YHWH decides what to do. There is a contrast with Exodus 2:25, where the final words describing God’s awareness are: “and God knew”. In Exodus 2 God’s knowledge was the anticipation of Exodus 3, where God’s mission and name were revealed. Here YHWH is portrayed as being undecided as to how exactly his relationship with the people will progress. A disjunction in characterisation invites us to read on in the narrative to discover if YHWH’s ignorance should be taken at face value, or if it is part of a larger narrative strategy, as with his command to Moses to “leave me alone”. After the tension reaches its highest point in narrative terms as YHWH decides what he will do (33:5), the narrative changes pace to depict Moses and YHWH’s ongoing relationship in terms of the meeting tent.

⁸¹⁶ “You and this people” moves to “you are a stiff necked people”.

⁸¹⁷ While Moses cannot be considered a “minor character”, his “disappearance” at this point does put the focus on YHWH and the people: Grossman, “The Vanishing Character in Biblical Narrative,” 571.

⁸¹⁸ Brichto suggests that the beginning of v5 should be taken as a pluperfect, thus “the Lord had said to Moses”. Brichto, “The Worship of the Golden Calf”, 21-22; Baden has proposed that the text should be emended so that the final word of v4 has a *mem* in front of it. This would give the sense “no-one took off (lit: from) his ornaments”: Joel S. Baden, “On Exodus 33,1-11,” *ZAW* 124, no. 3 (2012): 329–40, p344.

⁸¹⁹ Herring notes a contrast here between the removal of the ear-rings in 32:1-6 in an attempt to secure the divine presence, and the removal of the ornaments here in mourning at the loss of the divine presence: Herring, “Moses as Divine Substitute in Exodus,” 59.

6.4.4. YHWH and Moses Face to Face: 33:7-11

I will investigate this unit here because, despite the fact that it does not record any actual speech of Moses, it describes Moses and YHWH in “face to face” conversation. In the narrative of Exodus 32-34 the tension is heightened by the seeming change of pace as YHWH’s and Moses’ regular interaction is described. Such is the striking nature of the change of pace that many commentators have not hesitated to describe these verses as an interpolation which does not really belong in this location at all.⁸²⁰

However a number of more recent commentators have argued that 33:7-11 is not at such variance to its context, and even that it plays a central role in Exodus 32-34. It is pointed out that 33:7 follows from 33:4-6 as another sign of the loss of YHWH’s presence in the camp. Just as the people strip their ornaments, so Moses pitches the tent “outside the camp”, indeed “at a distance from the camp”, with several repetitions of “outside the camp” to reinforce the point.⁸²¹ Moses’ access to God contrasts with the distance at which the people remain.⁸²² Moses goes outside the camp to receive YHWH’s revelation for the people, while the whole people stand and watch.⁸²³ This forms a contrast to the golden calf and is a forward link to the end of the section in 34:29-35.⁸²⁴

Newing identifies a set of structures for Exodus 32-34, which places Exodus 33:7-11 right at the centre of Exodus 32-34.⁸²⁵ His analysis of Exodus 33:7-11 places the emphasis of the section firmly on the conversation of YHWH and Moses face to face, as a man with his

⁸²⁰ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 589–90; Durham, *Exodus*, 442.

⁸²¹ O’Brien, “The Dynamics of the Golden Calf Story (Exodus 32-34),” 27; Newing, “Up and Down--In and Out : Moses on Mount Sinai: The Literary Unity Of Exodus 32-34,” 21; Gianni Barbiero, “Ex xxxiii 7-11 : Eine Synchrone Lektüre,” *VT* 50, no. 2 (2000): 154.

⁸²² Barbiero, “Ex xxxiii 7-11,” 156.

⁸²³ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁸²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁵ Newing, “Up and Down--In and Out : Moses on Mount Sinai: The Literary Unity Of Exodus 32-34,” 28; two (slightly differing) larger structures of the “hexateuch” would suggest that this passage lies at the heart of the “salvation-history” section of the “primary history” see: *Ibid.*, 27; and Pekka Pitkänen, “Reading Genesis–Joshua as a Unified Document from an Early Date: A Settler Colonial Perspective,” *BTB* 45, no. 1 (2015): 3–31.

friend.⁸²⁶ Strictly speaking the word “friend” could be translated “neighbour”, but the context of the events warrants the description “friend”.⁸²⁷ This makes the nature of the meeting as “face to face” even more striking. Lapsley observes that “face to face” is usually used of divine-human encounters rather than human-human, and that these encounters are “intense, dramatic, and fraught with danger”, and yet that the following phrase “evokes the ordinariness of everyday conversations between people”, and thus “a highly unusual, dangerous experience has become a customary, everyday occurrence.”⁸²⁸

The scene is set for the following narrative, which the reader is presumably to understand taking place in the tent. The description of Moses’ face to face meetings with YHWH and the people’s watching of this event forms a vivid contrast to the golden calf narrative, and something of an interlude after the tension of 33:1-6. The status of the people is still in question, with YHWH’s statement of 33:5 hanging over the scene. The portrayal of the events in 33:7-11 however tends to reassure the reader that some way will be found for YHWH to avoid destroying the people. The question is how far YHWH will be present with his people and it is this that leads Moses to intercession in the next section. Moses intercedes first for the divine presence to go with the people and then for an unparalleled sight of YHWH’s glory.

6.4.5. Dialogue Conclusions

In these dialogues YHWH and Moses are shown to have an intimate relationship. YHWH invites Moses into his confidence and responds to Moses’ intercessions and pleas. YHWH’s first response to Moses is simply to relent from his threat to destroy the people. However, by YHWH’s silence, doubt is created over what remaining consequences there will be for the people and what YHWH relenting will look like. Moses’ speech and actions to the

⁸²⁶ Newing, “Up and Down--In and Out : Moses on Mount Sinai: The Literary Unity Of Exodus 32-34,” 30.

⁸²⁷ Lapsley, “Friends with God?” 117–129, 120.

⁸²⁸ Ibid.

people appear to reflect the anger of YHWH in 32:10, and thus the reader of the narrative is driven to wonder if Moses does not realise YHWH has fully relented. Moses is operating on the assumption that YHWH requires some form of judgement to be carried out, and YHWH does nothing to contradict this assumption. Finally Moses returns to YHWH to “make atonement” for the sin of the people. He is rebuffed in this, and yet a future for the people is affirmed.

The dialogue affirms YHWH’s commitment to keep his promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and yet also affirms YHWH’s commitment to punish sin. Therefore for YHWH to come to “pay attention” to his people, which was a positive attention in Exodus 3 in relation to his people’s suffering, is a threatening attention in the context of an idolatrous people because it means punishment of their sin. YHWH’s final statement to Israel through Moses leaves their fate hanging in the balance.

6.5. CONCLUSIONS: EXODUS 32:1-33:11

A consideration of the narrative description of YHWH’s actions on their own left us with a distinctly unclear conception of YHWH’s character. YHWH’s speeches considered on their own contained a similar degree of difficulty. In the call narrative of Exodus 3-4 a consideration of the dialogue helped to clarify characterisation, but here there is still some difficulty over what YHWH’s purposes are in the dialogue. This section begins with YHWH’s relenting in 32:14, and concludes with Moses and YHWH in conversation at the tent. A reading of the dialogues emphasises that the reader does not know how YHWH conveyed his relenting in speech and neither does the reader know exactly what was said at the tent. The reader knows, however, that whatever YHWH’s refusal of Moses’ offer of atonement and his threats of future punishment mean in detail, there is a future for the

people and the door is at least open to further dialogue as YHWH decides what to do with the people.

Chapter 7

Dialogues of Restoration: Exodus 33:12-34:35

7.1. INTRODUCTION

At Exodus 33:12 a critical point in the narrative is reached in which YHWH is pictured as deciding what to do with the people. I will demonstrate that in Exodus 33:12-34:35 YHWH's dialogue with Moses gives further meaning and significance to the divine name because it links YHWH's presence with his zealous vigilance over his people⁸²⁹ that results in him both punishing sin and showing favour and compassion. Both punishment and favour are shown to be given on YHWH's initiative. However, Moses' role is also essential. Moses prompts YHWH to relent, wrests the promise of YHWH's presence, provokes the "fullest depiction of the name and nature of God within the whole bible",⁸³⁰ pleads for forgiveness for the people, and is confirmed as the one who mediates YHWH's presence to the people. In this section I will look at the dialogues in 33:13-23; and 34:1-28.⁸³¹ As usual I begin with characterisation through actions.

7.2. CHARACTERISATION THROUGH ACTIONS

7.2.1. YHWH's Actions

7.2.1.1. YHWH's writing: 34:1 and 34:27-28

YHWH invites Moses up the mountain in 34:1 with the instruction to bring up two tablets so that YHWH can write on them. However in 34:27-28 the narrative appears to be ambiguous regarding who actually does the writing. Dozeman suggests that the ambiguity may be part of the point, as a continuation of the blurring of the distinction between

⁸²⁹ See section 5.3.1.2. for discussion of the translation of "jealousy"

⁸³⁰ Moberly, "How May We Speak of God?" 193.

⁸³¹ This division is also found in Suomala, although I have extended the fourth dialogue to conclude it with YHWH's instructions to Moses to write the laws: Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue*, 21.

Mosaic and divine authorship noted above.⁸³² By contrast, others suggest that there are actually two scribal activities going on in 34:27 and 34:28: the writing of the covenant ordinances by Moses (34:27) and the writing of the commandments on the tablets by YHWH (34:28), in accordance with 34:1.⁸³³ Thus YHWH is shown as willing to renew the covenant.

7.2.1.2. YHWH's descent and "passing by": 34:5

I will discuss this action in more detail in the discussion of the dialogue itself (7.4.2.), and will argue that YHWH's action here is an enactment of his words to Moses in Exodus 33:19. Thus YHWH here does what he has promised to Moses, and as in chapters 19-20 descends onto the mountain in order to meet with Moses, so that Moses can relay his commands to the people.

7.2.1.3. Conclusions regarding YHWH's actions

As in the analysis of chapters 3-4 the narrator's portrayal of YHWH's acts is sparse. By contrast with chapters 3-4, however, in this section of dialogue YHWH's acts have a greater degree of clarity and indicate that Moses' requests have received a positive response and that the covenant will be renewed.

7.2.2. Moses' Actions

7.2.2.1. Moses' Obedience, Worship & Writing: 34:1-28

Moses acts in obedience to YHWH's instructions in 34:4-5 and bows down in worship in 34:8. He writes the words of the covenant, and is on the mountain without food or water for forty days and nights. In his actions in this section he is a model worshipper of YHWH

⁸³² Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 749.

⁸³³ Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:725-6; Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 102-103; Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 218-219.

and a model leader. He obeys without hesitation and thus is the way in which Israel will know YHWH's will and ways.

7.2.2.2. Moses' Second Coming to the People: 34:29-35

Here Moses descends once more, with the two stone tablets in his hands. This time it is not Moses who sees something, but Aaron and the Israelites. Moses is in ignorance that his face is shining, but this is immediately obvious to Aaron and the Israelites.⁸³⁴

In terms of the portrayal of Moses, it is important to note the emphasis on his "descent".⁸³⁵

Twice this verb is used; both times in the infinitive construct form, both times preceded by the *beth*, presumably indicating a temporal nuance "when Moses descended". This draws the reader's attention to Moses' descent, and therefore to the tablets that Moses is carrying as he descends. This reminds the reader of Moses' previous descent carrying the tablets which he made from the mountain in chapter 32, which was immediately followed by Moses seeing the calf, and breaking the tablets.

This time, however, Moses' face is shining because YHWH has spoken with him. This provokes a sense of puzzlement in the reader, because this is the first time that Moses' face has been said to shine, yet YHWH had spoken to Moses prior to Exodus 32. Widmer suggests that it has to do with Moses' shining face being "a concrete sign of divine approval and vindication", acting as confirmation that the covenant relationship has been

⁸³⁴ There has been much discussion of Moses' "shining face", with some older commentators asserting that the original account understood the word "shining" as "to grow horns", and therefore that Moses was either said to have grown horns, to have a disfigured face ("horns", meaning metaphorically "becoming hard") or to wear a mask: See discussion in: Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 609–610; Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:731; Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 2:620–622. However, whatever the prehistory of the story may be the current text seems most straightforwardly understood as referring to light, if only because it is hard to imagine that Moses could be portrayed as being unaware of horns growing on his face. Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 222. The reason for the word קָרַן, related to a common word for "horns", rather than a more common word for light or shining being used here is likely to be to provide, as Moberly argues, an allusion to the golden calf. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 109.

