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# Exodus Through the Centuries

**Scott M. Langston**

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# Series Editors' Preface

The Blackwell Bible Commentaries series, the first to be devoted primarily to the reception history of the Bible, is based on the premise that how people have interpreted, and been influenced by, a sacred text like the Bible is often as interesting and historically important as what it originally meant. The series emphasizes the influence of the Bible on literature, art, music, and film, its role in the evolution of religious beliefs and practices, and its impact on social and political developments. Drawing on work in a variety of disciplines, it is designed to provide a convenient and scholarly means of access to material until now hard to find, and a much-needed resource for all those interested in the influence of the Bible on Western culture.

Until quite recently this whole dimension was for the most part neglected by biblical scholars. The goal of a commentary was primarily if not exclusively

to get behind the centuries of accumulated Christian and Jewish tradition to one single meaning, normally identified with the author's original intention. The most important and distinctive feature of the Blackwell Commentaries is that they will present readers with many different interpretations of each text, in such a way as to heighten their awareness of what a text, especially a sacred text, can mean and what it can do, what it has meant and what it has done, in the many contexts in which it operates.

The Blackwell Bible Commentaries will consider patristic, rabbinic (where relevant), and medieval exegesis as well as insights from various types of modern criticism, acquainting readers with a wide variety of interpretative techniques. As part of the history of interpretation, questions of source, date, authorship, and other historical-critical and archaeological issues will be discussed, but since these are covered extensively in existing commentaries, such references will be brief, serving to point readers in the direction of readily accessible literature where they can be followed up.

Original to this series is the consideration of the reception history of specific biblical books, arranged in commentary format. The chapter-by-chapter arrangement ensures that the biblical text is always central to the discussion. Given the wide influence of the Bible and the richly varied appropriation of each biblical book, it is a difficult question which interpretations to include. While each volume will have its own distinctive point of view, the guiding principle for the series as a whole is that readers should be given a representative sampling of material from different ages, with emphasis on interpretations that have been especially influential or historically significant. Though commentators will have their preferences among the different interpretations, the material will be presented in such a way that readers can make up their own minds on the value, morality, and validity of particular interpretations.

The series encourages readers to consider how the biblical text has been interpreted down the ages and seeks to open their eyes to different uses of the Bible in contemporary culture. The aim is to write a series of scholarly commentaries that draw on all the insights of modern research to illustrate the rich interpretative potential of each biblical book.

*John Sawyer*  
*Christopher Rowland*  
*Judith Kovacs*  
*David M. Gunn*

# Preface

No work is the product of one individual, and so it is with this one. It has been a collective effort. The work, insights, and impact of many people are present throughout this book, even though the reader may not be aware of them. Although it is impossible to mention everyone who has assisted me in so many ways, I nonetheless risk mentioning a few while remaining mindful of my indebtedness to all. I want to thank the series editors for allowing me the opportunity to be involved in such a worthy project and for patiently working with me in all phases, providing excellent guidance and apt counsel. The important contributions of all those at Blackwell Publishing should also not be overlooked. I am appreciative of the generosity and talent of Maja Lisa Engelhardt who has graciously made it possible to include her art. Likewise, thanks goes to He Qi and Alain Foehr for allowing the publication of their

works. I have often said, "Thank God for archivists and librarians!" and would like to reiterate that sentiment. Two in particular have been enormously helpful. This book could not have been written without the work of Donna Young, Patron Services Supervisor at the Harriett K. Hutchens Library in Bolivar, Missouri. She persistently labored to procure the vast and sometimes strange requests I made for materials through InterLibrary Loan, and was successful in obtaining them in almost every instance. Sandra Brown, Reference Librarian also at the Hutchens Library, provided valuable assistance in helping me to obtain and understand many items. Her insight into the arts was particularly helpful. The supervisors and patrons of the Hutchens Library are most fortunate to have a capable staff.

I am especially grateful for the contribution of my parents, John and Dorothy Langston, to my life and for the indispensable support of my wife, Donna, and children, Sarah, John, and Caroline. The latter patiently encouraged me even while enduring many, many nights and weekends of my work. I also want to express my admiration for those who have struggled throughout the centuries against tyranny, especially against religious tyranny. After having become acquainted with and contemplating their struggles, I dedicate this book to them.

Scott M. Langston  
May 20, 2005

# Introduction

This is a book about how readers have experienced the book of Exodus. It is about the intellectual, aesthetic, spiritual, religious, political, emotional, and social experiences generated by the words, phrases, and stories contained in the second book of the Jewish and Christian scriptures. This approach represents something unusual in the field of biblical studies. As is well known, biblical studies since the Enlightenment have considered a text's original meaning as the key to understanding its contemporary significance. This in itself is an important part of the modern experience of Exodus; it has been my primary experience. Yet it is by no means the only experience, or even the most prevalent one. People have made sense of Exodus, as well as used Exodus to make sense of their experiences, in a variety of ways.

The focus on the many uses of Exodus may be fresh ground for biblical scholars, but it is well-worn by others. It offers the opportunity to explore the book's impact beyond its original environment and to see how these subsequent contexts in turn have influenced its understanding and appropriation. In fact, the historical-critical approach to the book reflects its modern environment. So in this study historical criticism is placed within its own modern context, alongside others. This does not simply relativize the biblical text or its interpretations; it is clear that not all readings are equal. Indeed, those factors that privilege one use over another constitute an interesting and important aspect of reception history that needs more attention. Why do certain understandings predominate over other understandings in a particular context? What makes a predominant reading of Exodus useful and influential (powerful) in a particular context? Addressing these questions helps us to understand the interplay between the biblical text, its interpretation, and its environment. The question shifts from "What does the Bible say?" to "How does the Bible operate within a certain context?" The sixth President of the United States, John Quincy Adams, wrote to his son, "My idea of the Bible as a *Divine Revelation*, is founded upon its practical use to mankind, and not upon metaphysical subtleties" (Adams 1848: 22). While interpreters differ on the Bible as divine revelation, Adams touched on what has become a key aspect of reception history. What the Bible does is an exceedingly significant part of its nature and meaning. In fact, as important as it is to study what a biblical text *meant* or *means*, to do so apart from a consideration of what that text *does* leads to an incomplete understanding. Achieving this goal makes it necessary to consider the contexts in which various readings operate.

### Jewish and Christian Uses

This book, therefore, looks at Exodus in terms not of one context, but of many. They are so numerous that an exhaustive study is not possible. There are, however, certain contexts that have been especially fruitful. While these will be considered in their own right, they will also be viewed in relation to other readings. Interpreters rarely work in isolated settings, and their uses of Exodus often overlap, support, react against, or arise in response to other interpretive contexts.

Readings within religious settings have perhaps produced the most interpretations, arising primarily from the teaching and practice of Jews and Christians, and to some extent of Muslims. Exodus has helped these religions articulate their distinctive features. For Jews, the Israelite exodus and the giving



of the Law shape their understanding of themselves as the chosen people of God. This does not manifest itself merely in doctrinal statements; it impacts a whole way of life, giving a sense of purpose and direction as Jews. At the same time, the various settings in which the book has been utilized influences the way in which the text itself is read. So, for example, midrashic literature uses the burning bush to explain Jewish suffering by connecting it to understandings of the Jewish people's role among the nations. By identifying the burning bush with thornbushes used to protect gardens, interpreters portray the Jewish people as a fence surrounding all the other nations of the world and protecting them through Jewish suffering (*Exodus Rabbah* 2.5). Yet another midrash expresses the ultimate triumph of Israel by equating it with the fire that consumes the thornbush – that is, the nations of the world (*Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* 40). So the text proves flexible as it is placed in different contexts. In the first instance, it helps find purpose in Jewish suffering, while in the second, it expresses the desire and cry for retribution against the nations who have caused such suffering.

Christians have used Exodus from a dramatically different vantage point, understanding Israel's biblical exodus in light of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Jesus, who through his death and resurrection made possible the exodus from slavery to sin, is consistently understood as the Passover lamb of God. Israel's passage through the Red Sea provides an apt metaphor for the Christian rite and experience of baptism. Furthermore, despite their general acceptance of the historicity of the exodus, most Christians throughout history have been interested less in the exodus as a historical event as in how the exodus story can express the distinctive features of their own faith. Recently, however, in some Christian circles such as the Southern Baptist Convention, the historical nature of the exodus has been elevated by way of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy so that it has become an essential element to their faith. Many Southern Baptists, following the Convention's leadership, reason that if one does not believe that events like the exodus happened as the Bible recorded them, then one might conclude the same about the death and resurrection of Jesus. From their perspective this is unacceptable, because it threatens the very foundation of Christianity.

Jews and Christians have also appropriated material from Exodus to relate to and understand God. One of the primary, although by no means exclusive, texts for doing this has been the Ten Commandments. For example, Gregory of Nyssa during the fourth century CE used Moses' ascension of Mt Sinai to explicate the Christian's progress in the knowledge of God. Christians have also typically understood the Decalogue in light of Jesus' identification of the two greatest commandments (Luke 10:25–8). For Jews, the Law as a whole has played an enormous role in shaping how they relate to God. The *Mekilta of*

*Rabbi Ishmael* explains that the Law was given to the Jews only after other nations of the world rejected it. On the day that God gave it to them it was just as if a bridegroom came forth to receive his bride (Bahodesh 1.100–7; 3.115–19; 5.48–98). This analogy reflects the joy and the bond between God and his people that the Law produced. The Law, as well as the exodus, solidifies and regulates the Jewish relationship with God. In recent times, the Ten Commandments have been considered by some Americans to be such strong symbols of the nation's relationship with God that their posting in public places has become a matter of public debate and protest, congressional resolutions, and federal and state lawsuits. These texts have also inspired diverse spiritual practices such as Jewish sabbath observance, Christian Sunday observance, and Christian sabbatarianism.

As well as using Exodus to articulate their distinctive features, Christians and Jews have also found it helpful in criticizing and showing the shortcomings of other groups. Christians often condemned Jews for failing to recognize how Exodus pointed to Jesus and the Church. Origen, for instance, equated the Israelites of the exodus with the Church, and the Jews with the Egyptians who, like pharaoh, had hardened their hearts and would be destroyed (1982: 275–80). During the medieval period, Christian authorities required Jews to distinguish themselves from Christians by wearing a distinctive badge which at times took the form of the tablets of the Ten Commandments. On the other hand, Philo and Josephus explained the exodus in terms designed to convince non-Jews that the Jews constituted a worthy and noble race. Subsequent Jewish tradition has used the figure of Amalek, who attacked but was defeated by the Israelites in Exodus 17, to articulate the fate of those who oppose Jews and Judaism. The nineteenth-century rabbi James K. Gutheim asserted on the basis of Exod. 32:30–3 that the Bible did not teach vicarious atonement, a doctrine central to Christianity.

## **Political and Social Uses**

While Exodus has been appealed to most often within religious contexts, it has also been used frequently in struggles against social and political oppression. Groups experiencing oppression of various types have looked to Exodus for strength, hope, and motivation to resist and overcome it. Virtually every chapter of the book has played some part in these efforts. Exodus 1–2 has proved useful in characterizing the oppression by, and protest against, such things as modern life, religious and political tyranny, slavery, and abolition. Exodus 3–4 has been used to oppose the tyranny of institutional religion and articulate a spirituality

encompassing and transcending that of organized religion. These chapters have also assured those struggling against political and social evils that God has taken note of their suffering and either will or is acting on their behalf. Exodus 5–7 has been influential in articulating the struggle against tyranny and has also been used to characterize the resistance of the tyrannical to struggles for freedom. At the same time, it has evoked reflection on the oftentimes violent measures used to gain freedom, as well as on the role of God in bringing about calamity. Exodus 11–13, in addition to its uses in religious contexts, has also served to explain and justify the actions of those who gained freedom. The description and celebration of the actual exodus, beginning in the latter half of chapter 13 and continuing through most of chapter 15, have assured the oppressed of their deliverance and their oppressor's destruction. Perhaps more than any other segment of Exodus, this section has come to symbolize rebellion against tyranny and helped inspire resistance to oppression and celebration of its overthrow. The experiences of Israel after passing through the Red Sea (Exod. 15:22–18:27) also proved useful in characterizing continued opposition even after freedom had been achieved, as well as to chide those in the freed group who doubted or complained. While the chapters dealing with the Law (Exodus 19–31) have not often been connected with the struggle against oppression, some have used them to challenge social ills. Others have used them to shape societies and articulate acceptable behavior. This code of behavior, in turn, has identified nonconformists. The golden calf episode (Exodus 32–4) likewise has helped enforce conformity and identify and deal with those who violate a group's principles.

Yet, while Exodus has inspired many to challenge and overthrow tyranny, it has also been used to create and maintain tyranny. Even more astounding is the transformation of those who once invoked the exodus as an oppressed group into those who use it to perpetuate oppression. Unfortunately, this occurs with some regularity. Furthermore, some in positions of power have used Exodus to validate the furtherance of their domination. Examples of this can be found in the Crusades, the conquering of the Aztec empire by Hernando Cortés, and efforts of American slave-owners to buttress and maintain the slave system. While those who use the exodus to perpetrate tyranny would undoubtedly dispute such a characterization, preferring to associate their domination with freedom, the adverse results of this use are hard to deny.

A subversion of the Exodus paradigm is evident in those who at one time experienced oppression and then went on to become perpetrators of oppression – unless one argues that an exodus inevitably leads to a conquest. From colonial Europeans who came to the Americas fleeing oppression to the Boer Voortrekkers of South Africa to Robert Mugabe's regime in Zimbabwe, the legacy of the exodus has often meant freedom for one group at the expense of

another. These transformations illustrate the problems involved in using a biblical paradigm. Simply invoking biblical ideas and stories is not sufficient to demonstrate that a contemporary concept or event is equivalent to a biblical one. While similarities may exist, the differences in subsequent ideas and situations are often overlooked. For instance, ancient ideas regarding what constitutes justice and oppression are not always the same as contemporary ones. So, when biblical standards of justice and oppression are adopted wholesale in later situations, the outcome can be brutal. If these differences are not acknowledged and accounted for, the danger of the exodus story being used to justify a conquest is great. While the exodus paradigm has proved effective for sustaining an oppressed people and motivating groups to confront tyranny, it has proved less effective in motivating societies to eliminate all forms of oppression.