⁸³⁵ Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, 1005.

restored and being a visible sign in a similar way to the staff with which Moses acts for YHWH and the cloud that descends when Moses speaks with YHWH.⁸³⁶

While this seems a reasonable deduction within the narrative, the text itself does not mention this as a reason. Since the text of Exodus 34:29 explicitly states “because he had been speaking with him” it seems that the reason for Moses’ shining face must be something new about YHWH’s speech with him. In this instance YHWH himself has passed by Moses, and proclaimed his name to him in a fullness hitherto unobserved, before renewing his covenant with Israel. In this sense the two aspects that are new are the declaration of YHWH’s name, and the declaration of the covenant. Moses’ shining face therefore reflects the new revelation of YHWH’s character and action in renewing the covenant. Ruth Schoralick identifies this as the key moment in the revelation of the renewed covenant: “*Der erneuerte Bund gründet in Gottes schöpferischer Barmherzigkeit und Vergebung (Ex 34,10), deren erstes Zeichen das strahlende Mosegesicht ist.*”⁸³⁷

The reaction of Aaron and the Israelites to Moses’ face is to be afraid, and is similar to how the people reacted to the divine presence in Exodus 19-24. Moses calls to them, and Aaron and the leaders draw near, followed, after Moses has spoken, by all the people. Moses speaks YHWH’s words to them. This is followed by Moses placing a covering over his face.⁸³⁸ At this point the narrative describes a series of habitual verbs describing Moses’ habitual practices in a similar way to the change in Exodus 33:7.⁸³⁹ The veil is now part of an ongoing pattern of Moses’ speaking with YHWH and the people. Moses’

⁸³⁶ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 223.

⁸³⁷ Scoralick, *Gottes Güte Und Gottes Zorn*, 90.

⁸³⁸ The function of this covering is not clear in the text, but Moberly’s suggestion is attractive that it forms a contrast to known practices in the ancient world of priests covering their faces to represent the deity: Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 108; see also Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 619.

⁸³⁹ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 618.

unveiled face reflects YHWH's glory to the people when he acts as mediator, but when Moses is not speaking to the people he covers his face.⁸⁴⁰

7.2.2.3. Conclusions regarding Moses' characterisation through action

In this section of narrative Moses' actions appear exemplary. Moses obeys YHWH's commands to ascend with new stone tablets, and he acts in accordance with YHWH's instructions. As in the previous section Moses' descent from the mountain mirrors YHWH's words to Moses on the mountain. This time however Moses has received the words of the covenant once more, and descends the mountain radiating YHWH's presence to the people.

7.3. CHARACTERISATION THROUGH SPEECH

7.3.1. YHWH's Speeches

7.3.1.1. YHWH's Instructions: 34:1-3

In this speech YHWH commands Moses, in language reminiscent of the original instructions in chapter 19, to come up the mountain, but to keep everyone else away. The main point of interest is that Moses is to bring up a new pair of stone tablets so that God can write on them, to replace the previous tablets. That Moses will need new stone tablets is very encouraging from the perspective of Israel given that the only reason for new tablets is a new covenant.⁸⁴¹

The addition of "which you broke" seems unnecessary given that YHWH is speaking to Moses, who presumably knows full well that he broke them. It is possible that the

⁸⁴⁰ Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 108.

⁸⁴¹ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 611.

inclusion of “which you broke” is intended to be a slight rebuke to Moses, or more likely, the “you broke” is included to make it clear that it was not “I”, YHWH who broke them. In effect the inclusion of this verb causes us to think of the events of the tablet breaking from YHWH’s perspective for the first time in the narrative (Exodus 32:15-29 having no reference to any direct word of YHWH or action of YHWH). The sin of the people is remembered once more, and the breaking of the covenant is reinforced as something Israel, not YHWH did. The tablets were broken by the action of the people and Moses’ anger; YHWH himself had been dissuaded from any such action by Moses. Thus “which you broke” strengthens confidence in how YHWH will deal with the people.

7.3.1.2. YHWH’s Character: 34:6-7

In this short section there is enough material for any number of studies,⁸⁴² but I will focus on examining its role in the dialogue between YHWH and Moses. Before YHWH’s speech begins he descends to Moses, and “he” stands with “him” there. The question is whether Moses or YHWH is the subject. Both Moberly and Scoralick argue that the subject alternates in 34:5, because in 34:2 Moses has been told to come and stand, and it seems most natural to take him as the subject.⁸⁴³ He stands with YHWH, and YHWH passes by him; Moberly comments:

it is unclear whether an actual chronological sequence is envisaged or whether this is again an attempt to relate the theological tension that Moses was both “with” Yahweh, implying

⁸⁴² See amongst others discussions in: Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 335–350; repeated discussions in: Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*; Hermann Spieckermann, “God’s Steadfast Love Towards a New Conception of Old Testament Theology,” *Biblica*, 2000; Moberly, “How May We Speak of God?”; Scoralick, *Gottes Güte Und Gottes Zorn*; Andreas Michel, “Ist Mit Der ‘Gnadenformel’ von Ex 34,6(+7?) Der Schlüssel Zu Einer Theologie Des Alten Testaments Gefunden?” *BN*, no. 118 (2003): 110–23; L. Roger Owens, “Free, Present, and Faithful: A Theological Reading of the Character of God in Exodus,” *New Blackfriars* 85, no. 1000 (2004): 614–27; George Savran, “Theophany as Type Scene,” *Proof* 23, no. 2 (2003): 119–49; Jean-Pierre Sonnet, “God’s Repentance and ‘False Starts’ in Biblical History (Genesis 6-9; Exodus 32-34; 1 Samuel 15 and 2 Samuel 7),” in *Congress Volume Ljubljana 2007*, ed. André Lemaire (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 469–94; Friedhelm Hartenstein, *Das Angesicht JHWHs: Studien zu seinem höfischen und kultischen Bedeutungshintergrund in den Psalmen und in Exodus 32-34*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament (FAT) 55 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); Hermann Spieckermann, “Heart, Spirit, and Steadfast Love: Substantial Contributions of Torah and Psalter to Old Testament Theology,” *SJOT* 28, no. 2 (2014): 253–65.

⁸⁴³ Scoralick, *Gottes Güte Und Gottes Zorn*, 75–76; Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 86.

a close relation, and that he was the passive and partial onlooker before the dynamic motion of the divine splendour.⁸⁴⁴

That the calling of YHWH's name is by YHWH himself is made clear by the links back to 33:19 where YHWH declares that he will proclaim his name, and on to 34:8 where Moses responds, as well as the reference to the occasion by Moses in Numbers 14.⁸⁴⁵ Dohmen suggests that this speech marks the answer to Moses' request, both to know God's ways and see God's glory: "*Man kann die V6-7 von hierher durchaus als Gottes Antwort auf die Bitte des Mose nach dem "Wissen" um Gottes Weg (Ex 33,13) und das "Sehen" der Herrlichkeit Gottes (Ex 33,18) betrachten.*"⁸⁴⁶

In v6 most commentators view YHWH as the speaker, but this does not settle how the speech begins. There are three options: "YHWH said: 'YHWH...'", "he said 'YHWH, YHWH ...'" and "he said, 'YHWH is YHWH...'", Scoralick argues for the first of these options, not on the grounds that there is a problem with the subject being repeated (see Exodus 2:24-25), but because of the narrative of Numbers 14:18 where Moses' quote has just a single YHWH.⁸⁴⁷ Others hold to "YHWH, YHWH", as an expression of YHWH invoking his own name.⁸⁴⁸ Cassuto suggested "YHWH is YHWH", referring to the echoes of Exodus 3:14, and Dohmen agrees, arguing that this creates a strong link between Exodus 3:14, 33:19 and 34:6-7.⁸⁴⁹ This is an important point, and one that was also formerly argued in a slightly different way by Freedman.⁸⁵⁰ Even if Moses, in Numbers 14:18, only quotes one "YHWH" this is not decisive for the reader's understanding of Exodus 34, especially since Moses' quotation is not in any case completely verbatim.⁸⁵¹ The reader has more time to reflect on the nuances of the speech, and in this case both "YHWH, YHWH" implying an

⁸⁴⁴ Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 83.

⁸⁴⁵ Moberly, "How May We Speak of God?" 86; Scoralick, *Gottes Güte Und Gottes Zorn*, 79.

⁸⁴⁶ Dohmen, *Exodus*, 354.

⁸⁴⁷ Scoralick, *Gottes Güte Und Gottes Zorn*, 81.

⁸⁴⁸ Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 2:610.

⁸⁴⁹ Dohmen, *Exodus*, 354.

⁸⁵⁰ Freedman, "Name," 154.

⁸⁵¹ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 172.

invoking of the divine name, and “YHWH is YHWH” form a plausible beginning to the speech.

For the purposes of this study it is not necessary to go into exhaustive detail regarding the precise meaning of each individual phrase. The pairing “gracious and compassionate” was anticipated in 33:19, and is used often in the Old Testament in a variety of contexts to describe God’s attitude to his people. It has been suggested that “compassionate”, deriving as it does from the word for “womb”, is a maternal image, and “gracious”, a “fatherly” one.⁸⁵² This may be slightly too specific, and it seems safer to say that compassionate is a parental picture and gracious has a number of links to people finding favour from royalty, so it may be linked to a lordly kind of image.⁸⁵³

The exact nuance of “slow to anger”, and whether any kind of “literal” nostrils are still in view are disputed, but in either case the eventual nuance of patience is usually reached.⁸⁵⁴ More interesting for this study is the suggestion that this slowness to anger is a direct result of Moses’ intercession in Exodus 32: “the fact that YHWH allowed Moses to pacify his potentially destructive wrath already foreshadows YHWH’s final resolution to be slow to anger (32:11, 34:6).”⁸⁵⁵ However, the reader has already come across one instance of YHWH being slow to execute the consequence of his anger in Exodus 4, where his anger burns against Moses without apparent result until later on in the narrative. It seems clearer to say that YHWH changing his mind and not letting his anger burn against Israel is an instance of being “slow to anger” rather than YHWH coming to a decision to be slow to anger.

⁸⁵² Scoralick, *Gottes Güte Und Gottes Zorn*, 47.

⁸⁵³ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 186.

⁸⁵⁴ Scoralick, *Gottes Güte Und Gottes Zorn*, 53; Propp mentions the theoretical possibility that it could mean “harbouring a grudge”, but dismisses this possibility on the basis of parallel texts (especially in Proverbs) and the tradition of interpretation: Propp, *Exodus 19-40*, 2:611; Brueggemann mentions the possibility that the image here arises from the idea that Yahweh’s nostrils are so long that Yahweh’s anger has time to cool off: Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 216.

⁸⁵⁵ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 186.

The case for this is made stronger as the next two clauses are considered: “rich in steadfast love and faithfulness”. Here Brueggemann comments:

Israel’s most elemental and most reoccurring practice is to speak about Yahweh’s reliability and trustworthiness... .at the centre of Israel’s liturgical life and derivative ethical reflection, we find the belief that at the core of life is a Presence (not a principle), an Actor and Agent, who is marked decisively by reliability and trustworthiness.⁸⁵⁶

This is particularly intriguing given Brueggemann’s comments on the second half of the formula in 34:7, where he speaks of a “contradiction” within YHWH.⁸⁵⁷ Widmer adds the observation that YHWH’s רָצַח continues beyond whatever Israel has a right to expect.⁸⁵⁸

John Piper argues that there are no limits to YHWH’s רָצַח here but that it is indefinite in a sense that “corresponds perfectly to the indefiniteness of the *idem per idem* formula of 33:19cd”.⁸⁵⁹

YHWH’s speech goes on to speak of how he will forgive sin of all kinds, yet he will not clear the guilty and will punish the children and grandchildren for the sin of the fathers. The exact nature of this “punishment” is not clear, although one plausible option is proposed by Widmer who argues that רָצַח here should be taken as meaning “examine” or “assess” so that YHWH will “*assess* the moral standing of successive generations before appropriate measures are taken”.⁸⁶⁰

7.3.1.3. YHWH’s Covenant: 34:10-27

In analysing this section, I will begin by focusing on the start of YHWH’s speech before discussing the implications of how the requirements YHWH places on his people are

⁸⁵⁶ Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 226.

⁸⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁸⁵⁸ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 188.

⁸⁵⁹ John Piper, “Prolegomena to Understanding Romans 9:14-15 : An Interpretation of Exodus 33:19,” *JETS* 22, no. 3 (1979): 203-216, p213.

⁸⁶⁰ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 201. Emphasis original.

presented. Three plausible alternatives for the identification of YHWH's unique wonders, deeds and awesome acts have been identified. The first takes its cue from the wider context of Exodus, and sees YHWH's deeds and awesome acts as referring to the whole complex of YHWH's activity in rescuing his people out of Egypt, speaking to them at Sinai and bringing them into the land, the latter particularly in view of the context of the narrative at this point.⁸⁶¹ "The people in whose midst you are" is a reference to the people already in the land, who will experience YHWH's divine wonders as the Egyptians had done, in this case by being expelled from the land.⁸⁶²

The second takes its cue from the grammatical point that "you" here is always singular, and therefore considers that the addressee is initially Moses. Thus "the people in whose midst you are" becomes Israel, and the reference is to the awesome thing that YHWH is doing for Moses:

the wonder that YHWH will work 'with all your people' as witness', 'the wonder never before wrought on earth,' the wonder of 'My awesome manner in treating with you', Moses, to be witnessed by 'all these people in whose midst you are,' Moses – is that I, YHWH, will be present in you, and will thereby be present in the midst of the people – 'in whose midst you are'.⁸⁶³

In this case one of the "awesome wonders" could be the "transfiguration" of Moses in 34:29-35.⁸⁶⁴

If this is right then YHWH's response to Moses is re-orientating him to a new possibility regarding the divine presence. Moses has been concerned with YHWH going ahead with the planned tabernacle in his requests for the divine presence.⁸⁶⁵ YHWH here could be seen

⁸⁶¹ Van Seters, *The Life of Moses*, 354.

⁸⁶² Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 747; see also: Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 612–613.