A crucial aspect of the exodus paradigm occurs in the second half of the book. The Law is given at a strategic time, and it functions to regulate the new nation. In the biblical account, the exodus is incomplete without the Law, and many have sought to establish ideal societies through its implementation. Yet it has also been used as a tool of oppression. Southern slave-owners and later segregationists often appealed to elements of the Law to justify the abuse of African Americans. The Ten Commandments themselves have sometimes been experienced as tools of oppression. At the same time, they have been used to establish more just societies, as when evoked by American abolitionists. The appeal of the Law, and in particular the Ten Commandments, to oppressor and oppressed alike illustrates the challenge of applying these texts. They are subject to interpretation, and their meaning often changes with their contexts. There have been many contested understandings of what specific laws mean for a later time. For example, the commandment prohibiting lying is generally endorsed as part of a sound society. Exceptions to the rule always seem to arise, however, thereby propelling communities into debate and dissent. The problem is compounded by biblical examples of lying that are not condemned, and by new situations that are not addressed by the Bible.

## **Oppressive and Contradictory Uses**

The appeal of Exodus to oppressed and oppressor alike reflects the book's view of the tenuous and precarious nature of power. Power is not one-sided or one-dimensional; nor is Exodus simply a book pitting good against evil. The thin line between good and evil becomes evident in the use of Exodus, and the

power of its ideas makes it a potentially dangerous book. It can bring about great good, but it can also create great evil. The reception history of the book indicates that simply overthrowing tyranny is insufficient to establish freedom. Thought must be given to the aftermath of the overthrow. How will those who once experienced oppression subsequently organize themselves, and what place, both geographically and socially, will they inhabit? Without thoughtful consideration of these issues, the exodus easily becomes a story of conquest. The reception history of the book reveals its use as a tool of both liberation and oppression. It warns against the subtle underside of liberty. Those who read and cite Exodus in the context of their struggle to overcome tyranny must also consider its use in service of oppression. To do so challenges the user to consider the possibility of emulating both Moses and pharaoh and creating an Egypt as well as a Promised Land.

The book's reception history shows that competing groups have simultaneously invoked its traditions in contradictory causes. This is vividly demonstrated in the appeal to the exodus in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by African Americans, white northerners, and white southerners. All three groups claimed the authority of Exodus. Enslaved African Americans understood themselves as God's people struggling against the pharaoh of American slaveholders, and abolitionists used it to denounce the institution of slavery. White southerners, however, considered themselves as contending against the pharaoh of the North who was intent on denying them their liberty by taking their property and independence, integrally related concepts in antebellum thought. Southerners invoked a tradition that Americans had employed in their struggle against the British pharaoh, George III. White Americans of the Revolutionary era had used the exodus to call for freedom from Great Britain, but with little thought of its application to African Americans, despite the latter's concurrent appeal to it. By the antebellum period, however, the plight of African Americans generated a shift in white Americans' usage. In retrospect, most people's sentiments lie with the African-American cause, but the use of Exodus by eighteenth and nineteenth-century Americans demonstrates the conflict over its contemporary meaning. Within each individual community, a prevailing understanding of Exodus surfaced. As this understanding came into contact with understandings of communities that applied Exodus differently, conflict occurred over its meaning. African-American and abolitionist uses of Exodus did not convince southerners to abandon their reading of the book; nor were southerners successful in convincing their contemporaries.

Even though Exodus has been successfully used to maintain hope in a certain cause or to inspire opposition to a perceived tyranny, it has not been sufficient to effect a triumph over this oppression. So the exodus story has been

quite successful in maintaining the status quo. Inspiring hope and resistance can sustain people, but something more, such as overpowering force, is often necessary to gain freedom. Just as in the exodus story the Israelites needed superior power to be successful, so do those who have subsequently invoked the exodus. African-American slaves could not successfully overcome white oppression without force, even when large numbers of whites accepted their reading of the exodus. At the same time, southern uses of the exodus helped inspire devotion to their cause, but ultimately they were unsuccessful. Seldom has simply appealing to Exodus convinced an oppressor to relent. In fact, oppressors have often turned the exodus story on the oppressed. As Thomas Paine wrote in 1776 while on the retreat through New Jersey with American troops under George Washington, “Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered” (Paine 1993: *The American Crisis*, i. 50).

The post-biblical experience of Exodus reveals the complexities and dangers of reenacting the story. Although the story has great power to encourage the overthrow of tyranny and establish a new community, avoiding the reimplementation of tyranny requires more than Exodus itself can generate. The experience of the Israelites in its totality has not been that of subsequent groups. It was a unique experience, which cannot be replicated as a whole, even though later users may assert that they are the new Israel reenacting the biblical exodus. In fact, later uses of Exodus tend to be quite fragmentary. Interpreters merge selected words, phrases, and stories from the book with other ingredients in order to serve new individual and communal purposes. While groups may embrace the promise of Exodus, its realization has proved more difficult. The outcome of the Exodus in post-biblical environments is neither assured nor free of danger. Yet the book has inspired many to risk applying the book to contemporary political and social issues. The reception history of Exodus demonstrates that it is a book about power – its sources, expressions, uses, abuses, and management.

## Artistic Uses

Some of the richest applications of Exodus have come from artists of all types. Since the biblical period artists like the poets of Exodus 15 and the Psalms have created encounters between the biblical event and a variety of people, circumstances, and ideas. Such insight transcends, exploits, and uses the literal meaning of the text in order to engage issues not always apparent on the text’s surface. Artists have been particularly adept at making connections between the textual world and those worlds that lie beyond it by filling in the gaps of the text

and/or re-contextualizing the biblical event in creative ways. They open up for the reader of Exodus various possibilities not readily accessible by focused attention on its historical aspects.

Yet artists have by no means neglected the text's literal meaning. They have often provoked thought about the exodus as a historical event. For example, by portraying the finding of Moses (Exodus 2) within an ancient Egyptian setting, painters such as Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema and Gustav Doré conveyed a sense of historical reality to their readers. Cecile B. DeMille also attempted to re-create the historical exodus experience for his audience in his 1923 and 1956 movies *The Ten Commandments*. Illustrations of the tabernacle in Nicolas of Lyra's *Postilla in Testamentum Vetus* (Kaczynski 1973), as well as the reconstruction of the tabernacle in Israel's Timna Park and by Mennonites in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, performed similar functions.

Artists have excelled in using a range of settings to provoke reflections and experiences ranging far beyond the literal and historical. They have skillfully developed personalities for the characters of Exodus that allow readers to consider the actions of these characters from a variety of perspectives. The treatment given to the daughter of pharaoh illustrates this process. She has received numerous recastings, ranging from an aloof aristocrat upholding elite standards of conduct to a woman who is willing to violate and challenge the social order. Likewise, Zipporah, the wife of Moses, has been imagined as a skeptical foreigner, a subservient wife, and a modern feminist. Artists have filled in gaps left by the biblical author, thus bringing the text to bear on a host of issues not treated by the author. Of course, some will object that such a use distorts the text. This argument assumes that the author would have objected to or did not intend the exploitation of textual gaps and latent aspects. It also presupposes that the original meaning of the text is the only legitimate meaning. This debate is well chronicled in the secondary literature, but at the least this assertion fails to recognize that it has essentially re-contextualized the biblical text by making it conform to modern notions of textual meaning. This is certainly the prerogative of any age, and historical criticism has and continues to produce valuable insights, but it is nonetheless an expression of modern culture.

In addition to giving personalities to characters in Exodus, artists have brought to the forefront larger issues and ideas that lie behind the letter of the text. Numerous examples illustrate this use. As stated previously, Exodus presents power from a number of viewpoints. Erkki-Sven Tüür beckons the listener to experience the power of the exodus through his highly energetic musical composition *Exodus*, as does Gustav Doré by portraying the Red Sea in dramatic proportions in his artwork *The Egyptians Drowned in the Red Sea*. Maja Lisa Engelhardt invites viewers to contemplate the mystery of the divine through her *Burning Bush* (Carrier and Engelhardt 1996) and *Pillar of a Cloud*

(Engelhardt 2003) paintings. The punk rock group Lars Frederiksen and the Bastards in their song “10 Plagues of Egypt” focus on the annihilation produced by the exodus, thus portraying the divine–human relationship as one characterized by horror. William Blake’s watercolor *Pestilence: Death of the Firstborn* hints at an odd relationship between God and Satan in this world. Susan Hahn ponders the dual nature of the Passover as life-giving and life-taking in her poem, “Passover, Easter, Hitler’s Birthday.” Other artists such as John Dubrow and Krzysztof Kieslowski introduce an element of uncertainty into the exodus story. On the surface, the book communicates a certainty about God’s actions on behalf of Israel, the overthrow of the oppressor, and the responsibilities of the newly freed Israelites. Dubrow’s painting, *Rephidim* (Mullarkey 2003; Kunitz 2003), however, reflects uncertainty over the outcome of the struggle between good and evil, while Kieslowski’s film series, *The Decalogue*, raises questions regarding the meaning of the Ten Commandments in the modern world. On the other hand, Wojciech Kilar has explored in his musical composition *Exodus* the elation generated by the breaking-in of persistent divine power on behalf of those in need. These examples demonstrate how artists have recognized the metaphorical function of the book. Of course, artists cannot make exclusive claims, but they have played major roles.

## Aim and Design

The reception history of Exodus, like that of any other biblical book, involves a massive body of material. It reflects the book’s impressive power to provoke a multitude of experiences, including great good and great evil. But Exodus is more than the story of the deliverance of ancient Israel from Egyptian slavery. This biblical text has throughout the centuries shaped and interpreted the experiences and environments of readers, while at the same time itself being shaped and interpreted by the very same experiences and environments. The Bible as a whole, and Exodus in particular, therefore, acts more as a seedbed, constantly growing a variety of organisms and plants in response to diverse environments, rather than as a completed garden that must be maintained in its final state. While a gardener uses the soil to produce something intentionally, the soil also plays an active role in affecting what is produced, and even brings forth unexpected or unintended items. Understanding Exodus in light of this analogy forms the boundaries of this work.

I have two broad goals in writing this book. The first relates to the collection and analysis of some of the important and interesting uses of Exodus. By bringing together such diverse material, I make no pretense at having mastered it.



Rather, I hope that scholars who have more expertise in particular fields can pick up any trails that might be created in this book, pursue them from their specialized perspectives, and thereby contribute further insight. Trained in the fields of biblical studies and American history, I do not attempt to engage this material as an art critic or a medievalist or any other such specialist. Instead I have endeavored to glean insights from these specialists and then to understand and assess the many uses of Exodus as reflections of and about the biblical text. The book endeavors to clear a path through the centuries of usage in the hope of better understanding Exodus. It is not intended to be a history of scholarly interpretation, although elements of this approach do appear. Important interpretations are considered, but contemplating how the book is used in, and is influenced by, a variety of contexts distinguishes it from the traditional study of interpretations. While much more work remains to be done, my hope is that this book will be an aid and resource to others who will further our understanding of the nature and meaning of Exodus. My second goal in writing this book is to stimulate thought. Hopefully, after considering the various uses of Exodus, readers will view it from different angles, and interact with the text in new ways.

A brief explanation about the book's design is in order. The introduction has outlined in broad terms a few of the major uses of Exodus, which are then developed in more detail in the following chapters. The reception history of each section of the biblical text is treated in roughly chronological order. Firm chronological divisions between each of the periods are not strictly adhered to, however, because historical uses themselves have not always conformed to our categorizations. This will be most evident as uses from the end of one period or the beginning of another are addressed. An exhaustive account of the reception history of Exodus, as well as a verse-by-verse analysis, has been rendered untenable by the requirements of producing a manageable volume. So in dealing with the chapters in Exodus, the book addresses those textual aspects that have proved most significant in its reception history. While many of these are traced from their inception to the modern period, not all are, simply because of the need to deal with other uses that arose subsequently and perhaps existed simultaneously. The choice of which uses to consider has not been limited to those that have influenced the most people. Other appropriations that might be deemed of little significance when measured by the number of people they have influenced also appear. These often reflect unusual uses of, or insight into, the text, or offer the opportunity to view the text from a different angle, and therefore deserve their place next to the numerically significant applications. Furthermore, in keeping with the focus on reception history, the issues and insights raised by historical-critical research are treated in

this book as reflections of the modern experience. The reader will thus find references to these issues, but no attempt to engage in historical-critical analysis. He or she will also notice that certain sources or contexts appear throughout all or most of the chapters. In treating the ancient and medieval periods, Philo, Josephus, Origen, Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, and midrashic and Talmudic sources appear regularly, because they are significant interpreters who have engaged Exodus extensively. European and American uses of Exodus characterize the discussions of the early modern and modern periods because of the tremendous influence of these cultures in its reception history. Uses of the book outside European and American contexts are referenced as important reminders of its larger field of use, but they are not the focus of this work, again due in part to the necessity of producing a manageable volume. This book is a beginning, not an end, in the reception history of Exodus.

In keeping with Hebrew usage, the term YHWH is used throughout the book instead of Yahweh. Originally written without vowels, this word is the Hebrew covenant name for God, and is often rendered in English as LORD and pronounced as *Adonai* (Hebrew for Lord). Also, the numbering of Psalms follows that of the Hebrew Bible (used by many English translations, including the Revised Standard Version).

# Exodus 1-2

The book of Exodus begins with a paradoxical struggle between life and death. The multitude of descendants resulting from the promises made to Abraham (Gen. 13:16; 15:5) had now become the basis for exterminating the Hebrew people. The more the Egyptians tried to decrease their number, however, the more the Hebrews increased. Pharaoh ultimately decreed the murder of all male Hebrew infants, but his own daughter subverted the process by saving the Hebrews' future leader. The birth of the Hebrew nation began with death. These paradoxes flow from a series of vignettes that move the reader quickly from the suffering of the Hebrews to the introduction of their human savior, Moses. Within a matter of verses, Moses grows from an infant to an adult, and the Hebrews' groaning has captured the attention of their God. The first chapter recounts the general suffering of the Hebrews and their responses to Egyptian

aggression. The second chapter focuses on Moses and sets him within the context of the broader action.

While perhaps not as influential as passages recounting the burning bush, the plagues and the exodus from Egypt, the Ten Commandments, or the golden calf, these opening stories of suffering and resistance to oppression have sparked the imaginations of interpreters throughout the centuries. They have been a source for theological, social, political, ethical, and historical reflection, as well as emotional expression. They have also moved people to action.

These readings reveal that Exodus 1–2 is concerned with more than questions regarding its historicity, the identification of its original context and personalities, or the ancient meaning of certain words and phrases. It also invites consideration of issues such as suffering, oppression, power, hope, gender, race, and class. Subsequent readings illustrate how easily the biblical text is re-contextualized in different settings. They touch on features only hinted at within the biblical text, but nonetheless present. Such aspects, once unearthed, take on new life and even new forms in the world of the interpreter and demonstrate the elasticity of the text.

## **1:1–14 The Israelites' Suffering**

### *Ancient explanations*

One of the first interpretations of this passage comes from a biblical hymn. Psalm 105 encourages the Israelites to give thanks and praise to YHWH, using the exodus to illustrate his faithfulness to the covenant. Two verses recalled the sufferings of Exodus 1. Whereas in Exodus the Hebrews multiplied and as a result provoked cruel measures by the Egyptians, in Ps. 105:24–5 Yahweh precipitated these events to demonstrate that he remembered the covenant. The psalmist makes explicit what in Exodus had been either implied or completely omitted.

The events in Exodus 1, however, garnered little attention from other Hebrew Bible authors. Likewise during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, writers often either skipped over or condensed these events, preferring to explain why the growth of the Hebrews threatened the Egyptians. For the author of *Jubilees*, Egyptian oppression resulted from a Canaanite victory over Egypt: pharaoh subsequently enslaved the Hebrews to prevent them from joining with Egyptian enemies. (*Jubilees* also has them rebuilding all the walls and ramparts destroyed in Egypt [46:11–16, in Charlesworth 1985: vol. 2]). Pseudo-Philo in his *Biblical Antiquities* (*Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*

[Charlesworth 1985: 2. 297–377]) moves directly from Joseph’s death to the pharaoh’s plan to throw the male babies into the Nile. The Egyptian people responded by asking the pharaoh to give the Hebrew female infants to their slaves as wives, which would in turn produce more slaves (9:1–5, in Charlesworth 1985: vol. 2). Philo also begins his life of Moses with the infanticide, explaining that the males posed a military threat, whereas the females did not, because their “natural weakness” made “a woman inactive in war” (1935: *Life of Moses* 1.8). The writer of Acts summarizes the Hebrew oppression in one verse, mentioning only the infanticide in Stephen’s speech before the high priest, while quickly moving to Moses’ birth (7:17–20).

Interpreters explained the Hebrews’ suffering as either unjustly caused by the Egyptians or as fit punishment for Hebrew misdeeds. Josephus attributed the oppression to Egyptian laziness and envy. When the Egyptians saw that the Hebrews had prospered because of their virtue and love of work, they devised numerous building projects, including cutting river channels and building walls and ramparts, as well as pyramids (1974b: *Antiquities* 2.9.1). (Explaining how a pharaoh could not know Joseph, the *Targum Onkelos*, along with *Targum Neofiti I* and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, contended that the new king did not fulfill the decrees of Joseph [1.8]; that is, he likely knew Joseph, but chose not to follow his policies.) The *Midrash Rabbah: Exodus*, however, blamed the Hebrews, asserting that they abolished circumcision after the death of Joseph in order to be like the Egyptians. Therefore, God made the Egyptians hate the Hebrews (1.8). This explanation continued into the modern period, with only slight modification. According to Saul ha-Levi Morteira, a seventeenth-century Sephardic rabbi in Amsterdam, the Hebrews thought of Egypt as their homeland, became arrogant, and provoked the Egyptians. Using Exodus 1 as a paradigm to account for subsequent Jewish persecution, he explained that Jews had arrived in other countries as destitute refugees, eventually prospered, and then became arrogant and indulgent. The native-born inhabitants then expelled the Jews out of disgust. Morteira then encouraged the Jewish community to behave properly, by living less ostentatiously and serving God (Saperstein 1989: 274, 284–5).

To the ancient rabbis, the nature of the oppression in 1:10–11 demonstrated the Hebrews’ degradation. Whereas the Masoretic Text made the object of the action in these verses singular (“let us deal shrewdly with *him* . . . they set taskmasters over *him*”), the Septuagint as well as *Targum Onkelos* translated the objects as plurals referring to the Hebrew people (“let us deal shrewdly with *them* . . . they set taskmasters over *them*”). The Babylonian Talmud, however, found in the singular of verse 11 a reference to the pharaoh (*b. Sotah* 11a). The pharaoh had a brick mold hung around his shoulders. Whenever the Hebrews complained of being too weak to fulfill his commands, they were asked, “Are

you weaker than the pharaoh?” Thus he compelled them to work harder by asking a question that could hardly be answered negatively. Additionally, the rigorous work mentioned in verses 13 and 14 referred to the pharaoh compelling the men to do women’s work and vice versa (*b. Sotah* 11a). Such work resulted in an oppressive and unjust degradation. In this way, the rabbis encouraged their Jewish readers to contemplate the plight of their predecessors.

### *Modern oppression*

Modern readers have also related the story to contemporary oppression. George Lockhart of Carnwath (1681–1732) used the reference to a pharaoh who did not know Joseph to reflect upon the union of the British and Scottish crowns and the subsequent Treaty of Union, which formed Scotland and England into one nation in 1707. Almost a century before, Scotland’s King James VI had also become king of England (James I). This boded well for Scotland, but the Scottish Parliament did not provide for the separation of the crowns upon James’s death. This failure led, Lockhart complains, to Scotland’s oppression. The Parliament failed to realize that a king might come to power who would not treat the Scots favorably. Under subsequent rulers, who did not hold James VI’s concern for the Scots, Scotland suffered (1995: 247–8).

Whereas Lockhart alluded to Exodus to criticize oppressive national relations, Benjamin Morgan Palmer (1818–1902), pastor of New Orleans’ First Presbyterian Church and a highly influential southern clergyman, used it to argue against freedom for African-American slaves, to cast slavery in a positive light, and to boost southern morale. Preaching a fast-day sermon before the South Carolina legislature in December 1863, Palmer warned that freed slaves would confront “taskmasters more unrelenting than those of Egypt” (1864: 16). His analogy suggested that the supposed freedom for slaves sought in the United States would actually result in an exodus-like bondage. Unlike African Americans who appealed to the exodus story in order to validate change, Palmer used it to maintain the status quo.

In Franz Kafka’s novel *Amerika*, the increased workload of the Hebrews illustrated the degradation wrought by modern society. The novel was published after his death in 1924, and was later made into two movies, *Klassenverhältnisse* (Germany, 1984) and *Amerika* (Czechoslovakia, 1994). According to Robert Alter, Kafka, a native of Prague, paradoxically employs biblical allusions in which America, conceived as the New Eden and the Promised Land, ultimately becomes “a modern manifestation of the Egyptian house of bondage.” Compulsive and incessant work becomes a type of modern enslavement. When

the main character, Karl Rossmann, comes to America from Europe, he experiences various types of bondage, most evident when he is employed, working hard and long, at the Hotel Occident, located in the town of Rameses (cf. Exod. 1:11). Kafka, according to Alter, finds in the Bible “a resonant structure of motifs, themes, and symbols to probe the meaning of the contemporary world.” While not a “fixed source of authority,” the Bible demanded that he “make sense of his world through it.” In this instance, the land of promise and freedom became a land of slavery through its constant demands for work (Alter 2000: 15, 18; Kafka 1946).

Readers continue to find in the oppressive nature of the new pharaonic rule an interpretive lens. A recent historian has characterized the deployment of South Korean troops during the Vietnam War at the behest of the United States as being “in the service of Pharaoh” (Sarantakes 1999). The fact that the phrase is employed in the title of the article without any reference to Exodus indicates how commonly Israel’s enslavement has been used to describe oppressive relations. Similarly, another author uses the reference in Exod. 1:8 to “a pharaoh who did not know Joseph” to describe potential pitfalls in US President George W. Bush’s proposal to use federal money to fund certain faith-based social programs. The writer warned that just as a pharaoh arose who was not sympathetic to the Hebrews, so faith-based programs that accept federal funding might one day find themselves subject to an unsympathetic government (Rager 2001).

## 1:15–22 Attempts to Kill Israel’s Male Infants

### *The midwives*

#### THEIR ACTIONS

Most interpreters have focused on the oppression that follows the forced labor of 1:11–14, probably because it connects directly to the birth of Moses (2:1–10). Often discussed are the midwives, Moses’ mother, and the pharaoh’s daughter. Although some ancient accounts do not mention the midwives (for example, Ezekiel’s *Exagoge*, *Jubilees*, Pseudo-Philo, and Philo), others conflate into one event the two orders: to the midwives to kill the infants and to the general populace to throw the infants into the Nile. In the process, Moses’ birth takes on added significance. Josephus recorded a message relayed by a sacred scribe predicting to pharaoh that an Israelite child would be born who would weaken Egyptian power and strengthen the Israelites. He would exceed all people in

terms of virtue and be remembered forever. The pharaoh so feared this prediction that he commanded all Israelite male babies to be drowned and the midwives, who according to Josephus were Egyptians, to lend assistance (1974b: *Antiquities* 2.9.2). *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* gives a different version of this legend. Pharaoh dreamed that the land of Egypt and a lamb were placed on a scale; the lamb weighed it down. His chief magicians, Jannes and Jambres, told him that this meant that a child born among the Israelites would destroy Egypt. The pharaoh then ordered the midwives (who were Jewish) to kill the male babies. Both accounts enhance Moses' role, since his birth becomes the reason for the infanticide rather than its product.

Were the "midwives of the Hebrews" Egyptians or Hebrews? In the Septuagint, as in Josephus, they were Egyptians. In the Talmud, however, they were Jewish. One Talmudic tradition, also followed by *Targum Neofiti I* and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, identified Shiphrah as Jocheved, Moses' mother, and Puah as Miriam, his sister. The other understood the midwives to be Jocheved and Elisheba, the wife of Aaron (*b. Sotah* 11b). *Exodus Rabbah* agreed that they were Hebrew and recorded numerous explanations of their names. Their ethnicity made a difference to the story. As Egyptians, they exemplified God's ability to use non-Hebrews to achieve his purposes. As Hebrews, they became symbols of the national struggle for freedom.

These ancient clarifications differ significantly from those of modern scholarship and illustrate how different contexts affect textual meaning. Modern research has endeavored to understand the midwives in light of their ancient historical and literary contexts (e.g., Propp 1999: 137; Childs 1974: 16). Many have tried to identify the original sources of the narrative and show how it developed over time into the present text (Noth 1962: 24). Historians and archaeologists have sought clues in the text (or the lack thereof) to a better historical understanding, to prove or disprove the story's historicity, or to date the event to a specific period (Bright 1981: 121–2; Miller and Hayes 1986: 67–8; Malamat 1988). New Testament scholars have examined the influence of Exodus 1–2 on the pre-Matthean birth narrative of Jesus (R. E. Brown 1977: 111–16).

Such efforts to reconstruct the text in its original setting were of little concern in an earlier age and remain so for many modern readers. In Celia Gilbert's poem "The Midwives," they appear as the tenders of "clandestine liberty" (Atwan and Wieder 1993: 1.115). Their image appears on a poster and a T-shirt as part of the fundraising of the Midwives Alliance of North America. Carla Golembe depicts Shiphrah and Puah tenderly holding an infant, representing the care given by midwives. Their names characterize services related to childbearing: the Shifra and Puah Organization of Teaneck, New Jersey, provides meals for families of new mothers or expectant mothers on bed rest,



and in Des Plaines, Illinois, a similarly named group helps women and their families after the birth of a child and provides children's clothing.

The midwives also symbolize responses to various social and political issues. To the Lutherans for Life of Australia, contemporary midwives are doctors, nurses, lecturers in nursing, and other medical personnel who find themselves in the moral dilemma of whether or not to support or participate in abortion (Kleinig 1995). Similarly, in his encyclical *The Gospel of Life*, Pope John Paul II cited the midwives as examples sanctioning resistance to unjust human laws dealing with abortion and euthanasia (1995: n. 73). The Mennonite Central Committee (the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Churches of North America) has invoked the midwives as biblical precedent for civil disobedience with regard to unjust immigration policies, encouraging congregations to adopt, hire, or aid legal or illegal immigrants in response to the United States government's attempts to seal its southern borders (2000: *MCC U.S. Guide to Immigration*). After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States, the Mennonite Church Peace and Justice Committee encouraged its congregations to serve their country by reminding the nation's leaders of how nonviolence has historically been effective, in the liberation of India from British rule, the American Civil Rights Movement, and in the midwives' nonviolent resistance ("People of God's Peace"). The Leigh Russell Memorial Panel located in the All Hallows Anglican Church of Leeds illustrates the individual inward spiritual journey, as well as the outward journey to the poor, oppressed, and forgotten, with Shiphrah and Puah, in a panel exemplifying effective nonviolent resistance. Al Axelrad, the Hillel rabbi at Brandeis University during the 1960s, instigated the Shifra and Puah Award to encourage nonviolent resistance to tyranny. Brandeis' Hillel Foundation has awarded it to people like Russian dissident Anatoly Sharansky, South African freedom fighters Robert Sobukwe and Steve Biko, and Poland's Lech Walesa (Axelrad 1987: 40–1; 1985: 156–7). In a sense, then, the midwives' work has continued far beyond the biblical text and opposition to Egyptian oppression. In an overwhelmingly violent story, they provide a place for advocates of nonviolent resistance. Though their resistance ultimately failed to produce nonviolent change, their modern counterparts continue to hope that their methods will produce a different outcome.

#### THEIR REWARD

The midwives' reward for refusing to kill the babies has generated a number of ideas. What reward did the midwives receive for their actions? What did it mean that because they feared God, he "made houses" for them (1:21)? In Josephus's account the midwives fade quickly from the scene, their refusal to carry out the pharaoh's decree unmentioned, probably because as Egyptians (in this version) they played a secondary role in the author's effort to trace the

history of the Jews. The Talmud, however, recorded two traditions. One understood the houses to refer to the priestly and Levitical houses, or Aaron and Moses. The other considered them to indicate the royal houses (*b. Sotah* 11b). *Targum Neofiti I* and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* combined both traditions, asserting that the midwives received the royal house and the house of the high priesthood.