⁸⁶³ Brichto, "The Worship of the Golden Calf," 36.

⁸⁶⁴ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 214; See also: Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:720.

⁸⁶⁵ Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 90; Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 207.

as re-orientating him to a new stage of reality where Moses becomes part of that tabernacle complex by means of his new appearance after he has talked with YHWH.

However this too may not be the whole picture. The “you” may never explicitly switch from Moses to the people in this verse, but by v11, which is part of the same speech, YHWH clearly refers to Israel as “you” singular, as he speaks the stipulations of the new covenant to Israel through Moses. The reference to “all the earth, and every nation” may mark a “smooth transition to Israel the people as addressee”.⁸⁶⁶ Thus the wonder here is the remaking of the covenant with sinful, idolatrous Israel which is “quite without parallel in history”.⁸⁶⁷

Widmer argues strongly for an understanding which encompasses all three possibilities, as a “recognition that the Hebrew is surprisingly open-ended and would allow for all three possibilities.”⁸⁶⁸ The first possibility still seems the most straightforward, given the wider narrative context, but Widmer’s argument alerts the reader to the need to keep the two further possibilities in mind as the narrative is read. The covenant renewal contains a set of stipulations, which are mostly repetitions of sections of Exodus 23.

Brichto argues that because 34:10 is directly parallel to 23:20-21, the angel is Moses.⁸⁶⁹ However, while the focus of 34:10 is on the wonders which YHWH will do and the covenant he will make, in 23:20-21 the focus is on YHWH’s sending of the angel and the people’s obedience to the angel. This seems a somewhat different topic by comparison with the other examples where a close conceptual parallel can always be observed, and very often a close verbal parallel also.

⁸⁶⁶ Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 93.

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁸⁶⁸ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 215.

⁸⁶⁹ Brichto, “The Worship of the Golden Calf”, 36.

The differences in the parallel codes have implications for the study of the dialogues. First it should be noted that YHWH apparently feels no need to repeat the commandments of 21:1-23:9, but focuses on issues to do with idolatry and festivals, which is perhaps not surprising when one considers that the background to the need for a new set of commandments is the festival to the golden calf.

Next, the order is different; Exodus 34:11-23 begins with YHWH's action driving out the inhabitants, then moves to a strengthened section against idolatry, before setting out some of the laws regarding festivals from Exodus 23. The difference of order is in some ways unsurprising, as Exodus 23 forms the conclusions to the longer law code, which begins with "you have seen for yourselves that I spoke with you from heaven", and that introduction can be taken to imply that the Israelites should have the contents of that address in mind. The Ten Commandments begin with "I am YHWH your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt..." This suggests that YHWH's speech in 34:10 is regarded as the beginning of 34:10-26 and so indicates that Exodus 34:10 finds its parallel in Exodus 20:1. Therefore the renewed covenant is grounded in YHWH's activity, just as was the former, but unlike the former it does not spend time rehearsing that activity.

The remaining difference of order is that in Exodus 23 instructions regarding festivals and sacrifices are followed by prohibitions about other gods, while in Exodus 34 the order reverses. Thus this section first assures Israel of YHWH's action on their behalf, and then issues a solemn warning against idolatry, before reminding them of how to observe YHWH's festivals as they live their life in the land. This emphasis on the laws forbidding idolatry reflects the golden calf incident, and the inclusion of the cultic laws may also

reflect this background.⁸⁷⁰ This section thus reinforces for the reader the connections to YHWH's work for Israel and promises for the future, and this is summed up in YHWH's concluding instructions to Moses.

7.3.1.4. YHWH, whose Name is Jealous: 34:14

כִּי לֹא תִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְאֵל אֲחֵר כִּי יְהוָה קַנָּא שְׁמוֹ אֵל קַנָּא הוּא:

You shall not bow down to another god, for YHWH, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

This is the verse which demonstrates that YHWH has not forgotten his jealousy, but that the concept of divine jealousy relates to commandments regarding idolatry. In Exodus 34:14 there is an even stronger emphasis on divine jealousy than in the 2nd commandment. Here YHWH declares that not only is he a jealous God, but that his name is Jealous.

This was taken by Goitein to imply not simply that YHWH's nature was jealous but that the name YHWH meant "he is jealous".⁸⁷¹ Goitein linked this to Exodus 3:14, where he thought that the verb translated as "to be" is actually a form of *hwa*, meaning "to love" or "to be passionate", a verb that had almost disappeared from Biblical Hebrew, and which became exclusively used for the divine name.⁸⁷² Goitein's suggestion has not been followed by later scholars, due mostly to the obscurity of his discussion regarding the verb *hwa*.⁸⁷³ Freedman also linked Exodus 3:14 to Exodus 34:14, and Exodus 34:14 became either "the Zealous One creates", or "the one who creates zeal".⁸⁷⁴

⁸⁷⁰ Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 96; Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 613.

⁸⁷¹ Goitein, "YHWH the Passionate," 2.

⁸⁷² *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸⁷³ See especially: Vaux, "The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH," 59.

⁸⁷⁴ Freedman, "Name," 155.

In more recent studies connections have not been made between the two verses,⁸⁷⁵ perhaps because there is little obvious linkage once 3:14 is seen as being focused around the verb “to be”, while 34:14 is about YHWH’s jealousy. However, if the significances given to “I will be who I will be” and subsequent self-disclosures of YHWH are given their full weight then it may be that there is actually a relatively strong link between the two verses, as suggested by Goitein’s work, although not following his use of the verb *hwa*.

I have shown that “I will be who I will be” derives some of its meaning from the context, particularly YHWH’s immediately preceding promise “I will be with you”, and that it therefore carries a sense something like “I will be with you, in the manner which I choose to be with you”, carrying a sense both of YHWH’s freedom and his commitment to presence. I have also shown that Exodus 33:19 carries the same nuance of assurance to those who have YHWH’s favour, while preserving YHWH’s freedom to show favour as he decides. Therefore it has a strong emphasis on YHWH’s showing favour, and being compassionate.

This compassion and grace are the defining mark of YHWH in Exodus 34:6, forming a parallel to the “jealousy” of Exodus 20:5. YHWH states in Exodus 20:5, “I am YHWH your God, a jealous God”, while in Exodus 34:6 he states “YHWH is YHWH, a compassionate and gracious God.” Exodus 20:5-6 makes it clear that jealousy finds expression both in showing steadfast love, and in punishing sin. In Exodus 3:14 YHWH affirms his commitment to be with those he has chosen to be with, and subsequent chapters make clear the absolute nature of this commitment. Thus, given the positive nature of jealousy expressed in Exodus 20:5-6, it is an important way in which the meaning of the divine name can be summed up.

⁸⁷⁵ Indeed, the most comprehensive recent study of Exodus 3:14 does not even mention 34:14 in the list of explanations of the divine name: Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 130.

This meaning is used in Exodus 34:14 in the context of the dangers of being ensnared by the inhabitants of the land into idolatry. It therefore forms both a strong warning, because YHWH is a jealous God whose name is Jealous and who will therefore punish the sin of those who hate him, and an encouragement, because YHWH is a God who “keeps steadfast love to thousands of those who love him and obey his commands”. Furthermore, Exodus 34:6-7, followed by Exodus 34:10-28 (and preceded by Exodus 34:1), demonstrates that YHWH is a God who forgives in response to the prayers of the mediator.

7.3.1.5. YHWH’s Concluding Instructions: 34:28

YHWH’s last instruction is introduced with a final “And YHWH said”, which marks out a new section of the speech. He orders Moses to write the commands, in accordance with which YHWH has made a covenant “with you, and all Israel”. This at once underscores the importance of Moses, but emphasises that the people are also included in the covenant.

Widmer argues that:

In contrast to the first Sinai covenant there is no public ritual anymore (cf. 24:3ff.): the bond is renewed on the mountain in the presence of Moses the covenant mediator only. Thus by implication, the covenant is no longer directly between God and Israel, but between God, through Moses, with Israel (34:27).⁸⁷⁶

While this has some plausibility, care should be taken not to overplay the difference between the situation before and after the making and worship of the calf. Before the calf the public ritual which inaugurated the covenant with all the people was initiated by Moses without any command from YHWH. Further, at the first Sinai theophany, witnessed by all the people, the people request that Moses act as mediator, and YHWH had already previously stated in chapter 19 that Moses would be the one who would approach. It is true that in chapter 24 the elders and Aaron are invited up the mountain but in all likelihood this is intended from the start to be a unique event, because the following

⁸⁷⁶ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 217; Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 105–106.

chapters give the reader the narrative of the building of the tabernacle, the means by which YHWH will dwell among the whole people.

Prior to the episode of the golden calf there is already material which portrays Moses in a role that can be seen as “meshing of divine and Mosaic authority”.⁸⁷⁷ In addition YHWH’s language in Exodus 34:27 uses the same preposition to describe making the covenant “with Moses” and “with the people”. This certainly singles Moses out, and makes clear his privileged status, but does not suggest that the covenant is not also directly with Israel, in the same way that it was previously (Exodus 24), where Moses initiated the ceremony. Thus YHWH’s speech implicitly affirms that Moses’ prayers have won YHWH to a full acceptance of the people, and a full restoration of their status.

7.3.1.6. Conclusions regarding the portrayal of YHWH through Speech

A clear portrayal of complete forgiveness and reaffirmation of the covenant can be traced through these speeches. The change from the previous section comes about after the speeches of Moses and the interaction between Moses and YHWH. The investigation of the dialogue will be a way of showing the role the dialogue with Moses plays in this change.

7.3.2. Moses’ speeches

7.3.2.1. Knowing and Being Known: 33:12-17

In this section YHWH gives short, although far from straightforward answers, which I will consider in the actual discussion of the dialogue. I will however discuss Moses’ speeches briefly to see what they add to an understanding of his portrayal in the narrative.

⁸⁷⁷ Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 749.

Moses' first speech is in 33:12-13 and appears to be concerned firstly with who, or what, YHWH will be sending with him. Moses asserts that YHWH has declared both that Moses has found favour in his eyes and that YHWH knows Moses by name. This declaration is not recorded anywhere in Exodus, but neither YHWH nor the narrator contradict the declaration. The description "known by name" by YHWH, is used only of Abraham, David and Jeremiah elsewhere in the Old Testament.⁸⁷⁸

On the basis of this declaration of favour Moses asks that YHWH make known his ways to Moses so that Moses might know YHWH, in order that Moses would be able to find favour in YHWH's eyes. Moses wants to know that he is not going to fall out of favour, and to achieve this he needs to know YHWH by knowing his ways. It appears that Moses' uncertainty over who YHWH will send with him leads to an uncertainty over his standing before YHWH, hence the prayer as expressed here.⁸⁷⁹ His final plea is that YHWH should consider that this nation is "your people". YHWH has not yet described Israel as "my people" in Exodus 32-33 thus far, and Moses wants to hear it specifically stated. Once more Moses is portrayed as a mediator for the people, seeking God's activity on their behalf.

This activity continues in the second speech of Moses in this section. I will observe the interactional aspects to the speech later, but at this point it should be noted that the themes of favour and knowledge are strong here also, with Moses concerned that other nations would know that Israel has favour in YHWH's eyes because the nations would see that YHWH accompanies his people.

⁸⁷⁸ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 147.

⁸⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

7.3.2.2. Moses requests Restoration: 34:9

Here Moses speaks just once, and his speech is short but to the point. He asks that YHWH go in the midst of the people because they are stiff necked and forgive their sins and take them as his inheritance. In other words he asks for restoration, and that their stiff necked character should not be an obstacle to, but a reason for YHWH's forgiveness and presence.⁸⁸⁰

7.3.2.3. Conclusions Regarding the Portrayal of Moses' speech in the narrative

Earlier in the book of Exodus Moses claimed that he was "not a man of words". While there are more words from YHWH overall in Exodus 32-34 there are some significant speeches from Moses which indicate that he has gained in confidence and ability as a speaker. Moses' speeches of any length are addressed to YHWH and they demonstrate his concern for the people and also a determination to know YHWH's ways as fully as is possible.

7.4. ANALYSIS OF THE DIALOGUES

7.4.1. Pleading for Favour and Presence: 33:12-17

¹² Then Moses said to YHWH:

A1 REQUEST: "See, you have said to me:

'Lead this people'

but you have not made known to me who you will send with me,
even though you have said:

'I know you by name and also you have found favour in my eyes.'

¹³ So now, if I have found favour in your eyes,

then make known to me please your ways,

so that I may know you,

in order that I may find favour in your eyes.

For pay attention (to the fact that) this nation is your people"

¹⁴ And he said:

A2 ANSWER (DISPREFERRED)⁸⁸¹: "my presence will go and I will give you (sg) rest."

⁸⁸⁰ For a discussion of the critical conjunction here see: Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 90–91.

⁸⁸¹ The "dispreferred" nature of this answer is deduced from the fact that Moses asks a follow up clarification question. A "preferred" answer should be, in general, "brief and unmitigated": Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 26.

¹⁵And he said to him

B1 REQUEST: “if your presence does not go, do not bring us up from here.

¹⁶For, how will it be known then,
 that I have found favour in your eyes, I and your people,
 if you do not go with us
 and that we are distinct from every nation which is over the face of the earth – I
 and your people.”