Attention, however, soon turned toward reconciling the lies told by the midwives with the reward given to them by God. Augustine concluded that God rewarded them because of their mercy, and not in approval of their lying (Lienhard 2001: 4–5). During the medieval period, this pericope became the classic passage for discussions of lying (Childs 1974: 23). Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam) in the twelfth century read verse 21 in a way that changes the terms of the debate. Interpreters have understood the subject of “he made them houses” to be God. Rashbam took it to be pharaoh, who had placed the midwives under house arrest to prevent their aiding the Israelite women while giving birth (1997: 16–17). John Calvin contended that lying was sinful, no matter what the circumstances, and that even the best deeds are tainted with sin. While the midwives were courageous, they still sinned by telling a lie. Yet God forgave them. For Calvin the story illustrated God’s forgiveness and warned against allowing sin to taint good works (Calvin 1950: 35–6).

Instead of debating the merits of lying, some have tried to understand the midwives’ lying from the perspective of oppressed groups. During the nineteenth century, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a champion of the American women’s movement, read the passage quite literally and saw it as a tool to oppress women. Apparently God approved of the midwives’ lying since he gave them houses as a reward for saving the Hebrews. Yet the portrayal of the women as liars, albeit God-fearing ones, caused Stanton some consternation. Reflecting on the pharaoh’s subsequent decision to have all Hebrew male babies thrown into the Nile, Stanton said, “We are so accustomed to the assumption that men alone form a nation, that we forget to resent such texts as these . . . The greatest block to advancing civilization all along the line has been the degradation of woman” (Stanton 1993: 69–70). Almost a century later, Renita Weems has contended that, rather than lying, the midwives did not tell the whole truth. This “weapon of deception” is the “conventional weapon of the powerless . . . against those in power.” Although Exodus 1 uses race, gender, and sexual reproduction to comment on the construction of differences between the powerful and the powerless, it does not challenge these differences. It simply recasts them. Weems, therefore, cautions those struggling against modern expressions of racial, gender, or class oppression to be wary of using this story as a positive example (Weems 1992: 29, 33).

### *The unnamed women*

The midwives were not the only women of the story held in esteem. The Talmud recounts that the Israelites were delivered from Egypt because of the righteous women living at that time, including all who conceived under oppression. As they drew water for their households, God filled their pots with both water and fish, which the women then took to the fields where their husbands were working. Not only did they feed, water, anoint, and wash their husbands, but the women also had intercourse with them and conceived. When they gave birth in the fields, God sent assistance from heaven. When the Egyptians sought to kill the women and their children, the ground protected the Hebrews by swallowing them. Even though the Egyptians ploughed the ground, the women and babies were unharmed, and later they emerged to return home (*b. Sotah* 11b). This legend emphasized the divine protection and power given to the women to overcome Egyptian oppression.

### **2:1–10 Moses' Birth**

Moses is born amid great threat and persecution. The story features three women prominently – Moses' mother, his sister, and the daughter of pharaoh. Moses and his father, Amram, play subordinate roles in the biblical text, with Amram mentioned only as "a man from the house of Levi." Thereafter, the three women, all nameless, dominate the action.

### *Amram*

Some early interpreters subtly expanded Amram's presence in the story. While Ezekiel's *Exagoge* and the *Book of Jubilees* actually do not mention the father at all, Philo and the author of Hebrews, by mentioning the "parents" hiding and nurturing the baby, include Amram with the mother (named Jocheved) in these actions (1935: *Life of Moses* 1.8–12; Heb. 11:23). Others detailed Amram's role and made him into a positive example. As the greatest man of his generation, according to a Talmudic legend, he responded to the pharaoh's decree by divorcing his wife in order to avoid the procreation and subsequent death of any male offspring. The Israelites then followed his example. His daughter, however, rebuked him, arguing that his decree was even worse than

the pharaoh's, because it essentially killed both male *and* female offspring. At this, Amram and the other men remarried their wives, Jocheved conceived, and gave birth to Moses without pain (*b. Sotah* 12a). In Josephus's account, Amram responded to the decree by praying. God assured Amram in a vision that he had not forgotten the Israelites' piety: a child born to Amram and Jocheved would fulfill the Egyptian scribes' prophecy of an Israelite baby who would punish the Egyptians. As confirmation, Jocheved painlessly gave birth to Moses. After hiding the child for three months, Amram decided to entrust the child's safety to God, and he and Jocheved prepared the ark. Then God demonstrated the failure of human wisdom and the efforts of those seeking their own security at the expense of others (1974b: *Antiquities* 2.9.3–4).

According to Pseudo-Philo, the elders of Israel decreed that husbands and wives should abstain from sexual intercourse, deeming it better "to die without sons until we know what God may do." Amram, however, refused, vowing to take a wife, produce sons, and thereby fulfill the covenant with Abraham. For such faithfulness, God decided that from Amram would come one to work his signs and wonders. Amram then married Jocheved, who gave birth to Aaron and Miriam. Miriam later told her parents of her dream that they would have a child who would perform the works of God, and though they did not believe her, soon Jocheved became pregnant. The child was born circumcised, hidden for three months, placed along the bank of the Nile, and found by the pharaoh's daughter. She called the boy Moses, but Jocheved called him Melchiel (Pseudo-Philo 9).

Amram's prominent role in these early versions may reflect efforts to reassert male dominance over the action. Indeed, his relative absence in the biblical account raises questions. What did he think of Jocheved's plan and actions? Why was he not more involved in protecting Moses? At the same time, his elaborated role is clearly bound up with ancient efforts to understand God's involvement in the overcoming of Egyptian might. Apparently Amram's absence in such efforts was inconceivable. Amram, however, soon faded from the imaginations of subsequent interpreters.

### *Jocheved and Miriam*

Just as interpreters used Amram as a vehicle to convey their faith in God's ability to overcome human might, so too with Jocheved, Miriam, and even the daughter of pharaoh. These women worked in concert with God to bring deliverance. According to Philo, Moses' sister remained to watch over the child, motivated by familial love and the providence of God (1935: *Life of Moses* 1.12). *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* pointed out that the pharaoh's daughter had gone to

bathe in the Nile because the Lord had unleashed inflamed scars and blisters throughout Egypt (2:5). During the fourth century, Ephrem, a church leader in Edessa in southern Turkey, commented that when Moses' mother could no longer conceal the baby, in light of the efforts of the Egyptians, she appealed to God on the basis of the covenant with Abraham. She and Miriam, "trusting in God and the child's beauty," hoped that the first person who came by would rescue him. The pharaoh's daughter, who happened to come to the river earlier than usual, due to the unbearable heat, found the child (Salvesen: *Exodus Commentary* 2.2). The Qur'an explained that Moses' mother acted in accordance with God's plan and instructions to her (Suras 20.37–40; 28.1–13).

Not all interpreters, however, have considered the actions of Moses' parents to be commendable. John Calvin found it hard to excuse their timidity and fear, which led them to desert their child. The parents did well to trust the child to the providence of God, but they should also have trusted God to protect them. Nonetheless, Calvin recognized the pain they must have felt and concluded that Amram was too stricken with grief to help hide Moses (1950: 40–1).

In the modern period, the hiding of Moses has been used to address a particularly distasteful social problem. American legislators dubbed a law designed to discourage mothers from leaving unwanted babies to die as the Baby Moses Law. Most states have adopted such laws, and in Texas parents turning over unwanted infants who are younger than sixty days to fire stations and hospitals will receive immunity from prosecution (*Dallas Morning News* 2004). While the legislation is designed to have a positive effect, it subtly implies a negative view of the actions of Moses' mother. She is paralleled to mothers who abandon their babies.

### *Pharaoh's daughter*

#### HER CHARACTER

The pharaoh's daughter has generated a multitude of readings, even though she is not the main character. She appears as a somewhat neutral figure, although Brevard Childs believed that the narrator gave a "completely open and positive description of the Egyptian princess" by emphasizing her spontaneous pity and recognition of the child as a Hebrew (1974: 13, 19). Certainly she performs important actions. First, she sees the basket, sends a slave to retrieve it, and has compassion for the child (although the Masoretic Text merely says that "she" had compassion, conceivably referring to the handmaid; the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint specify the pharaoh's daughter). She also allows Moses' sister to retain her mother as a wet nurse. After the child

has been weaned and brought to the pharaoh's daughter, she names him Moses. Yet she still appears rather passive, being secondary to the text's main action, and might be considered more of a supporting character. Yet this secondary status has not prevented readers from focusing on her, and her nature as a "neutral" figure seems to have created an ambivalent understanding, with readers seeing her both positively and negatively. Some references to her are mundane, such as Mark Twain's comment in *The Innocents Abroad* (1911: 2.406) that during his trip to Cairo he had been shown the very spot where the princess found Moses, or like her appropriation as a geographic metaphor describing the sloping bank of Canada's St Lawrence River. The bank's smooth slope to the water combined with the line of trees reminded one traveler in 1889 of "Pharaoh's daughter and her train to the sacred Nile" (Winthrow 1889: 256). The writer of *Jubilees* presents an early glimpse into the daughter's character development, giving her a name, Tharmuth, and having *her*, instead of a servant, take Moses from the basket. She remains a secondary character as in the Exodus account, but with slightly more personality.

By the first century CE, however, the story had developed a good deal more. According to Philo, she was the pharaoh's only daughter and had been married for a considerable time. Although she greatly desired a male child to succeed her father, she had not as yet conceived one. This generally made her "depressed and loud in lamentation," but she was especially so on the day she found Moses. Moved with a mother's compassion, she began contemplating how to overcome the difficulties involved in her having a Hebrew child. Moses' sister then entered and suggested her mother as a wet nurse (1935: *Life of Moses* 1.12–14). Josephus adds that the daughter's name was Thermuthis, and that as soon as she saw the baby, "she was greatly in love with it." Furthermore, reflecting a Talmudic story (*b. Sotah* 12b), Josephus tells how Thermuthis first tried to have the child nursed by Egyptian women. The child refused them all until Miriam brought her mother (a similar story is in the Qur'an, Sura 28.12). Over the next few years Thermuthis observed Moses' vastly superior abilities, and she, being childless, decided to adopt him. Believing that Moses would one day succeed her father, she brought the child to him, but Moses grabbed the pharaoh's crown and threw it to the ground. Understanding his act to be an evil omen, a sacred scribe then tried to kill Moses, but Thermuthis protected him (1974b: *Antiquities* 2.9.5–7). In all of this, both Philo and Josephus showed God's protection of the boy, a point not made explicitly by the biblical writer.

The first-century pharaoh's daughter had developed substantially from her biblical counterpart. Having acquired a name, her motivation for adopting the child had moved beyond compassion to her own desire to have a son who would succeed her father. She also took a more active role in saving and raising

the child, suggesting that God had protected him through her. The writer of the book of Hebrews, however, appears to be among the first to cast her in a negative light. In chapter 11 he praises Moses' parents for their faith in hiding the child, and Moses for refusing "to be called a son of pharaoh's daughter" and choosing instead to suffer ill-treatment with his people. Moses believed that the future messianic reward was superior to earthly treasures (Heb. 11:23–7). Here the pharaoh's daughter represents earthly power and treasures. She is not a protector or savior of Moses, but a representative of what is to be rejected.

Reflecting more the descriptions of Josephus and Philo than Hebrews 11, the frescos adorning the western wall of the mid-third-century synagogue at Dura-Europos depict the finding of Moses in three scenes. Located on the west bank of the Euphrates River in modern Syria, these frescos contain perhaps the earliest artistic depiction of this episode. Pharaoh's daughter stands naked in the middle of the stream, rescues the child, and hands him to Jocheved and Miriam. In the words of one modern commentator, pharaoh's daughter is a "providential agent of the action" (Sed-Rajna 1985: 75). She nevertheless took on a decidedly negative character in the minds of two prominent Christian writers of the fourth century. Clearly influenced by the Hebrews 11 tradition, Ephrem composed a hymn extolling the virtues of fasting. Moses appears as the "chief of the fasters" and is juxtaposed with the pharaoh's daughter, who pampers him with all the good things royalty could provide. Yet he "cast off the feasts of Egypt," abandoned the pharaoh's daughter, and abhorred her "full table" in preference to "that storehouse that enriches all." For Ephrem, the pharaoh's daughter represents wealth and excess (Anderson, Griffith, and Young, *Hymns on Fasting*, hymn 10). He was not unique in portraying the princess negatively. Writing in the same century, Gregory, bishop of Nyssa, believed that she represented "profane philosophy." Describing her as "childless and barren," Gregory pointed out that "truly barren is profane education, which is always in labor but never gives birth." But even while living with the princess, Moses was not separated from his true mother, because she continued to nurse him. Gregory concludes: "This teaches, it seems to me, that if we should be involved with profane teachings during our education, we should not separate ourselves from the nourishment of the Church's milk." For Gregory, she represents secular wisdom, something that may be necessary, but is certainly inferior to the Church's milk. Both Ephrem and Gregory, therefore, used the pharaoh's daughter to distinguish the Church from secular society (Gregory of Nyssa 1978: *Life of Moses* 2.10–13).

The daughter, however, did not remain in a negative light. The early medieval midrash *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* considered her worthy of eternal life for having saved Moses (chapter 48). In contrast to Gregory of Nyssa's

characterization of her as profane philosophy, opposed to the Church's milk, just the opposite appears in a stained glass window from a series which the abbot Suger included in the twelfth-century reconstruction of the church of St Denis, near Paris. He comments on this portrayal of the finding of Moses, "Moses in the ark is that Man-Child Whom the maiden Royal, the Church, fosters with pious minds" (Panofsky 1979: 75). She now represents the Church and its fostering of the pious. This is hardly the neutral figure found in the biblical text or the inferior character that emerged in many Christian circles. Suger's equating the Church with the princess indicated a position of power and dominance for the Church.

Other works of art continued to depict pharaoh's daughter in diverse ways. At times she is painted as an older, aloof woman, as in Veronese's sixteenth-century work *The Finding of Moses*. The princess is surrounded by her entourage, all attired in sixteenth-century dress. One of her maids speaks to her, perhaps explaining the circumstances of the baby's discovery. The princess appears aloof and even draws back physically from the baby. With hands on hips, she seems almost uncertain about what has been found. During the same century, Fra Damiano da Bergamo, however, produced an aristocratic depiction of the biblical story, but without the aloofness of Veronese's work. Designed by Jacopo Barozzi and included as part of a door composed of intarsia panels made for the governor of Bologna, Francesco Guicciardini, the finding of Moses is placed within an urban setting (see plate 1). Behind the princess and her entourage is an elaborate and busy city, where the finding of Moses goes unnoticed by the people. Yet the biblical story takes center stage, being placed directly in the middle of the foreground. The princess maintains her separation from Moses as she sits, while one of her maidens, or perhaps even Jocheved or Miriam, holds the child. Yet she looks pleasantly upon the child and appears as the benevolent royal maiden. Orazio Gentileschi, more like Veronese than Bergamo, portrayed the pharaoh's daughter surrounded by her maidens with one hand on her hip and the other pointing to the child while she turns her face away as if to make some comment (c.1630–3) (see plate 2). Gentileschi's depiction no doubt appealed to a royal, aristocratic audience. Completed while he served as court painter to England's Charles I and his queen, Henrietta Maria, his *Finding of Moses* was eventually taken to Madrid and given to Spain's Philip IV (*Dictionary of Art* 1996: "Gentileschi"). Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (c.1730) also constructed an aloof, rich, lavish woman who looks with little emotion and perhaps even contempt upon the baby. This tradition continued into the next centuries and can be seen in the work of Gustave Doré (1832–83) and Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836–1912). Both artists constructed scenes with ancient Egyptian characteristics, rather than European ones. Doré's princess dominates the picture and is flanked by servants who fan her. She remains





Plate 1 Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola, *The Finding of Moses*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1912. (12.130.2)

majestic, sedate, and controlled, but also stretches out one hand toward the infant. Alma-Tadema's princess also dominates. As servants carry her along in the royal carriage, two women carry the child beside her. The princess, still calm, aloof, and somewhat detached, looks down on Moses.

Twentieth-century artists have created a more personable figure, emphasizing her youth and compassion. For example, Edna Hibel, winner of the prestigious Leonardo da Vinci World Award of Arts, presents in her lithograph *Pharaoh's Daughter with Moses in the Bulrushes* a young woman, perhaps even



Plate 2 Orazio Gentileschi, *Finding of Moses*. Museo Nacional Del Prado.

a teenager. Surrounded by foliage, the princess, acting more like a mother, tenderly embraces the newfound infant. Both appear calm and peaceful. He Qi, a Chinese artist living in Nanjing, in his *Finding of Moses* has portrayed this scene in non-Western terms (see plate 3). All individuals are Chinese, and a young pharaoh's daughter stands in the water with the child. In contrast with the fully clothed figures of previous works, she is nearly nude, covered only partially with a white cloth. Her head is bent to one side as she looks compassionately on the child who remains in the basket in the water. She appears less imposing than her earlier European counterparts. In Marc Chagall's *Moses Saved from Water*, the princess's care and concern are seen as she opens her arms to receive Moses.

Other artists have shown her as a righteous Gentile. Marsha Maurer, an American artist, places her in the background behind Moses and his mother, but still fills her with symbolic significance. In her stained glass windows located at congregation Temple Sinai of Newport News, Virginia, she uses the princess as an image of "a love that non-Jewish people have demonstrated



Plate 3 He Qi, *Finding of Moses*. Reprinted with permission of the artist.

during the darkest times in Hebrew history. She is the non-Jew who saves Jews as we recently saw during the Holocaust” (Maurer, email with author, November 12, 2001). From this biblical story of Egyptian threat to the Hebrews, Maurer highlights the righteous Egyptian who helps subvert the Egyptian persecution. The pharaoh’s daughter becomes a positive symbol. This idea is also reflected by Ellen Frankel in her book, *The Five Books of Miriam*, where the princess is considered a righteous Gentile who daringly threatens to overturn the status quo when she rescues and adopts Moses (Frankel 1996: 96–7).

#### MODERN EXEMPLAR

People have used pharaoh’s daughter as a positive symbol for a myriad reasons. In a nineteenth-century account of the early colonial days in Canada, Thomas

B. Smith recorded an incident on the St John River in 1769. Based on earlier records, he recounted the journey of the English captain Charles Godfrey, who left Fort Frederick in search of safer accommodations for his wife and children. As the family stopped along the river bank for the night, a single Indian approached Mrs Godfrey and warned her of impending danger – hostile Indians were present on the other side. Having avoided disaster, Mrs Godfrey reportedly said, “It brings to my remembrance what I have read in the Book of books, of Pharaoh’s daughter standing at the river’s brink and rescuing the babe, and seeing that no harm befell it” (T. B. Smith 1889: 19–20). The river setting likely influenced her comparison. Understanding the princess to be a symbol of divine rescue and protection, she believed that God had sent the Indian for the same purpose. Similarly, during the Sioux War in Minnesota in 1862–3, A. P. Connolly recounted the rescue of American women and children from the Sioux. “As Moses was preserved in the bulrushes and found by Pharaoh’s daughter and educated for a purpose – to lead the children of Israel from out the land of bondage and through the Red Sea to the wilderness and the promised land – so, too, was Colonel Sibley [i.e., the regimental leader of the rescuing forces] raised up to frustrate the designs of the Indians and liberate these women and children.” While Connolly focused primarily on the analogy of Moses with Colonel Sibley, the role of pharaoh’s daughter in rescuing Moses is evident. She had become the divine instrument of rescue in service of a greater purpose (Connolly c.1896: 139–40).

The pharaoh’s daughter has facilitated a variety of modern purposes. The Jewish social action group Avodah has used her to inspire others to work for seemingly impossible social change. The organization’s executive director, Rabbi David Rosenn, refers to the Talmudic explanation that if the Exodus 2 passage can be translated to read that the princess stretched forth her hand to get the baby (rather than sending forth her maiden), then her hand had to stretch a great distance. Connecting this with the observation by Rabbi Menahem Mendel (a nineteenth-century Hasidic teacher from Kotzk) that the princess could not have known that her arm would stretch such a distance, Rosenn concludes that individuals should not calculate the possibility of success or be restrained by what is rationally possible when doing good deeds. He encourages people to emulate the daughter of pharaoh by attempting the impossible when working for social change (Rosenn 2001). An African Methodist Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, points to the pharaoh’s daughter as one of many examples of black presence in the Bible. Identifying her as Thermuthis, the daughter of Seti, this church finds in her, as well as other biblical characters, reason to celebrate their cultural heritage (Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church 2002). Some adoption agencies, often associated with the anti-abortion movement, find biblical support for adoption

in her example. The Presbyterian Pro-Life organization, for example, contends that her actions, as well as those of other biblical individuals, “show how God has used adoption to provide for children and to further his purposes and kingdom.” When Moses rejected his position as her son, he “did not so much reject his adoptive family as he did their sinful and unrepentant ways as a nation” (Ring 1996). Dr James Dobson, founder and president of Focus on the Family ministries, suggests that telling an adopted child the story of Moses’ adoption will help convey dignity and respect to the adoptee (Dobson 2000: 71–2). The Moses Project, an effort sponsored by the Institute for Children and dedicated to the removal of barriers to adoption, also heralds the princess’s actions. Putting herself at risk, she provided Moses a secure, permanent environment that developed in him the qualities and character he would need to become a great leader. The movement identifies modern pharaohs as “race-based adoption policies, a federal funding system that rewards states for failure to promote adoption, and child welfare workers and judges who view adoption as a last resort, rather than as a gift from God” (Moses Project 1999). This interpretation implicitly associates the organization, adoptive parents, and religious communities that support adoption with modern daughters of pharaoh.

### *Moses’ birth in retrospect*

Some modern readers have understood Moses’ birth and early days retrospectively, often in light of the exodus, and in so doing have used it to address contemporary situations. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, a prominent African-American abolitionist, held Moses in high regard, as evidenced by her characterization of him in 1859 as the first “disunionist” found in the Jewish scriptures. She emphasizes his decision to break all connections with Egypt’s slave power and instead to suffer with the enslaved. Ten years later, she detailed Moses’ disunion in a narrative poem entitled “Moses: A Story of the Nile.” The poem begins with Moses informing his adopted mother that he will “go to join the fortunes of my race.” The princess attempts to persuade him to change his mind by recalling the day she found him. While this heightens Moses’ struggle, he still chooses to leave his place in the Egyptian palace. Harper had argued in 1859 that African Americans needed people who were “ready and willing to lay time, talent and money on the altar of universal freedom.” Her Moses provided that example (1990: 103–4, 138–45). Moses functioned in a similar way for the people of St Paul’s Church in Richmond, Virginia, but for a somewhat different purpose. In 1892 the church installed stained glass windows pairing a young Moses leaving the court of pharaoh (in the spirit of Heb. 11:24–6) with an aged

Moses on Mt Sinai, kneeling and gazing into heaven as the Israelites await his return. The first scene contains an inscription in memory of Confederate general Robert E. Lee, “Commander of the Army of Northern Virginia and Christ’s Faithful Soldier and Servant unto His Life’s End,” while the second bears an inscription giving the dates and places of Lee’s birth and death and a quotation from 2 Macc. 6:31. The first scene undoubtedly alludes to Lee’s decision in 1861 to leave the United States after his home state of Virginia seceded. The second refers to the stature attained by Lee as perhaps the most revered figure in the Confederacy. Despite the South having lost the Civil War nearly thirty years previously, the parishioners of Saint Paul’s found victory by recasting Lee as a modern Moses. His Moses-like courage and virtue suggested the ultimate triumph of southern values. Eleanor Wilner, in her poem “Epitaph,” showed the pharaoh’s daughter reflecting on her position as the king’s firstborn *after* she had been the first to die in Egypt as a result of the last plague. Contemplating her finding of Moses, she retrospectively characterizes herself as a young, bored, pampered princess who had been allowed to keep the baby Moses as a toy. Ironically, as she played with this human toy, she actually sharpened him as a sword, teaching him to hate the pharaoh’s palace and even herself (Atwan and Wieder 1993: 1.117). By juxtaposing the finding of Moses with the death of the firstborn, the poem focuses attention on the latent irony of the biblical story, as well as on the attitude of the wealthy toward the poor.

By interpreting Jocheved, Miriam, and the pharaoh’s daughter together, rather than separately, some have used the birth of Moses to reflect on the Hebrew exodus. On April 16, 2000, the oratorio *Women of Valor* had its debut in Los Angeles, a world premier, performed by the Los Angeles Jewish Symphony. Composed by Andrea Clearfield, the oratorio highlights ten women from the Bible, including Jocheved and Miriam. The Jocheved libretto, set to music characteristic of a lullaby, but accompanied by foreboding undercurrents, portrays her as placing Moses on the Nile in spite of the crushing agony it caused her. She beseeches the Nile to protect him, but also resolves to suckle him on her love and Hebrew heritage. Miriam, on the other hand, is portrayed with energetic music as the singing and dancing prophetess of Exodus 15. The coupling of the two women captures the agony of Egyptian bondage and the exhilaration of freedom, as well as calls attention to the important role played by women. Artist Judy Chicago connected all three women in a painted and embroidered matzah cover. The cover, which was exhibited in 2001 at the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, portrays Jocheved nursing Moses, Thermuthis finding Moses, and Miriam dancing with timbrel along the shores of the Red Sea. Celebrating the three central female figures of the Passover story, the cover reflects through ritual art the contribu-



tion of women in bringing about the exodus. Eleanor Wilner envisioned Miriam's feelings after the death of the firstborn in her poem "Miriam's Song." While preparing for the imminent departure of Israel from Egypt, Miriam reflects on the day baby Moses was found. Realizing that their freedom was gained by the death of the Egyptian firstborn, Miriam also understands that she is leaving one Egypt for another. She is reminded of this new Egypt whenever she finds herself at a river and hears the passing Hebrew army filled with men who themselves were once infants who had been hidden in baskets. She also thinks of the pharaoh's daughter lifting Moses from the Nile (Wilner 1989: 8–9; reprinted in Elwell 2002: 52). Wilner reminds the reader of the tragic side of the exodus, as well as the sinister possibilities inherent in it. The transformation from oppressed to oppressor always threatens the exodus story, and in fact often arises among those who have used the exodus in their struggles for freedom.

### *Israelite suffering and modern suffering*

Many have used the sufferings of the Hebrews (Exod. 1:1–2:10) as a lens to understand their own suffering. Various haggadot reminded their communities of the travails of their forebears. The *Venice Haggadah*, dated to 1629, portrayed on a single page the labor of the Hebrews, the drowning of the male infants, and a man and a woman sleeping in separate beds so as to avoid procreation. Images of the pharaoh sitting in a tub and washing himself in the blood of Hebrew male babies to overcome his leprosy appeared in the *Prague Haggadah* of 1526, as well as the *Leghorn Haggadah* of 1837 (Yerushalmi 1975: plates 50 and 92). During the mid-nineteenth century, Jews living in Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia occasionally referred to the *Familiantengesetze*, or family laws, as pharaonic laws. Introduced during the first quarter of the eighteenth century, these laws attempted to decrease the Jewish population by limiting the number of Jewish marriages that could be performed. No Jew could marry and establish a family unless he possessed a government-issued family number. When the holder of the number died, it could pass only to the eldest son; if the deceased only had daughters, the number expired. Those wanting to marry, but unable to obtain a number, had to leave the country (*Der Orient* 1848; see also *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judenthums* 1848; *Encyclopedia Judaica* 1971: "Familiant Laws"; *Jewish Encyclopedia* 1903: "Familianten Gesetz"; Marcus 1991: 2.15).