¹⁷And YHWH said to Moses:

B2 ANSWER “even this word which you have spoken I will do – for you have found favour in my eyes and I have known you by name.”

Moses’ speech here has a tone of pleading in the light of YHWH’s refusal to go with the people. An article by Bryan Estelle on the use of polite speech in the book of Esther points out an observation of J. Levenson that Moses’ speech here and that of Esther before Xerxes in Esther 7:3 have a basic similarity.⁸⁸² This suggests that Moses is pleading with YHWH as a supplicant to a sovereign lord. In this section Moses frames his requests with the imperative “see” or “look”, appealing to YHWH to act on the basis of what YHWH has previously declared regarding the status of Moses and the status of the people in order that Moses might know how YHWH will help and be with his people. Suomala argues that YHWH has already made known who he will send with Moses in 33:1-3, and therefore Moses is “feigning ignorance”.⁸⁸³ O’Brien however argues that Moses wants to know who the angel is that YHWH will be sending.⁸⁸⁴

The wider context from chapter 19 onwards, and especially 25-31, where Moses has been given detailed instructions about the tabernacle and the Ten Commandments on stone tablets to go in the ark suggests other reasons for Moses’ confusion. There are no tablets now, and YHWH has said he will not dwell in the midst of the people, as he had said in Exodus 29. Furthermore in Exodus 33:5 YHWH’s final words left a high degree of uncertainty regarding how he would be with the people, and in what sense the angel would

⁸⁸² J. D. Levenson, *Esther: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), p. 101 cited in: Bryan D Estelle, “Esther’s Strategies of Becoming an ‘bd Mšky!” *HS* 53 (2012): 61–88, p66.

⁸⁸³ Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue*, 30.

⁸⁸⁴ O’Brien, “The Dynamics of the Golden Calf Story (Exodus 32-34),” 27.

represent him. Therefore Moses' request is a reasonable one, especially as it leads up to the reminder that the people belong to YHWH, and that YHWH needs to remember this in his dealings with them.

YHWH's response is one that effectively ignores the final part of Moses' request, promising only that "my presence will go and I will give you (singular) rest". There is no mention of God's people here, and no mention of how God's presence will travel. Also there is no answer to Moses' request to know God's ways.⁸⁸⁵ It is not an encouraging way to begin to answer Moses' request, and Moses seems to find it not very encouraging either, in that he immediately seeks further reassurance of YHWH's presence with the people and an affirmation that the people are YHWH's.

William Irwin argues that the dialogue is an example of two speakers speaking at cross purposes where "neither party to the dialogue responds to what the other has just said".⁸⁸⁶

Irwin suggests that the brevity of YHWH's reply matches the brevity of Moses' quotation in 33:12a:

Just as Moses quoted the first thing YHWH said in Exod 33:1-3,5 and omitted the rest, YHWH now responds to the first thing Moses said. The reply omits all reference to the petition of v12b-13 and answers only the request implicit in v12a, 'You have not let me know whom you will send with me.' YHWH's response is as selective as Moses' opening quotation was.⁸⁸⁷

Irwin identifies two currents within the dialogue, one which incorporates 33:1, 12a, 14 and 15 and concerns YHWH's accompanying presence, and the second which incorporates 33:12b-13, 16, and 17, centred on the concept of divine favour.⁸⁸⁸ Irwin points out that

YHWH's reply in 33:17 answers Moses' request by providing the very quotation upon

⁸⁸⁵ Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue*, 31.

⁸⁸⁶ William H. Irwin, "The Course of the Dialogue between Moses and Yhwh in Exodus 33:12-17," *CBQ* 59, no. 4 (1997): 629-636, p630.

⁸⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 631.

⁸⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 631-632.

which Moses based his argument.⁸⁸⁹ Ultimately, for Irwin, while Moses is trying to direct the conversation it is YHWH who, somewhat playfully, controls it.⁸⁹⁰

This sense that YHWH is not giving very much away at this point is emphasised by Brueggemann, who argues that Moses' requests to "know" are not answered in this section, and that the only answer he receives to his desire for further assurance of YHWH's favour is his initial words quoted back to him.⁸⁹¹ Brueggemann argues further that YHWH's presence is known only to Moses, and Israel, in YHWH's promise and activity so that "the claim for more immediate, intense and sure guarantees of presence is turned aside in yet another summons for radical trust of Yahweh in a dangerous pilgrimage."⁸⁹² However this is overstated, YHWH does assure Moses that he will do as Moses has asked, and assures him that he has found favour. The phrase "found favour in YHWH's eyes" (or similar) is only used of a select few characters within the Old Testament and the words "you have found favour in my eyes" are only spoken by YHWH to Moses.⁸⁹³

Indeed YHWH's response in 33:17 could at first sight hardly be more "preferred", for he says "the very thing that you have spoken, I will do". Moses' problem is that he has asked too much to be sure exactly which word it is YHWH is referring to: is it the request for YHWH himself to go with them, or the request to know YHWH's ways, or the request that Israel be seen as YHWH's people? YHWH's response might be thought to be most encouraging to the first of these, as the request most recently raised by Moses, and possibly the second as this is the one where Moses quotes YHWH saying "you have found favour...". The third, by contrast, is not mentioned at all, which given Moses' insistent use of "I and your people" in 33:16 is a significant holding back by YHWH.

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid., 632.

⁸⁹⁰ Ibid., 633.

⁸⁹¹ Walter Brueggemann, "The Crisis and Promise of Presence in Israel," *HBT* 1 (1980): 47–86, 51.

⁸⁹² Ibid., 53.

⁸⁹³ O'Brien, "The Dynamics of the Golden Calf Story (Exodus 32-34)," 27.

There is an intriguing parallel to Moses' initial call at this point. In Moses' initial call, as Seitz points out, Moses does not fully identify with Israel and needs to be fully connected to his people.⁸⁹⁴ Here it seems that YHWH is somewhat detached from the people as a result of their rebellion, and Moses is seeking to connect people and God once more.⁸⁹⁵ However, here there is an important difference in that Moses' objections to YHWH's call in Exodus 3-4 were unavailing, but his intercessions for God's people ultimately prevail.

7.4.2. Moses asks to see YHWH's glory: 33:18-23

7.4.2.1. The Place of the Dialogue in the Narrative

In this section Moses speaks only once and it is not immediately obvious how, or indeed whether, his question relates to 33:12-17. Brueggemann argues that 33:18 marks a change of tone, and that the unit is very different from 33:12-17 because there is no real conversation; rather Moses simply speaks once in what Brueggemann describes as “a thematic heading for what follows... ..a somewhat removed, balanced theological reflection or meditation on the problem of divine revelation.”⁸⁹⁶ According to Brueggemann the use of $\eta\aleph\aleph$ in 33:18 reflected a “quite different theological perspective” to the $\aleph\aleph$ of 33:12-17.⁸⁹⁷ Further Brueggemann argued that Moses disappears from the text after 33:17, and that YHWH's speeches essentially have the “character of soliloquy which Yahweh carries on with himself.”⁸⁹⁸ While it must be conceded that there is some shift of discussion it does not seem so straightforward to separate the two sections, in that

⁸⁹⁴ Seitz, “The Call of Moses and the ‘Revelation’ of the Divine Name,” 151.

⁸⁹⁵ This observation is made by: Polak, “Theophany and Mediator,” 145.

⁸⁹⁶ Brueggemann, “The Crisis and Promise of Presence in Israel,” 55.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid.

YHWH continually addresses Moses, and gives him commands about the coming theophany.

Irwin by contrast sees these verses as a continuation of the dialogue from 33:17. He argues that YHWH does not answer directly but shifts the emphasis from seeing glory to “proclaiming the name” so that 33:19b and 34:5-7 actually answer 33:13 “show me your ways” with the result that the text demonstrates that “YHWH will choose the petitions to answer and the time and the place of their answering.”⁸⁹⁹

Therefore it is reasonable that 33:18-23 should be read as part of the ongoing dialogue, but it remains to be seen how closely it relates to the preceding dialogue and how far it marks a new topic of conversation. In order to understand its relationship to preceding dialogue the meaning of what Moses says must be considered, as well as what Moses’ asking of this question says about the portrayal of Moses. I will go on to consider YHWH’s answer and how it relates to Moses’ question as part of a dialogue.

7.4.2.2. Moses’ Request: 33:18

The first question to be addressed is what does Moses mean by YHWH’s glory? Some have argued that Moses wants to see something that has already been glimpsed in the Exodus narrative (9:16; 14:4, 18; 16:7, 10; 24:17) as the cloud.⁹⁰⁰ O’Brien argues that this will be, as in 24:15-18, a symbol of the full covenant relationship restored.⁹⁰¹ Others have suggested that Moses is in effect praying for YHWH’s presence to be manifest as promised

⁸⁹⁹ Irwin, “The Course of the Dialogue between Moses and Yhwh in Exodus 33,” 634.

⁹⁰⁰ Durham, *Exodus*, 451; Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 157-8; Dohmen, *Exodus*, 347.

⁹⁰¹ O’Brien, “The Dynamics of the Golden Calf Story (Exodus 32-34),” 22.

in Exodus 29:42-46.⁹⁰² Brichto argued that Moses is asking for YHWH to show himself, a demand that YHWH complies with, even if in a qualified way.⁹⁰³

Benjamin Sommer argues that *בְּבוֹד* can sometimes refer to “body” or “substance” (Isaiah 17:4, Psalm 16:9) and that God’s physical presence is seen as a “substantial blazing thing” (1 Kgs 8:11-12), so that in Exodus 33:18-23 the *בְּבוֹד* must refer to God’s body, which moves, has a face (*פְּנִים*), a hand (*יָד*) and a back (*אֶחָר*).⁹⁰⁴ David Aaron too argues that the terms used in Exodus 33:18-23 point to *בְּבוֹד* being understood as “the physical being of the deity”.⁹⁰⁵ Sommer argues that God’s intensely bright physical body is in view, which is “normally surrounded by a cloud”.⁹⁰⁶

Therefore Moses’ request is more than simply asking for YHWH’s ways to be made known to him. Moses is, in 33:18, asking that something in particular about God be made manifest to him. This request is either to see once more God’s glory as a cloud, or to see God’s “body”, or to see some aspect of God’s “essence” represented by his “glory”. It is difficult to decide between these options purely on the basis of Moses’ words. The first interpretation has its attractions; not least that “glory” is understood in the sense in which it has been perceived in the narrative up to this point. However notice should be taken of the exact form of Moses’ request, where he asks “show *me* your glory”. While it would make sense for Moses to request that the cloud come down as in Exodus 24 to begin the process of re-establishing the covenant, that is not the primary meaning here. Rather Moses is requesting a particular individual glimpse of YHWH’s glory.

⁹⁰² Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, 973-974.

⁹⁰³ Brichto, “The Worship of the Golden Calf,” 28.

⁹⁰⁴ Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Pr, 2009), 60.

⁹⁰⁵ David H. Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities: Metaphor, Semantics, and Divine Imagery* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 53.

⁹⁰⁶ Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, 61.

This makes sense according to Irwin's view of the way that the dialogue works because according to this view the reader may suppose that at this point Moses is far from certain that his prayer to know YHWH's ways, in order to know YHWH so that he may find YHWH's favour, has been granted (he has simply had YHWH's words reaffirmed).⁹⁰⁷ Therefore Moses may be seeking to ground this favour in something more than the knowledge of YHWH's ways that he has already gained. This lack of certainty leads to the request to see YHWH's glory in a new way, in order to understand how YHWH's ways relate to YHWH's being, because at 33:17 YHWH's ways are still something of an enigma. Piper pointed out that the threat of 33:5 still hangs over Israel, and the reader can note that nothing in the words YHWH has spoken has addressed the nature of Israel as a "stiff necked people".⁹⁰⁸

Piper goes on to argue that Moses' request is "a desire to have God confirm his astonishing willingness to show his favour to a stiff necked, idolatrous people".⁹⁰⁹ This may be too strong a view of how clear Moses is at this point in the narrative on his own understanding of YHWH's glory. Piper's argument depends on YHWH's answer and his argument will be important to consider when analysing YHWH's reply, but the answer cannot define what Moses means by the question, given the consistent pattern in Exodus of YHWH redefining or adjusting the question. The manner in which YHWH's reply works as an answer, or not, to Moses' request must be analysed in order to understand if this conception of Moses' request is correct, and if YHWH's response changes Moses' understanding of the concept of "glory" or of how this glory can be apprehended.

7.4.2.3. YHWH's Answer in the Context of the Dialogue

It is to this I now turn, first by setting out this section of the dialogue.

⁹⁰⁷ Compare: Irwin, "The Course of the Dialogue between Moses and Yhwh in Exodus 33," 634.

⁹⁰⁸ Piper, "Prolegomena to Understanding Romans 9," 207.

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹⁸And he said:

C1 REQUEST: “Please show me your glory.”

¹⁹And he said:

C2a. RE-ORIENTATION (I) “I will cause all my goodness to pass before you, and I will proclaim my name YHWH before you, and I will show favour on whom I show favour and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.”

²⁰ But he said:

C2b RE-ORIENTATION (II) “You are not able to see my face – because man shall not see my face and live.”

²¹Then YHWH said:

C2c RE-ORIENTATION (III) “See (here is) a place near me, where you shall stand on the rock.