The Israelite oppression may also have provided a subtext for Ignazio Silone's novel *Fontamara*. Written in 1930, the book explores the plight of the *cafoni* of southern Italy, a landless class of peasant farmers. Alluding to the Israelites, Silone portrayed the *cafoni* as an oppressed people subject to the



Plate 4 Alain Foehr, *Slavery*. J. Nachtwey/Magnum All rights reserved/Al Foehr, *Slavery*, 2001. Reprinted with permission of Al Foehr.

whims and requirements of Italian governmental leaders. One peasant in the book even explains that governments created wars and epidemics to decrease their number (Gatti-Taylor 1994: 62–4; Silone 1960). The Reverend Alain Foehr, who spent one year as a minister in Fort Beaufort, South Africa, similarly interpreted the suffering of blacks in South Africa under apartheid. As a result of his experience and study of liberation theology, Foehr produced a series of computer images interpreting the experience of apartheid in light of the Hebrew experience in Exodus. The first image, entitled *Slavery*, links Exod. 1:13 with the image of a miner working in South Africa (see plate 4). According to Foehr, he met “black people working as beasts” and came to see them as the new Hebrew slaves (Foehr 2002). Likewise, some have viewed the warlords, dictatorial governments, and neo-colonial structures of dependence in countries such as the Congo, Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea, as well as European and American missionary efforts to control African churches, as modern manifestations of Egyptian bondage (Temple, “Theology at AACCC”). By linking their suffering with that of the Hebrews, subsequent readers express hope for deliverance and condemnation for their oppressors, while also coun-



tering the degrading effects of oppression by identifying themselves with the people of God.

## 2:11–25 Moses' Early Life

The biblical text next moves from the birth of Moses to his adulthood. Completely skipping over his childhood, the biblical author left a vacuum that subsequent readers have filled to a variety of purposes. The legend of Moses grew extraordinarily within this lacuna. Some interpreters, such as Pseudo-Philo and *Jubilees*, jumped from Moses' birth to his return to Egypt to deliver Israel. Others attempted to glorify him by filling in the missing details.

### *Moses kills an Egyptian*

Early commentators tried to mitigate the negative repercussions of his murder of the Egyptian and subsequent flight into the desert. Exodus has Moses making sure that no one is watching before he kills the Egyptian, hardly the portrait of a bold defender, and indicates that he fled the country because of the murder. Artapanus, however, portrayed him as a great inventor and administrator who was faithful to the Egyptian pharaoh, but whose exceeding popularity with the people had made the pharaoh envious. Hoping Moses would be killed when given command of a troop of farmers during a campaign against the Ethiopians, the pharaoh continued to plot against Moses even after he valiantly led the farmers to victory. When Aaron informed Moses of another plot, Moses fled to Arabia, where he met Raguel (the name used for Reuel in the Septuagint and the *Exagoge*). Thus Moses left Egypt to avoid threats to his own life, rather than to escape punishment for murder (*Moses* 3.27.4–21, in Charlesworth 1985: vol. 2). Josephus gives a similar description, adding that Moses gained an Ethiopian wife, Tharbis, as a result of his campaigns in the region (cf. Num. 12:1; 1974b: *Antiquities* 2.10–11). Philo glorified him even more as excelling in all things, but also choosing to pursue his Hebrew heritage (although continuing to be grateful to his adopted culture). Though angered by pharaoh's actions against the Hebrews, he was helpless to do anything, save offering words of encouragement and pleas for mercy. Philo defends Moses' killing of the Egyptian by portraying the latter as one of the cruelest overseers, and noting that "righteous it was that one who only lived to destroy men should himself be destroyed." Moses' enemies in turn created such doubt in the pharaoh's mind over his intentions and integrity that Moses had to flee to Arabia.

All the while he prayed that God would overthrow the oppression of his people. Thus Philo characterizes Moses as a defender of justice and portrays his actions at the well in Midian as efforts against injustice (1935: *Life of Moses* 1.5–11). Likewise, Stephen's speech in Acts 7: 22–9 portrays him as the defender of his kinsmen. The Hebrews, however, misunderstood Moses' actions, failing to see that through him God was rescuing them. For Stephen, this incident illustrates the Israelites' lack of discernment.

Praising Moses continued to be a staple of interpretation, but his committing murder also created problems for those seeking to laud him. Augustine questioned whether Moses acted virtuously in killing the Egyptian. But he extrapolates on the basis of Acts 7, that even though Moses lacked authority for this action, he thought his divine call to bring deliverance justified him (Lienhard 2001: 7). Gregory of Nyssa understood the killing as the fight of true religion against idolatry (1978: *Life of Moses* 2.14). The *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* likewise portrayed Moses' actions positively, but identified the two fighting Hebrews as Dathan and Abiram, leaders involved in Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16 (2:13–14; see also *Exodus Rabbah* 1.29). Medieval commentators typically understood the Egyptian taskmaster as a figure of the devil (Lewine 1993: 36). The *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu* (Exod. 1:9) exonerated Moses by recounting a story whereby the Egyptian taskmaster forced the wife of an Israelite to have sexual intercourse with him. When the Israelite discovered what had happened, he was angry, whereupon the Egyptian beat the Israelite. Learning of the incident through the Holy Spirit, Moses intervened. The Qur'an indicates that after Moses had killed the Egyptian, he immediately recognized the event as a work of Satan, and prayed for and received forgiveness. In gratitude for God's graciousness, he vowed never to help those who sin (Sura 28.14–21). Moses' exalted status seems to have mitigated his violent act. As an important figure in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Moses could not in the eyes of subsequent readers have been a common murderer.

Despite Moses' stature in Christianity, he has always played a role subordinate to Jesus. The events of Exodus 2 comprised the majority of scenes portrayed by Alessandro Botticelli in the Sistine Chapel. Commissioned by Pope Sixtus IV, artists began decorating the walls primarily with biblical scenes in 1481. The altar wall originally contained depictions by Perugino of the *Assumption of the Virgin*, the *Nativity*, and the *Finding of Moses*, but they were destroyed when Michelangelo painted the *Last Judgment*. Seeking to demonstrate the parallels between Christ and Moses, the two side walls contained scenes from both their lives. Placed opposite the *Temptation of Christ* scenes (also painted by Botticelli), *Moses in Egypt and Midian* depicts seven events: the killing of the Egyptian, the flight to Midian, the driving away of the shepherds, Moses watering the sheep, the burning bush, Moses removing his sandals, and Moses

leading the people from Egypt. While these events correspond to texts and themes contained in the Roman liturgy (Lewine 1993: 33), Botticelli apparently viewed them in their own right as pivotal in the life of Moses and the freeing of Israel from slavery. Their juxtaposition with events from the temptation of Christ suggests that for Moses this was a time of testing in which even the outcome of the Israelite struggle against oppression was determined. In fact, the *titulus* associated with this fresco reads: “Temptation of Moses, legislator of the written law.” At the inauguration of the restored chapel in December 1999, Pope John Paul II remarked that Botticelli had set Christ’s temptations in symmetry with Moses’ (*Dictionary of Art* 1996: “Rome: Vatican Palace: Decoration” and “Perugino”; *Encyclopedia of World Art* 1996: “Perugino”; and Pope John Paul II 1999). Yet the fresco may suggest that while Christ was obedient during his temptation, Moses was not; he had committed murder (Goffen 1986: 246).

### *Moses, Zipporah, and the daughters of Jethro*

A few decades after Botticelli completed his work, Rosso Fiorentino, in his painting *Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro*, glorified him as a man of great strength and energy, fighting off five others, with four already knocked to the ground. Around 1609–10, Carlo Saraceni depicted a quite different man. In his *Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro*, Moses appears to discuss the situation in a reasonable fashion with one of the shepherds. This, however, was an exceptional portrayal. Within about a century of Saraceni’s work, three others, by Sébastien Bourdon, Nicolas Colombel, and Sebastiano Ricci, appeared with the same title. They depicted Moses as either physically driving away the shepherds or as standing his ground against them with sword drawn, while the helpless daughters of Jethro watch.

By the late twentieth century the image of the helpless daughters of Jethro had been challenged by the depiction of Zipporah in the animated film *The Prince of Egypt*. She first appears as a captive in the pharaoh’s court who defiantly withstands the taunts of the Egyptians and is given to Moses as a prize. She then overcomes the guards and escapes to Midian. Later, when Moses drives away the shepherds in Midian, he falls into a well. As Zipporah’s sisters work to pull him up, Zipporah arrives and begins to help until she realizes who she is helping. She promptly releases the rope, sending Moses back into the well. Quite taken with her, he has to pursue and win her heart. Zipporah appears as one who does not need his help, but handles herself with strength and defiance in the face of injustice. Viewed in conjunction with earlier portrayals, the artists’ ideas about gender roles become more apparent.

While this passage has provided interpreters with an opportunity to reflect upon gender roles, it has also provoked discussion of other social issues. The Jewish Outreach Institute, an organization devoted to the development of community-based Jewish outreach, has understood Moses' marriage to Zipporah and relations with her family as an example of an interfaith family. Moses' marriage thus illustrates that intermarriage with non-Jews can be successful in some instances ("Moses' Interfaith Family"). Others have understood Moses to have been a polygamist. Arguing that Moses' Cushite wife (Numbers 12) was not the same as his Midianite wife, Zipporah, advocates of polygamy assert that the Bible does not condemn it ("Was Moses a Polygamist?"). The violence of Exod. 2:11–25 has also initiated reflection on the use of violence to bring about social justice. Brevard Childs, in his commentary on Exodus, admits that this question arises within the context of modern society and that the text gives no clear answer. Yet he concludes that, "By uncovering the ambiguities in the act of violence, the reader is forced to confront rather than evade those basic factors which constitute the moral decision" (Childs 1974: 44–6). Struggle with the story's violence has increasingly characterized modern reflection. The midwives' non-violent response stands in tension with Moses' violent reaction to Egyptian violence. It at least raises the question of the appropriate response to oppression.

## **Moses and Modern Biographies**

The first two chapters of Exodus quickly convey the reader from Joseph's death at the end of Genesis to Moses and his involvement with the exodus. They provide important information as regards why the exodus was necessary and introduce the reader to Moses. The biblical author, however, devotes more time to Moses' actions as an adult in delivering the Hebrews from slavery than to the preceding years. These two chapters are a sort of "bare bones" narrative with little comment by the writer(s). The writer makes clear that God blessed the midwives because their actions reflected fear of God. Moses' mother followed in their footsteps by subverting the plan of the pharaoh. Chapter 2 ends with God noticing the suffering of the Hebrews and remembering his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The stage has been set for the deliverance of the Hebrews. The author does not attempt to write a biography of Moses, but does explicate the Hebrews' relationship with YHWH.

While the biblical author did not produce a biography of Moses, later readers found within the Bible the skeletal outline for such a project. Writers have understood and shaped Moses' life in accordance with their own contexts

and societies, while producing divergent portrayals. During the early twentieth century, for example, several poetic and narrative renderings of his life were written. Among them were Edmond Fleg's *Moïse raconté par les Sages* (*The Life of Moses*), Werner Jansen's *The Light of Egypt*, Louis Untermeyer's *Moses: A Novel*, and Ivan Franko's *Moses*. The story was dramatized in Carl Hauptmann's *Moses*, Viktor Hahn's *Moses*, and Max Donkhin's *Moysey* (see *Encyclopedia Judaica* 1971: "Moses" for more titles). Two film versions were also produced. One, made by Pathé Frères in 1905 and entitled *La Vie de Moïse* (*The Life of Moses*), depicted Moses' life in six films. The other, produced by the Vitagraph Company of America in 1909 and entitled *The Life of Moses*, portrayed his life in five parts.

The imprint of the novels' respective periods is evident as they develop Moses' character. One reviewer, commenting in 1929 on the works by Fleg, Jansen, and Untermeyer, observed that "The problems which we link with his name [Moses] are not millennial dreams but the practical dilemmas of the living present. We who are plagued with a multiplicity of laws have a special interest in the lawgiver." While the reviewer praised Fleg's work as deserving "to be included with the Bible as one of the Apocrypha," he criticized Jansen and Untermeyer as producing a "strangely distorted and anachronistic Moses." Fleg, in the opinion of the reviewer, clarified the biblical Moses by focusing on "the legendary and poetical process which has given us the Biblical account itself." Untermeyer's Moses was "a labor agitator organizing the Hebrew slaves in a general strike." Jansen's Moses was "a parable for modern Germany," portraying Moses as struggling against Jewish bankers and businessmen who were overrunning Egypt (Seagle 1929). Without debating the merits of the reviewer's assessment, his observations concerning the novels by Untermeyer and Jansen underscore an important point. The meaning of a biblical text does not reside merely in its original meaning, but in the conversation between the "original author's" context and the interpreter's context.

One novel in particular demonstrates this idea, especially in relation to Exodus 1–2 and the life of Moses. Lawrence Langner wrote a little-known play called *Moses: A Play, a Protest, and a Proposal*. Langner, a British-born playwright, director, and producer, and the founder of the Theatre Guild of New York City, attached a long introduction to his play. In it he argues that Moses' monotheistic belief led him to ban the use of graven images. He observes that people worshipping many gods possessed a rich mythology and artistic expression, while those acknowledging only one god, such as Hebrews and Protestants, had a poor mythology and little artistic expression, but placed a high value on science and intellectual activities. One of the chief weaknesses of science, its "failure to realize the need of men for beauty," ultimately leads to materialism. Langner decries the modern industrial system for its degrading

influence on humans and its promise of nothing more than increased goods. He envisions art as the most effective combatant to modern materialism, and asserts that the theater could better demonstrate the importance of Moses to modern life than the Church. While the Church was hostile to “new views on old subjects,” the theater welcomed them (Langner 1924: pp. vii–xlix).

The prologue demonstrates Langner’s protest against materialism and Moses’ role in producing it. When pharaoh’s daughter goes to bathe in the Nile, she engages in a debate with Neb-Ket, a priest of Ammon. The princess complains that Egyptians are obsessed with gods and the building of tombs. Neb-Ket retorts that there is nothing better to do. Asserting that devoting oneself to gods is superior to devoting oneself to trade and commerce (like the Israelites and the Phoenicians), the priest proclaims, “We Egyptians are a nation of artists!” He praises the princess’s father who has foreseen that those worshipping only one god would have more time for barter and commerce, and ultimately gain the nation’s wealth. The pharaoh, therefore, persecutes the Israelites in order to curb the power they have gained by focusing on commerce. But the princess is determined to employ an Israelite as the overseer of her estate, because he will spend his time dealing with her affairs, rather than praying as the Egyptians do. Moses is then discovered in the Nile, and ultimately becomes the princess’ overseer.

Scene 1 portrays Moses as a young man who dislikes poetry, but values law. He aspires to lead the Hebrews out of bondage because he abhors the injustices done to them. He contends that Egypt has turned them into traders and cheats. While Moses sees only an Egyptian culture that has produced lust, corruption, and luxury, Miriam argues that it has also produced great temples, images of gods, tombs, and palaces. Moses sees these only as stone images for idolaters. Miriam then upbraids Moses for despising art and charges, “You love the law. Your temples are the temples of justice! Your images are the images of the mind.” In the second scene, set in a marketplace, several Israelites argue over business matters. Moses intervenes and upbraids them for their greed, asserting that their aggressiveness in attempting to possess the Egyptians’ wealth has caused their oppression. Later Moses tells Miriam that he has given up his dream of leading the Israelites out of slavery. Having discovered their greed and usury, he is repelled by them. Miriam encourages him not to be so intolerant and contends that the Israelites can be changed by changing their dream. Many of them dream of God, but he remains only a dream. Having never seen him, Miriam thinks that an image of God, as a symbol, would better serve the people. Moses denounces this suggestion as idolatry, asserting that God makes himself known through laws protecting the weak and the righteous. A “half-wit” then passes by and is accosted by an Egyptian official. Moses intervenes and accidentally kills the official and flees the country.

During the 1920s, the United States experienced what many historians call a second industrial revolution. This helped create a number of changes. Accordingly, “the 1920s saw an enormous increase in the efficiency of production, a steady climb in real wages, a decline in the average employee’s work week, and a boom in consumer goods industries” (Faragher et al. 1997: 723). Langner uses the biblical story of Moses as the skeletal structure for commenting on many of these changes. For him, the basis of the materialism of the Twenties lay in the figure of Moses, especially as distilled through the Church. Langner holds Moses in esteem, calling him the first to have a modern legal mind and characterizing his legal system as being centuries ahead of its time. Yet this system was designed for a nomadic group of people; it was “rough justice.” This “law of the desert” had remained, at least in spirit, the law of twentieth-century civilization. Realizing that Moses had become “a tradition, a legendary figure,” Langner challenges his stature and calls for a new set of ideals. He contends that “once the fact is clearly recognized that modern materialism can never be combated merely by preaching or legislating against it, but that some different direction must be given to the stream of creative mass-imagination, educators, preachers and leaders of thought may come to realize that the most effective answer to materialism is art.” The hope for civilization resides in paying at least as much attention to art as to “the creation of inventions and enterprises.” Desiring to liberate civilization from “the domination of Moses, Materialism and the Machine,” Langner offered his reinterpretation (Langner 1924: pp. ix–x, xxii–xxiii, xlv, xlix).

Langner’s Moses grows up under the influence of a princess who disdains Egyptian religion’s preoccupation with art and ritual, and instead values business. While he abhors the Israelites’ greed, he believes that setting up a legal system that produces righteousness is the only way to deal with such problems. Ironically, it is his violation of the law that forces him to flee Egypt. Langner seems content to allow Moses the lawgiver to deal with the problems of the ancient Israelites, but believes that this Moses has contributed to the problems of modern society. The traditional Moses, therefore, has to be challenged and recast. In doing so, *Exodus 1–2* provides the structure on which to hang the new presentation. In this new version Moses essentially becomes the villain, rather than the hero. The reader is thus encouraged to view Moses from the perspective of the roaring Twenties, rather than the thirteenth century BCE. Furthermore, Langner’s presentation of Moses from within the realm of the theater allows him to dislodge Moses from the domain of the Church and the Synagogue. By using the biblical sketch of Moses’ life, Langner challenges the traditional sacred presentation and role of Moses.

# Exodus 3–4

Modern critical scholars have approached Exodus 3–4 from a variety of perspectives. These have included efforts at identifying its sources (J and E are typical attributions, and chapter 3 has been deemed “a key passage for the documentary analysis of the Torah” [Propp 1999: 190]), genres (local cult saga, call narrative, and theophany have been suggested), and *sitz im leben* (local cults and the prophetic office have been proposed) (see appropriate sections in Childs 1974; Driver 1911; Sarna 1986; Noth 1962). While scholars discuss and debate the original author(s)’ intent, they ultimately hope to clarify the passage’s true meaning by uncovering its ancient Near Eastern settings. Often they focus on how these events relate to Moses’ life, as well as to Israel’s history. Gerhard von Rad calls attention to the composite nature of the Hebrew Bible’s presentation of Moses’ life. Each generation has repeated and added elements



to the story according to its particular understanding and needs. Von Rad explains, “These later writers had in their minds questions and needs and answers to questions related to their own experiences, as they tried to follow Moses in the path of faith.” One finds in the Hebrew Bible, therefore, “something of Israel’s own picture of itself and its history.” He further highlights the Bible’s interpretive nature by pointing out that none of these stories was “really written about Moses,” but rather about God and his words and deeds (von Rad 1959: 7–9). Von Rad has inadvertently identified the roots of the reception history of Exodus 3–4, which issues in two broad streams. One emphasizes the role of these stories in Moses’ life and Israel’s history. The other focuses on their significance for understanding and relating to God.

### 3:1–6 Moses Encounters YHWH

#### *Moses as a shepherd*

Moses’ encounter with God through the burning bush received little attention from the writers of the Hebrew Bible. Deut. 33:16 (cf. *b. Gittin* 7a) refers to “the one who dwells in the bush,” although some suggest that it should be emended to read “the one who dwells in Sinai.” Beyond this reference, the burning bush experience received virtually no explicit mention. Perhaps the biblical writers subordinated it in light of the greater significance of other Exodus events for the history of Israel.

This subordination began to change during the Hellenistic period. As the legend of Moses grew, writers used it to glorify him, which, in turn, helped them as they attempted to elevate the status of Jews among Gentiles. Commentators had to explain elements such as Moses’ occupation as a shepherd (3 : 1) that Gentiles might find objectionable. Philo, seeking to show that Moses was “worthy of memory,” explains that Moses’ shepherding of sheep trained him for commanding people. He emphasizes Moses’ worthiness as a great leader by arguing that the “only perfect king . . . is one who is skilled in the knowledge of shepherding” and by pointing out that he managed the flocks more skillfully than others (1935: *Life of Moses* 1.1, 11–12). Artapanus also glorified Moses at length, explaining the burning bush as God’s response to Moses’ prayers that the Hebrews’ suffering be relieved (*Moses* 3.27.21, in Charlesworth 1985: vol. 2). Moses appears, therefore, as one concerned for the plight of his countrymen and one to whom God responded.

Jews and Christians, however, did not always shrink from acknowledging Moses’ experience herding animals. At least from the third century CE, depictions

showing Moses as a shepherd became commonplace (Gaehde 1974: 353). Artists used this episode to reflect upon his life in subtle ways, emphasizing certain roles he performed by the manner in which they clothed him. For instance, some did not portray him tending the flock in shepherd's apparel. In the third century CE synagogue frescos at Dura-Europos, Moses appears clothed in a long chiton and himation, dress more appropriate to his later role as a statesman and leader of Israel; but a pair of boots worn by farmers and shepherds does sit next to him (Sed-Rajna 1985: 82). Within the Church of St Catherine, located at St Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai peninsula, two sixth-century mosaics adorn the area above the triumphal arch just in front of the entrance to the Chapel of the Burning Bush. One depicts Moses at the burning bush, while the other shows him receiving the Law on Mt Sinai. In both instances Moses is dressed similarly to the portrayal at Dura-Europos (Forsyth and Weitzmann 1973: 15). In the fifth-century mosaic in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, however, the artist depicted Moses wearing an exomis, attire more in line with the work of a shepherd; he does not, therefore, appear as a pious individual or a statesman (Brenk 1975: 80–1). This portrayal is also reflected in two illustrated manuscripts of the *Christian Topography* of Cosmas Indicopleustes. One manuscript dates from the ninth century and is housed in the Vatican Library (Cod. Gr. 699), and the other is an eleventh-century copy at St Catherine's Monastery (Cod. 1186) (Weitzmann and Kessler 1990: 34–6). These latter two depictions juxtapose the burning bush episode with the receiving of the Law (as do the Dura frescos and St Catherine mosaics), but they portray Moses clothed in both garments. At the burning bush, he wears shepherd apparel, while at the receiving of the Law, he wears the statesman's chlamys (see Boucher 1967: 105–21 for discussion of Greek and Roman clothing styles). Artists, therefore, found the portrayal of Moses at the burning bush helpful in reflecting on the various roles he performed. Moses' inferior position as a shepherd is counterbalanced by his attire as a statesman and by his reception of the Law. The coupling of the two scenes also highlights the divine revelation Moses received while a lowly shepherd.

The pairing of the burning bush with the reception of the Law reflects the transformation that Moses underwent. The burning bush scene calls to mind his sojourn in the wilderness, something resulting from his having killed an Egyptian, while his work in Midian as a shepherd contrasts with his royal position in Egypt. Moses had suffered great loss, at least materially and socially. His receiving of the Law, on the other hand, represented great gain. He had become Israel's leader and conversed with God. This change signaled by the different clothing also appears in a large sixth-century bronze cross located in the Chapel of the Forty Martyrs at St Catherine's. Most of the cross bears an inscription comprising Exod. 19:16–18 and a dedication by an unknown Theodora. The

top of the cross contains a depiction of a celestial globe with two hands coming forth. One hand holds a tablet, while the other has two fingers extending in a gesture signifying speech or blessing. The right arm of the cross contains a portrait of Moses removing his sandals, a common portrayal of the burning bush episode. The left arm of the cross bears the scene of Moses ascending Sinai to receive the Law. In the former depiction, Moses does not have a nimbus, whereas in the latter, he does. This points to the change in Moses as he progressed from shepherd to national leader. The placing of these two scenes on a cross also suggests that they foreshadow Christ's epiphany (Weitzmann and Ševčenko 1963: 385–90).

### *The burning bush*

#### EARLY JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN USES

In addition to reflecting on Moses' life, readers of the text have given attention to the burning bush itself. Philo turns the event into an example of God's providential protection of the Hebrew nation, seeing in the bush that burned, but was not consumed, a general symbol of those who suffered, but were not destroyed by evildoers. In particular, the bush referred to the Hebrews. Accordingly, the angel in the bush represents God's providence, while the fire actually protects the bush (i.e., the Hebrews) by consuming those who sought their destruction (1935: *Life of Moses* 1.67–70). *Exodus Rabbah* (2.5) preserves this nationalistic application with several teachings explaining the Hebrews' slavery in light of the burning bush. The thornbush, being the lowliest of all trees, reflects Israel's poor condition in Egypt. Since it was also the prickliest of all trees, and no bird could fly into it without injuring itself, Israel's labor in Egypt is cast as the most severe in the world. The thornbush also demonstrated Israel's relationship with the nations as both beneficial and destructive. Explaining that thornbushes were often used as fences for gardens, Rabbi Johanan asserted that Israel protected the world through its suffering. Yet Israel's presence among the nations could also cause damage. Since the bush's thorns pointed inward, a bird could fly into the bush unharmed. When it left, however, it could be injured. So, when Abraham went into Egypt, he did so unnoticed. But when Israel left Egypt, God brought the plagues on pharaoh. Thus the thornbush symbolized divine protection of the Jews living among hostile nations. The mixture of thorns and roses also helped to explain the presence of righteous and wicked Israelites.

Christian interpreters during the patristic period found the burning bush useful for advancing a number of Christian teachings. Ambrose, the fourth-century bishop of Milan, connected it with the work of the Holy Spirit,

asserting that God would illuminate the “thorns of our body” through the Holy Spirit. Yet, instead of consuming those in misery, he would alleviate their pain. God’s intention to baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt. 3:11) also demonstrated his intention to destroy sin and dispense grace (1955: “On the Holy Spirit,” 112). According to Chrysostom (c.347–407), in a homily on 1 Cor. 15:1–2, the bush indicates the resurrection of Jesus. As the bush burned, but was not consumed, so the body of Jesus died, but was not overcome by death (1956: “Homilies,” 229). For Gregory of Nyssa (335–95), the burning bush explains Mary’s virginity. The divine light appeared through Mary when she gave birth to Jesus, but as the fire did not consume the bush, so the birth of Jesus did not destroy Mary’s virginity (1978: *Life of Moses* 2.21). Augustine, in a sermon dated around 400, equates the bush’s thorns with sinners, the bush with the Jewish people, “full of sins,” and the fire with the Law. The point was clear: the Law did not consume the people’s sins (1990: 228). In a later sermon preached during the fast after Pentecost, he furthered this interpretation by equating the bush with “the thorny people of the Jews.” He asserts that, “If that people were not represented by thorns, Christ would not be crowned by them with thorns.” Augustine then demonstrated how the angel in the bush actually was Jesus (1990: 234–5). Ironically, the early medieval midrash *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* similarly used the bush, but to a vastly different effect. By equating the nations with the thornbush and the fire with Israel, it concludes that the nations might “extinguish the flames of Israel” (i.e., the Torah), but Israel’s fire would eventually consume the nations (chapter 40).

#### JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN ENCOUNTER WITH THE DIVINE

Medieval Christians continued to use the burning bush to express various dogmas. Christological understandings remained at the forefront, as is demonstrated in the Moses window of the Benedictine Abbey Church of St Denis. Moses’ life is portrayed in five episodes: the finding of Moses, the burning bush, the crossing of the Red Sea, Moses’ receiving the Law, and Moses and the bronze serpent. The interpretation of the burning bush is best understood in the context of all five episodes. Abbot Suger had explained the finding of Moses in terms of the Church’s nurture of the pious mind. Concerning the burning bush scene, Suger commented, “Just as this bush is seen to burn yet is not burned, so he who is full of this fire Divine burns with it yet is not burned.” The bush had become a receptacle for the divine fire, identified as Christ and distributed through the Church. This becomes apparent in the other three scenes, which Suger interprets as representing baptism, the grace of Christ, and the crucifixion (Panofsky 1979: 75–6). In this way, the Church, the royal maiden in scene 1, nurtures the pious. The Church essentially is the burning bush, containing, dispensing, and mediating the divine.