²²When my glory passes by, then I will place you in a cleft of the rock and I will cover you with my hand until I pass by. ²³And I will remove my hand, and you shall see my “back”, but my face shall not be seen.”

It is immediately apparent that YHWH’s response to Moses is divided into three sections, which form together a positive response in that God’s glory will pass by, but also a negative response in that Moses will not see the “face” but only the “back”. I will look at each section in turn.

7.4.2.3.1. *Glory, Goodness and Name*

YHWH’s first section (C.1.a.), 33:19, can be divided into three parts, with the relation

between these parts being somewhat disputed. 33:19 can be set out like this:

¹⁹ And he said

- i. “I will pass all my goodness before you,
- ii. and I will proclaim my name Yhwh before you,
- iii. and I will show favour on whom I show favour
and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion”

I will review each section of the statement in turn. First, YHWH emphasises by use of the personal pronoun (אני) that he himself will pass all his goodness before Moses. The question here is whether “all my goodness” is to be taken as equivalent to “my glory”, or whether a more limited idea is in view. Childs, followed by Dozeman and Moberly, suggests that “all my goodness” signifies all “his benefits which are experienced by

Israel”.⁹¹⁰ In a similar manner Brueggemann suggests that God’s goodness here is “Yahweh’s generous, friendly power for life”, so that “In response to Moses’ request to see glory, this is a manifestation of God’s good gifts, but not Yahweh’s own self.”⁹¹¹ For Brueggemann this implies that YHWH is turning down Moses’ request to see his glory, because YHWH’s glory is:

God’s awesome, shrouded, magisterial presence, something like an overpowering light. It is in this passage as though the request for glory is to draw even closer, more dangerously, more intimately, to the very core of God’s own self.⁹¹²

However this opposition of glory and goodness is overstated. The LXX has “my glory” (τῆ δόξῃ μου) which links more closely to 33:22, and suggests that the Greek translator understood “goodness” as “the same as the כְּבוֹד of v18.”⁹¹³ This connection, in a different way, is also made by Aaron, who criticises the traditional translation of טוב as “goodness” (almost every English Bible) because this is too abstract, and argues that טוב and כְּבוֹד should be both be translated in ways that indicate physicality.⁹¹⁴ Houtman translates כְּבוֹד as “full splendour” and טוב as “my attributes”, suggesting that these attributes are those unfolded further in 33:19 and in 34:6-7, and adding “it is not unlikely that the manifestation of it was thought to be accompanied with blinding glory: ‘It is to be a spectacle of outward beauty as a visible sign of His moral perfection’ (McNeile)”.⁹¹⁵ This is somewhat similar to the HALOT suggestion of “beauty” as a translation in Exodus 33:19. The first gloss suggested for the word is “the best things” of a country, place or person. This idea of “best things” has some overlap with the derivation of glory from concepts of weight or substance. When Exodus 33:19 and 33:22 are read together it is reasonable to say that glory and goodness are used as parallel (but not identical) terms by

⁹¹⁰ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 596; Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 730; Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 76.

⁹¹¹ Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 940.

⁹¹² *Ibid.*, 939–940.

⁹¹³ John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus*, Septuagint and cognate studies series no. 30 (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1990), 551.

⁹¹⁴ Aaron, *Biblical Ambiguities*, 53.

⁹¹⁵ citing: McNeile, A.H. *The Book of Exodus (WC)*, London, 1931: Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:701.

YHWH. The point of the shift in terms is therefore not to contrast “glory” as the essential being of God which remains profoundly inaccessible to people, *pace* Brueggemann, but rather that, as Moberly suggests: “Yahweh is presenting an understanding of the divine glory in terms of the divine goodness. God’s glory is expressed in his graciousness.”⁹¹⁶ As a response to Moses’ request and concerns this begins to provide some reassurance for Moses because he is beginning to learn that there is no separation between YHWH’s gracious activity and his essential nature.

YHWH goes on to declare that he will proclaim his name. Moberly points out that this use of the verb אָרָא is unusual, because normally it is used (e.g. Genesis 4:26) of people calling on YHWH’s name, but here YHWH calls on his own name.⁹¹⁷ Thus, the narrative demonstrates, in Moberly’s words: “men can only call upon the name of God and rehearse his attributes, as they customarily do in the cult, because at the critical moment in Israel’s history Yahweh revealed himself and proclaimed himself first.”⁹¹⁸

The statement here comes in parallel to YHWH’s promise that he will cause all his goodness to pass before Moses. This suggests that YHWH’s name is tied very closely to YHWH’s glory and in particular to his goodness. This understanding is amplified in 34:5-7 where the name is proclaimed. Dohmen argues here that YHWH refuses a vision of himself or to give theological descriptions of his essence but instead graciously proclaims his character through his name.⁹¹⁹

Following the statement that YHWH will proclaim his name is YHWH’s declaration in 33:19b, which Noth suggested serves to give the reason why Moses is allowed to see

⁹¹⁶ Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 77.

⁹¹⁷ Ibid.

⁹¹⁸ Ibid.

⁹¹⁹ Dohmen, *Exodus*, 348.

God’s goodness pass by and to hear the name proclaimed.⁹²⁰ However it has been more common to follow Childs, Houtman and Dozeman (amongst others) in understanding this in terms of a proclamation of the name.⁹²¹ I will show, however, that these two avenues of interpretation need not be mutually exclusive.

A comparison of 33:19 with 34:5-7 helps to demonstrate this:

| 33:19 | 34:5-7 |
|---|--|
| I will cause all my goodness to pass before you. | And YHWH passed before him. (6a) |
| I will proclaim the name YHWH before you. | And he proclaimed the name YHWH (5b) And he proclaimed YHWH, YHWH... (6a) |
| I will show grace to the one to whom I show grace, and I will show compassion to the one to whom I show compassion. | A gracious and compassionate God Slow to anger, and great in steadfast love Keeping steadfast love to thousands And forgiving sin, transgression and iniquity, yet not completely clearing, but “visiting” the sins of the fathers on the sons to the third and fourth (generation). (6b) |

In understanding, and confirming, that 33:19b is intended to be a preview of the proclamation of the divine name, one of the key questions to be considered is the function of the *idem per idem* clauses. Widmer identifies two main approaches to this verse, one emphasising that the *idem per idem* serves to underline divine sovereignty or freedom, the other that it serves to emphasise the certainty or abundance of grace and mercy.⁹²²

Cassuto, taking the first approach, interprets the clauses as: “I shall be gracious and compassionate if it pleases Me, when it pleases Me, and for the reasons that please Me.”⁹²³

Houtman takes the second approach: “I will abundantly display grace and mercy.”⁹²⁴ Den

⁹²⁰ Noth, *Exodus*, 258.

⁹²¹ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 596; Piper, “Prolegomena to Understanding Romans 9,” 211; Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 77; Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:702; Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 730.

⁹²² Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 160–161.

⁹²³ *Ibid.*, 436; See also the emphasis on divine freedom of: Brueggemann, “The Crisis and Promise of Presence in Israel”; and arguing that the function of the sentence is to close off debate: Jack R. Lundbom, “God’s Use of the Idem per Idem to Terminate Debate,” *HTR* 71, no. 3-4 (1978): 193–201, pp198-199.

⁹²⁴ Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:701–702; “I will have mercy on you, yes indeed I will have mercy on you”: Fretheim, *Exodus*, 306; “I am the gracious one, I am the compassionate one” Freedman, “Name”; and also Ogden, “Idem per Idem.”

Hertog suggests an indefiniteness which relates to the surprising nature of the grace and mercy that will be shown: the statements

make explicit the implications of God's promise in the given situation. Therefore the indefiniteness of the *idem per idem* construction works towards underlining the surprising nature of YHWH's acting: he is willing to be gracious and compassionate although the opposite could be expected.⁹²⁵

Widmer favours an approach that seeks to combine both: "a gracious and merciful God determines who will be shown grace and mercy".⁹²⁶ This seems to be the best way to take these statements which do not have a definite object in view. This does not mean that there is anything necessarily arbitrary about the object of YHWH's grace and compassion, rather that the statements do not in themselves define how YHWH's grace and compassion are shown. It is reading on in the narrative that will bring a fuller understanding of how the objects of YHWH's grace and compassion are determined. In essence it is the expansion of YHWH's name in Exodus 34:6-7 which will begin to determine how YHWH will show his grace and favour. The *idem per idem* of 33:19 is clarified to a degree when 34:7 is reached, with its affirmation that YHWH will by no means, or not completely, clear the guilty. YHWH will show grace and mercy, but he will also punish the guilty.

Exodus 33:18-22, den Hertog observes, fall into a similar pattern as Exodus 3:14-15, where a general statement about YHWH is followed by a more definite answer to Moses' question.⁹²⁷ As I have previously discussed it is difficult to understand exactly what Moses means with regard to YHWH's glory, but it seems from the answer YHWH gives that Moses is being re-orientated so that he understands that YHWH's goodness and name display YHWH's glory, but only on YHWH's terms. Sonnet suggests that the *idem per idem* 3:14a has the effect of initiating narrative,⁹²⁸ and Exodus 33:18 is the first statement by YHWH in this narrative which opens up the possibility of a fresh start for the people. YHWH's

⁹²⁵ Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 110.

⁹²⁶ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 161.

⁹²⁷ Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 113–114.

⁹²⁸ Sonnet, "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh (Exodus 3)," 334.

statement affirms that grace and compassion are YHWH's gift and yet that they are also a part of what makes up YHWH's name. Not only is YHWH the one who can say "I will surely be with you in whatever way I choose to be with you", he is also therefore the one who can say "I will surely be the gracious and compassionate one with you who gives grace and compassion in such ways as I determine".

Furthermore, these verses also provide an assurance of divine favour to Moses, just as Exodus 3:14 provides an assurance of the divine presence. The general similarity between Exodus 33:19b and Exodus 3:14a has long been noticed, but the resemblance goes further to a distinct parallel between the two verses. I argued in the discussion of Exodus 3:14 that the most plausible way to read Exodus 3:14a is as referring to Exodus 3:12 "I will be with you", and that therefore it affirms YHWH's commitment to be with Moses, while preserving YHWH's freedom to be present in whatever way he chooses.

If Exodus 33:19b is similarly read in the light of Exodus 33:12 (Moses' quotation of YHWH, "you have said that ... 'I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight'") and Exodus 33:17 (YHWH's re-affirmation of this truth, "for you have found favour in my sight and I know you by name"), then it can be read as an affirmation of YHWH's favour to Moses. Moses' request in 33:13 is that he may find favour in YHWH's eyes, and here YHWH is answering him; Moses will indeed find favour in YHWH's eyes, because YHWH has shown him favour. Moses seeks some other ground of YHWH's favour which he may learn by knowing more of YHWH's ways but YHWH in 33:19b reaffirms that the reason for Moses knowing YHWH's favour will always be because he knows YHWH's favour. If this reasoning seems somewhat tortuous, it should be noted that it can be seen as analogous to the reason given by YHWH for Israel's existence in Deuteronomy 7:7.

In short, the answer to Moses' question as to whether YHWH will show him favour is found in the divine name itself. YHWH's response thus forms a favourable response to 33:12-13, and so fits into Irwin's pattern of the dialogue.⁹²⁹

7.4.2.3.2. No Sight of YHWH's "Face"

At this point I will move on to YHWH's second part of his response in 33:20, and observe how this functions in the dialogue. Having given an expansive positive answer to Moses' request, YHWH adds some conditions. Moses will not see his "face" because "no one can see my face and live". While YHWH's glory may be displayed in his goodness, there remains something about YHWH that it is not possible for a human being to see and live. It has been suggested that 33:11 "face to face" and 33:20 "no one can see my face" form a contradiction, but as Houtman observes this is overly pedantic: "The purport of 3:11b is that Moses is YHWH's intimate; the purport of 33:20, 23 that not even Moses can know YHWH fully and intimately."⁹³⁰ The limitations on Moses' sight are in themselves a manifestation of YHWH's favour because they have the purpose of protecting Moses. YHWH's hand, which is elsewhere used for descriptions of YHWH in battle for Israel, is used here to protect Moses from the overwhelming sight of YHWH's face.

7.4.2.3.3. A Place to Stand

The third part of YHWH's response contains specific instructions given regarding what Moses will need to do. Moses will need to be hidden in a rock and covered with YHWH's hand so that only YHWH's "back" may be seen. In 34:5-6 however nothing is said about YHWH's glory passing by at all, simply that YHWH passes by. Brueggemann argues that the promised passing by of YHWH's glory never actually takes place but that the "passing of God's glory seems always to be in prospect."⁹³¹ Piper also observed the problem and speaking of 34:6 wrote "nothing is said here of a visible appearance of YHWH", and

⁹²⁹ Irwin, "The Course of the Dialogue between Moses and Yhwh in Exodus 33," 634.

⁹³⁰ Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:703.

⁹³¹ Brueggemann, *Exodus*, 940.

therefore he concludes “we are inclined to construe the manifestation of God’s glory as embracing the ‘passing by’ of his goodness and the proclamation of his name.”⁹³²

However Brueggemann may be overly pedantic at this point and while it is true to say that God makes his glory known in his goodness and in the proclamation of his name Piper seems to be unnecessarily spiritualising the text when he excludes the visible. Exodus 34:6 states that YHWH passes by, and it is clear from 33:21-23 that this entails sight as well as hearing. Moses will experience the radiance of YHWH’s glory, and yet he will not see its fullness. This seems to match other accounts of theophany in the biblical narrative, for example Isaiah 6, which begins “I saw the Lord”, but goes on to say “and the train of his robe filled the temple”, or closer to our text, Exodus 24 where the elders of Israel “see the God of Israel”, yet the only description given to the reader is of the sapphire pavement under God’s feet.

In the case of Exodus 3:15-16 the reader does not find anywhere in the narrative where the events are described in full, rather they are summarised in Exodus 4:31. Likewise in Exodus 34:5-6 a brief summary of the theophany is given before the real focus of the narrative, the proclamation of YHWH’s name by YHWH himself, and the renewal of the covenant, before the final twist in Exodus 32-34, the theophany through Moses.

7.4.2.3.4. Conclusions regarding YHWH’s answer

Thus YHWH’s three-fold answer to Moses may be regarded as essentially positive, in that Moses will be given a glimpse of YHWH’s glory. There are important conditions set on the encounter, and Moses is reminded of the danger of such an encounter in 33:20. YHWH’s reply has a marked similarity in structure to his reply to Moses at the burning bush when Moses asked YHWH’s name, in that there is first a re-orientating response, then a set of

⁹³² Piper, “Prolegomena to Understanding Romans 9,” 214.

specific instructions.⁹³³ Further this same pattern was also found in Exodus 32:30-34, although Exodus 32:30-34 concludes with a further general statement about YHWH's punishment of sin.

| | Exodus 3:13-15 | Exodus 32:30-34 | Exodus 33:18-23 |
|--|---|--|--|
| Question/Request | “And if they ask me ‘what is your name’ – what shall I say?” | “Forgive, and if not blot me out.” | “Please show me your glory.” |
| Answer (I) General statement regarding YHWH | And God said to Moses: “I will be who I will be.” | “I will blot out whoever sins against me.” | And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘YHWH.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” |
| Answer (II) Specific answer to question/objection | And he said: “Thus you shall say to the Israelites: ‘I will be has sent me to you’” And again he said to Moses: “Thus you shall say to the Israelites: ‘YHWH, God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has sent me to you’”. | “But now go; lead the people to where I have spoken – for indeed my messenger will go before you.” | “And YHWH said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”” |

This supports den Hertog's analysis, and therefore YHWH's response is a re-orientating one, which sets out a new stage in the narrative. In this case Moses' misunderstanding is most likely that he needs to see YHWH's glory in order to know that he has YHWH's favour.

YHWH's statement serves to assure Moses of his favour, before outlining the instructions for what Moses will be able to see. Further the statement is almost as if YHWH is re-

⁹³³ Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 110.

orientating himself, moving away from threatened punishment towards showing the grace and compassion which are at the heart of his name. The statement thus initiates the next section of the dialogue, where YHWH proclaims his name most fully.

7.4.3. Name and Covenant: 34:1-28

¹And YHWH said to Moses:

A1 COMMAND “Hew out two stone tablets like the first, for I will write on the tablets the words which were on the previous tablets which you broke. ²And be ready for the morning, so that in the morning you may come up to Mt Sinai, and stand by me there on top of the mountain. ³But no-one may come up the mountain with you, and also, no-one may look at the mountain at all, the flocks or cattle shall not even graze opposite the mountain.”

A2 OBEDIENCE (PREF) ⁴So Moses hewed out two stone tablets like the first, and he rose early in the morning to go up Mt Sinai just as Yhwh had commanded him, taking the two stone tablets in his hand.

⁵And YHWH came down in the cloud and he stood with him there,
and he proclaimed the name YHWH.

⁶*YHWH passed in front of Moses, and he proclaimed:*

B1 PROCLAMATION⁹³⁴ “YHWH is YHWH, a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. ⁷He keeps steadfast love to thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin. Yet he will not completely clear, visiting the sins of the fathers on the children, and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth (generation).”

B2 WORSHIP (PREF) ⁸And Moses quickly bowed to the ground and worshipped,
⁹*and he said:*

C1 REQUEST: “If, please, I have found favour in your eyes, my Lord, please will my Lord go in our midst⁹³⁵ because these people are stiff necked,⁹³⁶ and forgive our iniquities and our sins, and keep us for an inheritance.”

¹⁰*And he said:*

C2 AGREEMENT (PREF): “Now I am making a covenant: before all your people I will do wonders which have never been performed on all the earth and among all the nations. And all the people, in whose midst you are, shall see the deeds of YHWH, for it is an awesome thing which I am doing for you...”

²⁷And YHWH said to Moses:

D1 COMMAND: “Write these words, for by these words I have made a covenant with you and Israel.”

D2 OBEDIENCE (PREF): ²⁸Now Moses was there with YHWH 40 days and nights, and he did not eat bread or drink water, and he wrote the words of the covenant, the 10 words on the tablets.

⁹³⁴ “Proclamation” and “Worship” can be seen as a particular form of our “Statement” and “Acknowledgement” pair.

⁹³⁵ A slightly awkward translation, which may be better rendered as “together with us” or similar, but I have retained a literal form to highlight that there is a nuance of YHWH’s presence being close, and I have also retained the literal form to highlight that Moses’ words are then reflected in YHWH’s response to Moses, for reasons I shall investigate below.

⁹³⁶ Literally: “This is a stiff necked people”

As noted earlier, in this section of dialogue Moses speaks only once, in 34:9, to make his final request of YHWH. All other dialogue is initiated by YHWH, and all other speech is YHWH's. YHWH issues commands and instructions, and proclaims his name, and Moses obeys and worships. By the end of the dialogue some of the major tensions have been resolved, the people are in a covenant relationship with YHWH, their sin is forgiven and YHWH will be present with his people. I will argue that this is indeed a full restoration as far as the people of Israel are concerned to the position prior to the golden calf, and my analysis of the dialogue will help to establish this.

7.4.3.1. Return to the Mountain: 34:1-4

I have examined the content of YHWH's speech, but in the context of the dialogue it remains to note that the scene is reminiscent of Exodus 19, with Moses called up the mountain while the people remain below. It may well be that the language is strengthened compared to chapter 19 because of the sin of the people, by the addition of the command that no-one is allowed even to look at the mountain. The obedience of Moses is emphasised by the "just as YHWH had commanded him". Here Moses is indeed characterised as an obedient servant.⁹³⁷

7.4.3.2. YHWH's self-disclosure: 34:5-7

YHWH's speech here switches the order of Exodus 20:5-6, and from this the deduction is often made that here YHWH's "positive" side is given greater emphasis. Sonnet is relatively typical when he argues that Exodus 34:6-7 alludes to Exodus 20:5-6 and concludes this:

Yet the echo brings about a surprise. What we thought came first, on the basis of the foundation revelation in Exodus 20 – namely the attribute of justice – now comes second, after what amounts to an inflation of the attribute of mercy. Far from being bound by any

⁹³⁷ Kürle, *Appeal*, 170.

order whatsoever, God, we now understand, is free to rank his attributes the way he chooses – *Ehyeh asher ehyeh* – and he wants them slanted here in favour of mercy.⁹³⁸

This seems a large load to place on a mere change of order. I have argued in the previous chapter that Exodus 20:5-6 may not be as heavily weighted against mercy as is envisaged in the quotation, and that if Exodus 34:6-7 is weighted more heavily in favour of mercy this may be due to other factors. If the two speeches are placed side by side, with the commonly designated “positive” and “negative” sections placed next to one another, this can be clearly seen:

| Text | Exodus 20:5-6 | Exodus 34:6-7 |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Introduction: | because I am YHWH your God, a jealous God, | YHWH is YHWH, a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and rich in steadfast love and faithfulness. |
| “Negative” | “visiting” ⁹³⁹ the sin of the fathers on the children to the 3 rd and the 4 th generation of those hating me | Yet he will by no means acquit, “Visiting” the sin of the fathers on the children, and on the grandchildren to the third and the fourth (generation).” |
| “Positive” | But showing steadfast love to thousands of those loving me and keeping my commandments. | Keeping steadfast love to thousands Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. |

Each speech is in three parts: “Introduction”, which contains YHWH’s self-introduction, followed by adjectives describing the kind of God YHWH is said to be; “Negative”, where YHWH describes his punishment on the guilty; and “Positive”, where YHWH describes his “keeping steadfast love” and “forgiveness” of others.⁹⁴⁰ I will briefly consider how the ordering of the “Positive” and “Negative” sections impacts interpretation.

⁹³⁸ Sonnet, “Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh (Exodus 3),” 345.

⁹³⁹ “Visiting” is kept until a clear understanding of how to translate this concept is arrived at.

⁹⁴⁰ For the division of Exodus 34:6-7 into statement about YHWH followed by statements about his action see: Scoralick, *Gottes Güte Und Gottes Zorn*, 43; For a similar outline of the two speeches see: Kürle, *Appeal*, 49.

7.4.3.2.1. “Self-Introduction”

Here the comparison is striking. In Exodus 20:5-6 YHWH introduces himself with a standard self-introduction formula: “I am YHWH your God.”⁹⁴¹ Then he adds a modifying phrase describing the type of God he is: “a jealous God”. I noted above that there is no need to assume that jealousy is inherently negative because in the text of Exodus 20:5-6 both the negative and the positive statements about YHWH’s action come as explanations of his jealousy. In Exodus 34:6-7 the introduction is the less standard “YHWH, YHWH” or “YHWH is YHWH”, and the modifying phrase describing the type of God is much longer: “a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, rich in steadfast love and faithfulness”. This introduction clearly emphasises YHWH’s mercy, which is appropriate given the context of divine forgiveness after the breaking of the second commandment.

7.4.3.2.2. “Negative”

In Exodus 20:5-6 the “negative” section is straightforward. YHWH will punish to the third and fourth generations those who hate him. The “negative” section of Exodus 34:7 adds the statement that YHWH will by no means clear the guilty, adding an additional emphasis to YHWH’s punishing. In the statement about YHWH punishing to the third and fourth generations the reference to “those who hate me” is removed, although it could reasonably be assumed that this reference is equivalent to the implied guilty parties in 34:7. There is certainly no lessening of the force of YHWH’s punishment in 34:7, and indeed it could be argued that describing it with two verbs actually increases the emphasis on punishment.

7.4.3.2.3. “Positive”

In Exodus 20:5-6 the “positive” section is again fairly straightforward, asserting that YHWH will show steadfast love to “thousands” for those who love him and keep his commands. In Exodus 34:6-7 YHWH is said to keep steadfast love to “thousands”, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin. Here, with the substitution of “keep” for

⁹⁴¹ For discussion of the formula see: Zimmerli, *I Am Yahweh*.

“show/do”, the first part is very similar, but the second differs and becomes a statement about God’s forgiveness. It is this forgiveness which is at the heart of the issue. Moses wants God to forgive, and here YHWH asserts that he is a God who forgives sins of every kind.

7.4.3.2.4. Ordering

In Exodus 20:5-6 the descriptions of the “negative” and “positive” aspects of YHWH clearly act respectively as a warning against breaking the commandment and an encouragement to keep the commandment. This may well influence their order. Intuitively it seems to make sense to start with a note of emphatic warning so that one may finish on a note of encouragement, and thus, in the context of the commandment it seems that the emphasis is actually on the positive aspect of the command.

Exodus 34:6-7 is a proclamation of YHWH’s name to Moses. In this proclamation the heart of what it means for YHWH to be YHWH is developed. In this context the “positive” section flows naturally out of the focus on YHWH’s grace and compassion in the introduction. Moses has prayed for forgiveness and YHWH indicates that he will forgive sin, so that his steadfast love can be shown even to those who break his commands. The “negative” section is included to demonstrate that one may not sin with impunity. YHWH’s gracious, compassionate nature is not a license for his people to ignore his law.⁹⁴² Thus the “negative” must also be included, and by being placed as the final issue, is given a degree of emphasis.

7.4.3.2.5. Conclusions

This comparison of Exodus 34:6-7 with Exodus 20:5-6 highlights that the focus of both divine speeches is the forgiveness, and in particular the steadfast love, of YHWH.⁹⁴³ It also

⁹⁴² See for example: Fretheim, *Exodus*, 302; Moberly, “How May We Speak of God?” 199.

⁹⁴³ Kürle, *Appeal*, 50.

highlights, however, that Exodus 34:6-7 very deliberately lacks objects of the verbs. In Exodus 20:5-6, as part of a relatively straightforward command, warning and encouragement sequence the objects of the warning and encouragement are made very clear (those hating, and those loving). In Exodus 34:6-7 the reader is told that YHWH keeps steadfast love to thousands, and that he forgives sins, and yet YHWH also declares that he will by no means acquit, and that he will “visit” the sins of the fathers on the children and grandchildren.

Thus the reader seeks to understand who it is YHWH forgives, and who it is YHWH punishes. YHWH tells this to Moses, not in the context of Moses being given a set of commands, but rather in the context of Moses seeking forgiveness for the people and YHWH’s presence with them once more. YHWH’s speech can therefore be taken as a further invitation to Moses to intercede one more time, knowing as he does that YHWH is a God who forgives the whole range of sin. The speech therefore amplifies 33:19b, while still leaving open the identity of those who will receive YHWH’s grace. The speech also leaves a warning that YHWH will punish sin when the time comes, again as an invitation to Moses to persist in interceding for the people so that their sin might be forgiven and they might receive the chance to begin anew. Thus the differences between Exodus 34:6-7 and Exodus 20:5-6 are not because YHWH re-orders his attributes, but rather a difference of order and emphasis in order to continue the dialogue with Moses, and encourage Moses to further intercession in order that Israel may be a people who do receive YHWH’s forgiveness.

Here YHWH’s divine self-disclosure provokes Moses’ worship and obeisance, which in the context of divine-human encounters is entirely expected. It also provokes Moses to one final request, which will now be analysed.

7.4.3.3. Moses' Request, Covenant Renewal: 34:8-28

In this section Moses' requests made previously in 33:12-17 are summed up in C1; this suggests that Moses understood that the divine speech in 34:6-7 expresses at least the possibility that YHWH will pardon Israel. Suomala points out the deferential tone of Moses' speech, with \aleph and $\aleph\aleph$ both used twice.⁹⁴⁴ He identifies four things Moses seeks to confirm from YHWH: reassurance that Moses has found favour in God's eyes, that God will not remove his presence from Israel, that God has forgiven Israel and that Israel has a future as God's people.⁹⁴⁵

In the light of 33:18-23 and 34:5-7 there is, however, no doubt that Moses enjoys the divine favour. Indeed, Moberly noted that "Formally the usage of the idiom is akin to the merely deferential introduction to a request", although it gains extra significance from the previous conversation, especially Exodus 33:12ff where Moses' quotation of YHWH's speech to him where YHWH had declared "you have found favour in my eyes" forms the basis of his prayer.⁹⁴⁶ It is therefore better to see the statement "if I have found favour in your eyes" as the grounds of Moses' request for God's presence with Israel, for God's forgiveness, and for Israel to be YHWH's people.⁹⁴⁷

The final exchange of this section begins with Moses' request to YHWH for him to go in the midst of Israel. This request to YHWH is somehow linked to the people's ongoing "stiff-neckedness". The \aleph has been understood in at least three ways: concessive "although",⁹⁴⁸ causative "because"⁹⁴⁹ and emphatic concessive "although indeed".⁹⁵⁰

Widmer points out that Moses' request is linked to YHWH's speech of Exodus 33:3, where

⁹⁴⁴ Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue*, 34.

⁹⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁶ Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 88.

⁹⁴⁷ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 207; Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:710.

⁹⁴⁸ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 602; Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 732.

⁹⁴⁹ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 208.

⁹⁵⁰ Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 89–90.

the people's "stiff-neckedness" is the reason that YHWH cannot go with the people.⁹⁵¹ In terms of the ongoing dialogue Moses is praying that YHWH's gracious character as expressed in 33:19 and 34:6-7 will override his anger, and that he will find a way to forgive their sin.⁹⁵²

The dynamic of conversation which leads to Moses knowing how to pray to YHWH is particularly important to note here. YHWH's gracious character is revealed only because of Moses' intercession, and only because of this revelation does Moses know how to pray further.

The next section of Moses' petition is that YHWH would forgive their sins.⁹⁵³ Widmer suggests that this is linked to the continuance of the covenant, rather than removing some particular act of punishment for sin.⁹⁵⁴ Moses asks that YHWH would take Israel as his inheritance: "according to Exodus 19:5 being YHWH's possession is dependent on covenant obedience. Having failed and being still stiff-necked, Israel needs not only a new covenant but ongoing gracious attendance."⁹⁵⁵

YHWH's response forms an agreement with Moses' request, a "preferred" response which takes account of the request and answers it by proclaiming the renewal of the covenant.⁹⁵⁶ However there is a contrast between speech and request in that YHWH does not answer Moses' request by a simple "I will do what you say" (as in 33:17 for example), but rather with a speech centred around the wonders (unspecified) which he will perform addressed

⁹⁵¹ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 208.

⁹⁵² See Widmer: *Ibid.*, 209.

⁹⁵³ It is possible to understand this as a statement, but in the light of the initial imperative it seems simpler to take the perfect plus waw consecutive as continuing the imperative nuance, and is the option followed by most English translations.

⁹⁵⁴ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 210; See also: Houtman, *Exodus*, 3:711.

⁹⁵⁵ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 211.

⁹⁵⁶ Suomala, *Moses and God in Dialogue*, 35.

to a “you” whose referent is sometimes unclear. Indeed it is not until the end of YHWH’s dialogue with Moses that it becomes clear that this new covenant is with both Moses and Israel. However, the parallels noted above between Exodus 23 and 34 serve to demonstrate that the covenant is indeed being renewed and that Israel is restored to a situation where they enjoy YHWH’s favour.

Moses’ obedience is recorded, as well as the statement that he was up the mountain 40 days and 40 nights. This reminds the reader of the previous 40 days and nights, and has the effect therefore of creating a degree of narrative tension with regard to what the people may have done in the intervening period. Thus both the tablets and duration of Moses’ stay have the effect of bringing the reader back full circle to the situation at the end of chapter 31. This is another way to indicate to the reader that Israel’s position is a restored one, as will be seen in investigating the final section.

7.4.4. Reflected Glory, Seeing the Face: 34:29-35

In this section there is no reported direct speech, but there are many occasions when Moses is said to “speak” (the verb occurs 7 times in these 7 verses). As with 33:7-11, a relationship that clearly centres on speech is narrated, but the details of the speech are not recorded. Instead the centre of attention in this passage has always been Moses’ shining face.

There are two main types of interpretation of the significance of Moses’ shining face. The first is presented by Herring:

Just as the presence of YHWH with Moses is the crucial issue in Exodus 3-4 and 6-7, so also is YHWH’s ongoing presence with Israel central to Exodus 32-34. Moreover, given ‘the order of events in Exodus 3-4 and 6-7, where Moses’ call to lead the people out of Egypt is followed by the revelation of YHWH’s name, it is not out of place in Exodus 32-34 that Moses’ request to see YHWH’s glory (33:18), following his renewed call to lead the people from Sinai to Canaan, is answered in terms of the proclamation of YHWH’s name (33:18-19 with the fuller revelation in 34:6-7). Finally, in all three passages, the

elevation of Moses to divine status provides the solution to questions regarding Moses' role as YHWH's representative.⁹⁵⁷

This perspective emphasises Moses' role as the divine representative, who even takes on a divine status. Herring's conclusions are mirrored in Widmer:

Little did Moses know that YHWH would answer his prayer for divine presence in this way. There is no need for a divine messenger to guide Moses and the people to the Promised Land since *he himself* resembles the heavenly agent who bears the divine name and speaks with divine authority.⁹⁵⁸

By contrast Childs states "Moses did not himself become a deity. He was unaware of any transformation. The whole point of the story emphasises that he was only a reflection of God's glory."⁹⁵⁹

This discussion is similar to that seen previously in Exodus 4 and 7 regarding Moses' elevation there to a "god". Here the parallels between Exodus 34:29-35 and Exodus 32:1-6 suggest that Moses becomes a vehicle of the divine presence to the people, a means by which YHWH chooses to manifest himself. There is an irony in this because in Exodus 32:1-6 the people create the calf to replace Moses and to be a visible representation of YHWH, and in Exodus 34:29-35 Moses descends the mountain and takes up the role of YHWH's visible representation in their midst. As both YHWH's visible representation and spokesman he then begins the construction of the tabernacle, by which YHWH himself will live among the people and be their God, so that they come to know that "I am YHWH their God who brought them up out of the land of Egypt". Moses' carrying of the divine presence into the midst of Israel enhances his authority even as a more permanent way of carrying the divine presence is constructed. There is a further irony in that Moses asked to see YHWH's glory, but that the result of his request is that it is Israel who sees YHWH's glory reflected in the face of Moses, who appears completely unaware that he is displaying YHWH's glory.

⁹⁵⁷ Herring, "Moses as Divine Substitute in Exodus," 68.

⁹⁵⁸ Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 225. Emphasis original.

⁹⁵⁹ Childs, *Exodus, a Commentary*, 619.

7.4.5. Conclusions Regarding the Dialogues

Here the difference between the tension of 33:12-23, where the dialogues are centred on Moses' desire for YHWH's presence to accompany them, and desire to see YHWH's glory, and the resolution of 34:1-28 where the dialogues are essentially YHWH's speech to Moses with one request in response from Moses is striking. Moses' requests in 33:12-23 do not meet with direct acceptances from YHWH. On the other hand, they do meet with YHWH's final re-orientating response to Moses in 33:19-23, which sets the stage for the covenant renewal of Exodus 34:1-28.

Moses' speech wrests further revelation from YHWH regarding his name and character, and that finally YHWH does confirm the covenant with the people. However Moses does not see YHWH's face and he does not get to know on what basis YHWH will finally decide it is time to punish. This matches the findings of Tracy from the dialogues in Genesis that "it is impossible to know the Deity as intimately as the Divine knows us. However if you refuse to send the Deity away requests for blessings will be fulfilled."⁹⁶⁰

7.5. CONCLUSIONS: EXODUS 33:12-34:35

By the examination of this section I have demonstrated that Moses' questions prompt YHWH into revealing more of his ways and character, and especially that he will be gracious and merciful. In particular I have shown that there is a standard form of YHWH's response to such questioning at key stages of the dialogue which re-orientates Moses by revealing some aspect of divine character before re-directing Moses with new instructions for the next stage of his mission and learning.

⁹⁶⁰ Tracy, *Dialogue in Genesis*, 160.

I have demonstrated that each of YHWH's self-disclosures can be seen as an expansion of his original declaration of his name in Exodus 3:14, and that the affirmation of divine presence with Moses and Israel that Exodus 3:14 provides is an expression of the idea that YHWH is a God who is passionately concerned for his people, such that he will punish their sin, but also that he will show compassion and mercy, steadfast love and faithfulness. In particular, I have described how Moses is one of YHWH's chosen means of being present to Israel, so that Moses is more than a simple mediator; he is a carrier of the divine presence with Israel.

Moses plays a vital role in ensuring that the covenant can continue. There is something of an irony in the manner in which the Moses who spent so much energy rejecting YHWH's commission is the same Moses who will not let YHWH give up on the people. It is important to note also that in Exodus 32-34 YHWH gives ground at each stage of Moses' intercession, forming a contrast to Moses who would only comply with YHWH's commands after hearing that those who wanted to kill him were dead, and after being threatened with death himself.⁹⁶¹

Furthermore it is only in conjunction with Moses that these deepest purposes of YHWH emerge. Widmer notes "God chooses not to act on His own, but in collaboration with His chosen servants. God's servants are part of the heavenly council and thus are intimately familiar with the King's nature and ultimate purposes."⁹⁶² Here the disjunction between what Israel within the narrative knows and what the reader knows should be noted. Israel does not hear YHWH's proclamation of his name, and does not hear his affirmation of compassion. These words are spoken to Moses, and it is only through Moses that Israel

⁹⁶¹ See our discussion on Exodus 4 for more detail on this.

⁹⁶² Widmer, *Moses, God and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer*, 348; and see also: Lena-Sofia Tiemeyer, "Were the Neo-Assyrian Prophets Intercessors? A Comparative Study of Neo-Assyrian and Hebrew Texts," in *Thus Speaks Ishtar of Arbela*, ed. H. Barstad and R. P. Gordon (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 253–272, especially 270–272.

hears these words. On the level of the reader of the narrative it is only because of Moses' questioning of YHWH that the reader comes to learn the depths of YHWH's character. This too is part of what it means for YHWH to declare "I will be who I will be" to Moses. It is an invitation to Moses, and therefore to the reader, to make a journey of discovery as YHWH continually reveals more of his being and ways in response to the objections, questions and desires of Moses.

Chapter 8 Conclusions

8.1. THESIS SUMMARY

In conclusion, it remains to draw together the threads of the argument from the preceding chapters and summarise how I have demonstrated that a close reading of the dialogues between Moses and YHWH in the book of Exodus demonstrates that YHWH's response to Moses in Exodus 3:14, אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה, both affirms YHWH's presence with Moses, and Israel, and maintains YHWH's freedom to be present in the manner in which he chooses. A close reading of this verse in the narrative context has demonstrated that the content and manner of YHWH's speech invites the reader to observe the development of the narrative in order to understand how YHWH's presence is manifested and his freedom exercised at any given point.

Further I have shown that in the narrative of the dialogues between Moses and YHWH one key way in which YHWH chooses to be present to Israel (and for a brief period, to Egypt) is through the person of Moses. In particular Moses' questions and objections to YHWH's stated plans prompt further self-revelation by YHWH, further information on YHWH's purposes, and even changes in YHWH's plans.

I began by assessing different approaches to the interpretation of Exodus 3:13-15 over the last century. I observed that most attempts to understand אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה as indicating a verb or form other than the *qal* of "to be" have been unsuccessful, and also that the translation should be "I will be who I will be" rather than "I am he who is". Further I also demonstrated that attempts to uncover a historical source for the name YHWH have proved inconclusive.

Instead the phrase אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה links the meaning of the name YHWH to the verb “to be” in a type of word play best understood as connecting YHWH’s name with his promise to Moses in 3:12. Thus the phrase intimately connects YHWH’s name to his presence, in such a way that affirms both his presence and his freedom to be present as he chooses. The indefinite nature of the phrase and its use at this point in the dialogue invite the reader to read further on in the narrative to see how this will be developed. It encourages the reader to pay close attention to the character of Moses and the portrayal of his relationship with YHWH, especially because 3:12-15 hint at Moses becoming a means of Israel experiencing YHWH’s presence. This further reading enhances the reader’s understanding of what it means for YHWH to explain his name to Moses, and ability to exegete the divine name by reference to the narrative of YHWH and Moses.

I assessed various approaches to the methodology of reading dialogues and concluded that the study of individual dialogues would proceed by means of three steps: first an investigation of the way in which the narrator portrays the actions of the characters, then of the manner in which the narrator portrayed individual speech of the characters and finally the way in which an analysis of the portrayal of the dialogues added to an understanding of the characters.

I split my analysis up into five key sections of dialogue: Exodus 3:1-4:31, Exodus 5:1-7:7. Exodus 19:1-24:18, Exodus 32:7-33:11 and Exodus 33:12-34:35. In the first of these dialogues YHWH aims at re-orientating Moses, so that Moses becomes the means by which YHWH delivers his people from Egypt and by which YHWH is present with his people. By 4:31 he succeeds in this aim, but Moses’ compliance is only secured after a dramatic night time encounter with YHWH and a favourable day time encounter with Aaron.

In Exodus 5:1-7:7 I showed that YHWH is portrayed through his speech as one whose presence for his people is manifested at the time of his choosing in order that his people and their enemies might recognise that “I am YHWH”. In chapter 5 YHWH’s presence is hidden, and the carrier of YHWH’s presence, Moses, silent. YHWH’s revelation of more of the significance of his name in 6:2-8 is made in response to Moses’ challenge regarding that name in 5:22. This revelation that “I am YHWH” comes in the context of YHWH promising to fulfil his covenant promises to the patriarchs, to bring the people into the land, and his promise that they would be his people, and he their God. Furthermore this rescue would be despite the unbelief of the people, and Moses’ unwillingness to go to Pharaoh. YHWH acts to enable Moses to confront Pharaoh, by designating him “god” to Pharaoh. YHWH promises to enact judgement on Egypt and bring out the people. In the speeches of chapters 6 and 7 YHWH declares that he will indeed be present with his people, to deliver them and carry out the words of chapter 3, and that they would see that YHWH declaring “I will be who I will be” meant that YHWH would be present with them, and that his self-defining presence is also a presence which re-defines and re-builds his people.

I moved forward in the narrative of Exodus to the encounter of the people with YHWH at Sinai, narrated in Exodus 19-24. In this section the fulfilment of YHWH’s words to Moses in Exodus 3:12 is seen as YHWH manifests himself to Israel, and speaks his words to them. In this section I argued that many of the complexities of the text for the reader arise from the different ways in which YHWH is portrayed as manifesting himself. This variety of methods of self-manifestation, and of perception of the divine, is unsurprising since YHWH has already declared to Moses in 3:14 that he is free to be present as he chooses. YHWH is known, both in the dialogues between Moses and YHWH and in the rest of the Old Testament, as the creator (Exodus 4:10-12) of the world with power over his creation (see

Exodus 7-14), and it is therefore expected that the intrusion of the divine presence into the world may not be fully comprehensible to other characters in the narrative, or indeed to the reader.

In the next section, Exodus 32:7-33:12, YHWH's dialogues with Moses show Moses persuading YHWH not to destroy the people, and to be present with his people as they journey to the Promised Land. At the end of the section the reader does not know whether Moses is successful or not, because YHWH affirms his intention to punish at the time of his choosing, and his determination not to be with the people, lest his anger destroy them. Such is the people's sinfulness that YHWH's "visiting" of them, that had such liberating consequences in chapter 3, would only bring down YHWH's punishment for their sin.

In the midst of this threat Moses' role is essential. Exodus 33:13-34:35 portrays Moses persuading YHWH to show that Moses has indeed found favour with YHWH by YHWH going with the people to the land. YHWH's agreement comes after a complex re-orientating reply to Moses, where he affirms that he will indeed show mercy and compassion, but in the way he chooses to show them, and as he sees fit. Further, YHWH both agrees to show Moses his glory, and makes clear that Moses cannot see the fullness of YHWH. Once these statements have been made clear YHWH renews the covenant with Moses, and with Israel, and the people are restored to their former status. Moses carries YHWH's presence to the people in terms of YHWH's speech, action and guidance, and also becomes a visible manifestation of that presence to the people.

8.2. CONTRIBUTION OF THIS THESIS

8.2.1. A Re-orientating Reply

One particular contribution to the study of these texts has been the analysis of the dialogue between YHWH and Moses. When my readings of these central sections of dialogue have been reviewed it is clear that Moses' questions, criticisms and objections in the dialogues prompt YHWH into revealing more of his ways and character, both to affirm that he will punish sin, and that he will be gracious and merciful. In particular there is almost a standard structure for YHWH's response to such questioning. These responses re-orientate Moses by deepening his understanding of an aspect of divine character or purposes before re-directing Moses with new instructions for the next stage of his mission and learning. This idea of a re-orientating response has been suggested by den Hertog, especially in reference to Exodus 3:12, 14; 4:12 and 33:19.⁹⁶³ I have shown that it also applies to Exodus 32:31-34, and by analysis of the dialogue have supported the concept of a "re-orientating" response.

These speeches of YHWH occur in response to an objection or question of Moses, and each challenge the assumptions behind Moses' question with a response that does not begin by answering his question but by explaining something further about YHWH's character. In addition, this third type often, although not always, is marked in the dialogue by more than one speech introduction. I have noted in my study the key examples of Exodus 3:13-15, Exodus 4:10-12, Exodus 32:31-34 and Exodus 33:18-23, and this can be seen clearly when the dialogues are placed side by side:

⁹⁶³ Den Hertog, *The Other Face of God*, 121–122.

| | Exodus 3:13-15 | Exodus 4:10-12 | Exodus 32:31-34 | Exodus 33:18-23 |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| Moses' Question | 3:13 "... 'what is your name' – what shall I say?" | 4:10 "slow of speech" | 32:31-32 "... forgive, ... if not... blot me out..." | "Please show me your glory." |
| General statement regarding YHWH | 3:14a "I will be who I will be." | 4:11 And YHWH said to him: "Who places the mouth on the man? Or who makes him dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind, is it not I, YHWH." | 32:33 "whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book." | 33:19-20 "... goodness pass before you ... proclaim ... my name YHWH ... I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, ... cannot see my face ... and live." |
| Specific response to question/objection | 3:14b-15 "...you shall say... : 'I will be has sent me to you.'" And again ... "...you shall say to the Israelites.... " | 4:12 "So now, go and I will be with your mouth and I will teach you what you are to say." | 32:34 "now go, lead my people... when I "visit", then I will punish their sins..." | 33:21-23 But YHWH said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, ..." |

In all these responses YHWH's general statement contains an affirmation of YHWH's self-determination. This affirmation is followed up with an application to the particular situation. In each case the response is not exactly a "preferred response" to Moses' question, but by being a carefully explained "dispreferred response" it re-orientates Moses to YHWH's plan of action and explains a further important aspect of YHWH's name.⁹⁶⁴

This re-orientation is significant because it shows that YHWH is not willing simply to ignore or refuse Moses' requests, yet he is not willing simply to agree to them either. Rather YHWH seeks deliberately to educate Moses, and through this education process reveal more of who YHWH is to Moses and therefore to the people. YHWH's statements of re-orientation have a future orientation in that they look to what YHWH will do, either immediately or more generally. Each of the statements reveals more about YHWH's

⁹⁶⁴ As previously see, for a discussion of the different ways preference can be indicated within the CA endeavour: Bilmes, "Preference and the Conversation Analytic Endeavor."

character and thus encourages the reader to keep paying attention to the dialogues between YHWH and Moses.

8.2.2. YHWH's Name and varied Presence

I demonstrated in my study of Exodus 3:13-15 that YHWH's reply to Moses both affirms YHWH's presence with Moses, and preserves YHWH's freedom to manifest that presence as he chooses. In Exodus 19-24, and again in Exodus 33:18-23 this theme is most clearly seen. In Exodus 19-24 I noted a series of paradoxes at the heart of YHWH's manifestations of himself to Israel and Moses, and in particular that when YHWH is most intimately seen by the Israelite elders the conversation, and indeed any description, ceases.

By contrast, while Moses' request in Exodus 33:18 is for sight of YHWH's glory, YHWH's response is to shield Moses from view, so that he can proclaim his name before Moses. All Moses sees is the "back" of YHWH, yet he hears one of the fullest disclosures of "YHWH's name and nature within the whole Bible".⁹⁶⁵ Thus YHWH's freedom to make himself known and present as he chooses is preserved, and yet YHWH is truly seen and heard by Moses. When YHWH is most clearly named, sight of his being is veiled. When YHWH is most clearly seen, no words are able to record what is experienced. YHWH is seen and heard, yet he can never be fully apprehended or discovered. This contrasts with Exodus 34:28-35 where I showed that when YHWH's words and presence are mediated through Moses it is possible for the people to see something of the glory, even if, as with the Israelites, it creates fear.

8.2.3. YHWH's Responsiveness and Partnership

In this context there is a clear difference between the narrative in Exodus 3-4, where YHWH's command to Moses to go eventually meets with acceptance, and Exodus 32-34,

⁹⁶⁵ See: Moberly, "How May We Speak of God?" 193.

where YHWH's command to be left alone, and statements regarding the inability of his presence to go with the people, are questioned by Moses. In his study of Jonah, Person finds that all of YHWH's commands eventually meet the preferred response of acceptance and concludes that this expresses YHWH's omnipotence.⁹⁶⁶ If the same follows in Exodus, then Exodus 32-34 would call into question YHWH's omnipotence because it appears that YHWH is talked out of a course of action by Moses. However, I argued that YHWH's command to "leave me alone" could be taken as an implicit invitation to intercession, and likewise YHWH's statements in Exodus 32:30-33:17 regarding his presence can be seen as a further invitation to dialogue. By pressing on in the dialogues Moses gains a clearer understanding of YHWH and the reader can come to share his understanding.

In our study I have shown that this holds true both when Moses intercedes for the people, and when he is simply questioning YHWH's plans, or trying to evade his responsibility. In each case YHWH's response re-orientates, and reveals more of his character. Even YHWH's name is revealed to Moses in a re-orientating response, as YHWH shifts Moses from a request for a name that will validate his mission, to proclaiming the name of the one who made the promises to the ancestors and is now ready to carry out those promises in and through Moses to Israel. Furthermore, YHWH's explanation of his name invites Moses, and the reader, to pay close attention to the coming events in the narrative in order to understand more of what the cryptic phrase means. Moses' questions and objections do not necessarily arise from particular insights into YHWH's character; rather they arise from initial partial knowledge, or indeed ignorance, and in response to this YHWH reveals more of his character and purposes. Thus YHWH is shown to be a God who weaves human responsiveness and unresponsiveness into his purposes and plans.

⁹⁶⁶ Person, *In Conversation with Jonah*, 165.

Even Moses' questioning is therefore indispensable to YHWH's plans, and yet YHWH is still the rescuer. YHWH is free to be who he will be, yet in his freedom he freely chooses to be present in and through and with Moses in order that his people, Israel, will see something of his gracious and merciful character. YHWH is indeed the King of Israel, and the one on whom they build their identity.⁹⁶⁷ At the same time YHWH's rule does not come to Israel unmediated, rather Moses is the means by which Israel comes to know and understand that their existence and deliverance depend on the name of YHWH, and the means by which they know that YHWH is present with them.

8.3. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

There are many possibilities for taking the current study further. The remaining, much briefer, Moses-YHWH dialogues in Exodus and into Numbers could be examined in order to understand how these contribute to the discussion. A detailed analysis of Tracy's study of the divine-human dialogues in Genesis and their relationship to the Moses-YHWH dialogues of Exodus could be carried out. In particular this would be useful in refining the similarities and differences between the Mosaic and Patriarchal traditions, and perhaps have something to contribute to the ongoing discussions over the continuity of the Exodus with the Ancestor narratives.⁹⁶⁸

At a methodological level there is room to undertake more reading of the, ever expanding, literature on everyday conversation, in order to provide for a rigorous study of conversation across the Old Testament and in particular for a study of divine-human interaction. Further study on incorporating the results from the sociological study of appropriate cultures, in particular to understand the differences between ancient and

⁹⁶⁷ As argued convincingly by: Kürle, *Appeal*, 250.

⁹⁶⁸ See (amongst others): Joel S. Baden, "The Continuity of the Non-Priestly Narrative from Genesis to Exodus," *Biblica* 93, no. 2 (2012): 161–86; and: Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story*.

modern dialogue in order to gain a greater understanding of the assumptions that the implied reader would bring to the text could be beneficial.⁹⁶⁹

There is the potential to take the study of dialogue further in the Old Testament. Extensive conversations between people could be examined and further conversations between YHWH and individuals (e.g. the various call narratives as well as 1 Kings 19, Amos 7 and others) could be analysed. Results could be compared with the studies of Genesis and Moses, in order to gain a fuller understanding of the portrayal of divine-human interaction in the Old Testament in order to deepen the study of YHWH's character in the discipline of Old Testament theology.

⁹⁶⁹ See for example discussion in: Esler, *Sex, Wives, and Warriors*, 35–78.

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