The Church's mediation of the divine expressed itself in other uses of Exod. 3:1–6. John of Damascus appealed to the burning bush as an image of Mary, in order to support the use of icons. Moses removing his shoes because he was standing on holy ground led John to conclude, "Now if the ground where Moses saw an image of the Theotokos is holy ground, how much more holy is the image itself?" (2002: "Second Apology," 1.20). As the cult of the Virgin Mary grew among European Christians, most communities during the twelfth through the sixteenth centuries began reciting daily the Little Office of the Virgin, prayers recited in honor of and addressed to the Blessed Virgin (Harper 1991: 133). The Book of Hours, which contained as its main text the Little Office, also arose as a devotional guide for laity participating in daily prayers. Furthermore, artistic depictions of the burning bush began including images of Mary and the baby Jesus within the flame. For instance, in a fifteenth-century version of the Book of Hours illustrated by Georges Trubert, an image of the Madonna and Child within the burning bush prefaces the *Obsecro te domina* ("I beseech you, Lady"), one of the prayers of the Little Office (J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Book of Hours, MS 48, fol. 154). This prayer, among other things, asserts Mary's virginity before, during, and after childbirth. The image of Mary and Jesus in the burning bush helped to convey this teaching, while juxtaposing this prayer with the bush also emphasizes its role as a vessel facilitating connection with the divine. The prayer describes Mary as "most grateful temple of God, the sacristy of the Holy Ghost, the gate of the kingdom of heaven." As the bush contained God, so too did Mary. Another work, commissioned at approximately the same time by René of Anjou (also the patron of Georges Trubert) and made by Nicolas Froment, portrays a similar image. As the central panel of a triptych at the Cathédrale St Sauveur in Aix-en-Provence, this painting depicts Moses before the burning bush removing his sandals while shielding his face with a hand. Within the bush appear the Madonna and Child, supplanting the angel of the bush who now stands across from Moses. Thus the Christian use of the burning bush to foreshadow the coming of Christ developed into a statement about the Virgin Mary. Artistic depictions literally shifted the focus of the account from Moses' reaction to the divine to the presence of Mary and/or Christ.

During the Middle Ages and early Renaissance the Church employed the burning bush as a theological expression for teaching and reinforcing in the minds of her members her claim as the divine receptacle. Jews also used this passage to assert claims about their role in the divine-human relationship. Whereas the Church had little problem making the bush the receptacle of God, Jewish commentators expressed ambivalence regarding its role. They took great care in dealing with the presence of both the angel and God in the bush. This was not a unique challenge to medieval Judaism. Earlier interpreters had

employed a variety of terms to describe the presence in the bush. Artapanus does not even mention the bush, but simply notes that fire sprang from the earth as a sign from God (*Moses* 3.27.21, in Charlesworth 1985: vol. 2). The Talmud references the Shekinah dwelling in the bush (*b. Sotah* 5a; *b. Shabbat* 67a). *Targum Neofiti I* speaks variously of the “Shekinah of the Glory of the LORD” having been revealed on Mount Horeb, the “angel of the LORD” being revealed to Moses from the fire in the bush, the “Memra of the LORD” speaking from the bush, and Moses being afraid to look upon the “Shekinah of the Glory of the LORD.” *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* characterizes Mount Horeb as the “mountain on which the Glory of the LORD was revealed,” identifies the angel of the LORD in the fire as Zagnugel (*Exodus Rabbah* records identifications as Michael and Gabriel, 2.5), while having “the LORD” speak to Moses from the bush, and Moses respond in fear of looking at the “Glory of the Shekinah of the LORD.” *Targum Onqelos* mentions Horeb as “the mountain on which the glory of the LORD was revealed,” “an angel of the LORD” residing in the bush, while the “LORD” spoke from it, and Moses being afraid to look at the “glory of the LORD.” *Exodus Rabbah* indicates that at first an angel descended as an intermediary, and then the Shekinah descended and conversed with Moses (2.5). Rashbam argues that even though the text mentioned God, it actually referred to the angel (1997: 31).

These efforts to distinguish between the presence of God and the angel in the bush were not mere semantic games. They reflect a response to the divine. Just as the text portrays Moses’ response to God’s presence in the bush, so do the commentators continue to respond by defining what the bush contained. The terms “Shekinah,” “Memra,” “glory of the LORD,” act as intermediaries between the reader and the divine. While these terms often refer to God himself, they are not precise descriptions and can encompass a range of meanings. Shekinah literally means “dwelling” or “resting,” and in rabbinic literature it usually, but not exclusively, refers to the divine presence. In the targums, it, along with other phrases such as *memra yakara*, serves as an intermediary term referring to God. In Jewish usage, therefore, it is not merely an attribute of God, nor does it refer simply to the divine essence. It has a wide range of meanings (*Encyclopedia Judaica* 1971: “Shekhinah”). Memra (literally “word”), occurring exclusively in the targums, “was used only to guard against any idea which . . . might militate against the exalted conception of the Divinity or tend to diminish the pure concept of God” (*Encyclopedia Judaica* 1971: “God”). It essentially serves as a linguistic buffer between the individual and God. The terms used to describe God in the bush and the debate over his presence there signal a written response to God. It is the written equivalent to Moses’ removal of his sandals and hiding his eyes.

Artistic portrayals of the divine in the burning bush episode also reflect a similar response. As might be expected, the portrayal of the divine is not uniform, but certain paradigms do exist. Usually the divine is indicated in one of three ways: by the hand of God, by the burning bush itself, or by some representation of an angel or Mary and/or Jesus. The hand of God is the customary representation in Christian art of late antiquity, while the image of Christ in the bush began to appear during the Middle Ages. Jewish depictions apparently never contained anthropomorphic representations of God (Kogman-Appel 1996: 116–17). According to Kurt Weitzmann, however, God's hand extends from heaven in the upper left corner of the Dura-Europos fresco, although it is difficult to see (Weitzmann and Kessler 1990: 35). The hand of God also appears in many other depictions, including the mosaic at St Catherine's Monastery, a fourth-century fresco in the Via Latina catacomb, an eleventh-century Octateuch (Vat. Gr. 747, fol. 74r), and an eleventh-century copy of *Christian Topography* (St Catherine's, Cod. 1186, fol. 101v). Examples of the angel can be found in a twelfth-century Octateuch (Vat. Gr. 746, fol. 157r), a twelfth-century Pamplona Bible (with only the angel's face emerging from the bush; Bucher 1970: 2. plate 103, Harburg F51R), and the fourteenth-century *Golden Haggadah*, *Sister Haggadah*, and *Brother Haggadah* (only the angel's face in the latter). The late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century Hispano-Moresque *Haggadah* combines the angel and the hand. Emerging out of the bush is an angel's wing with a hand coming forth from the wing (Narkiss 1982: 1.1. 47; 2. plate XXVIII). Indications of the divine suggested by only the burning bush or the sky, appear in the sixth-century mosaic in the church of San Vitale in Ravenna (Berchem and Clouzot 1924: 150–1), the mosaic of Santa Maria Maggiore, and perhaps the fourteenth-century *Rylands Haggadah* (Narkiss contends there are traces of an angel's face in the flames; see 1982: 1.1. 88; Sed-Rajna 1987: 93).

Scholars have debated for some time the relationship between different artistic renderings of the same biblical episode during antiquity and the medieval period. Jewish figurative painting existed at least from the third to sixth centuries CE, but apparently then ceased until the thirteenth century, when it was revived first in central Europe and later in Iberia. Earlier scholarship believed that Jewish iconographical models from late antiquity had influenced and been absorbed by early Christian biblical iconography. Later, when medieval Jewish illuminators employed Christian models in their works, they were essentially using Jewish models that had come to them through Christian mediums. Some scholars are now reassessing this idea and arguing that medieval Hebrew manuscript iconography used medieval Christian models and translated them into a Jewish context, often through the aid of rabbinic



interpretations. According to one scholar, “In many cases, polemical interpretations dictated a dialogue with Christian models, and steered Jewish illuminators away from motifs bearing strong christological meaning.” One example of this can be found in representations of the burning bush in the early fourteenth-century Catalan *Golden Haggadah* and its parallel, the thirteenth-century French Picture Bible housed in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York (Kogman-Appel 2001: 206–7).

The images are extremely similar. The illuminators have combined into one scene the various episodes of Exod. 3:1–6. The iconographical framework of the narrative is the same in both works: Moses appears twice, is surrounded by his flock, and encounters the burning bush. A bust of Christ appears within the bush in the Morgan Picture Bible. Reading from left to right, the miniature begins with an apparent rendering of Exod. 3:3, when Moses sees the burning bush. With hands crossed and resting on his staff, he gazes at the image of Christ in the bush (positioned on the far right of the picture). He then takes off his shoes, in keeping with Exod. 3:5, while continuing to gaze at Christ (Cockerell and Plummer 1969: fol. 7v). The *Golden Haggadah*, renders the scene differently, although using the same iconographical framework (see plate 5). When read from left to right (although the companion miniature depicting Exod. 4:20, 27, and positioned next to it reads from right to left), the miniature portrays an angel coming forth from the bush, Moses removing his sandals while looking upon the angel, and then standing and covering his face (with shoes on). Hebrew inscriptions above the miniature read, in sequence, “The angel of the bush,” “Remove your shoes,” and “And Moses hid his face”; they refer accordingly to Exod. 3:2, 5, and 6 (Narkiss 1997: fol. 10v). Compared to the Morgan Picture Bible, the *Haggadah*’s artist reorients the scene and emphasizes a specific reaction by Moses to the theophany, that of reverence and fear. The Morgan miniature, by contrast, stresses the account’s Christological connotations, something which the Jewish illuminator obviously avoids. The latter does so, not only by portraying an angel instead of the bust of Christ, but also through the Hebrew inscription, “The angel of the bush.” This phrase does not occur in Exod. 3:1–6; instead, the angel is there referred to as “the angel of the LORD.” Whether or not the artist intended to do so, this change in wording further distances the reader from any associations of the angel or the bush with God himself. The bush does not contain the deity, but it does contain his messenger, through whom the encounter with the divine is mediated.

These two examples illustrate common uses of the burning bush episode. Christians often employed it to stress doctrinal ideals, while Jews found it helpful for expressing responses to the divine. The Qur’an uses the passage to emphasize Islamic theological values by focusing on God’s instructions to



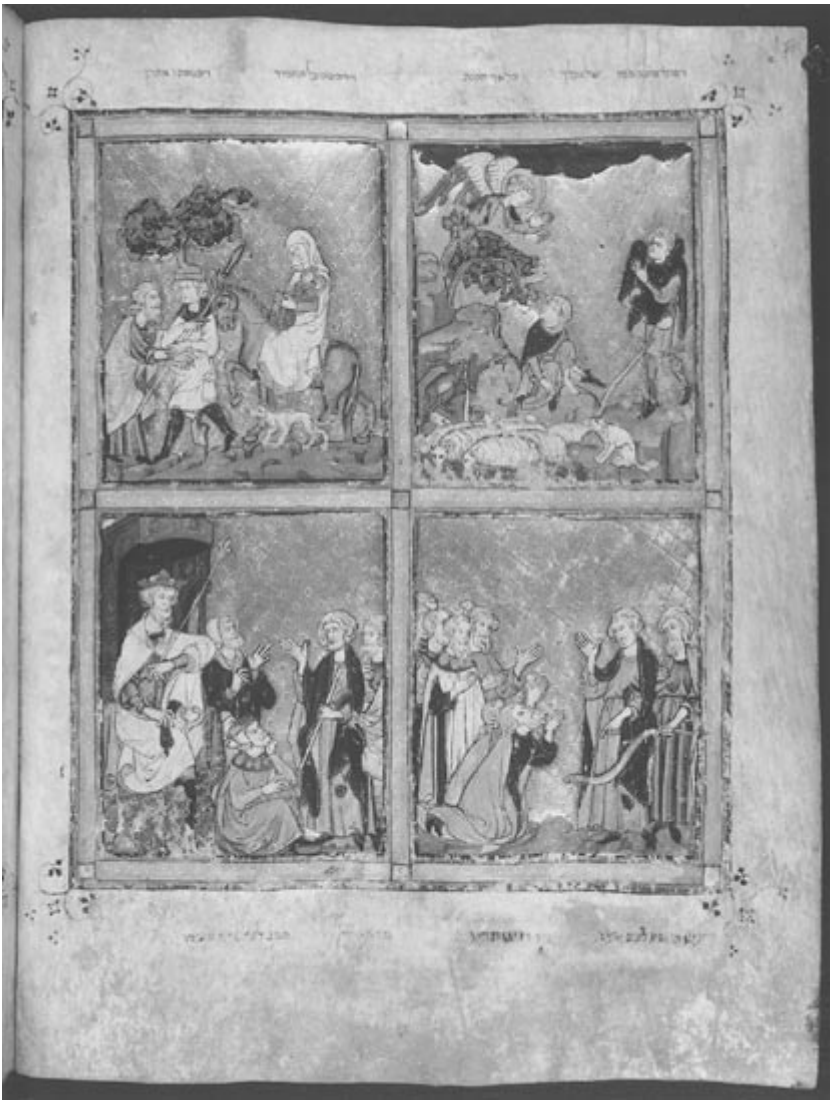


Plate 5 *Burning Bush, Golden Haggadah, British Library.*

Moses to serve him alone and to establish regular prayer (Sura 20.9–16). Historians of medieval Spain sometimes use the term *convivencia* to describe the interactions of Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Broadly defined, the term means “coexistence,” but it also encompasses the mutual influence and friction

among these groups. This concept asserts that “there are no cultural isolates, not in remote jungles, and much less in the cosmopolitan towns of medieval Spain” (Glick 1992: 1, 5). Generally applied to Jewish and Christian portrayals of the burning bush, one can see the mutual cultural links that provided the possibility of interaction, as well as the cultural distance separating the two groups. Jews and Christians shared the narrative and iconographical frameworks of the story. That is, they told the same story in the same general terms. Those frameworks, however, proved flexible enough to allow both groups to make distinctive statements. The burning bush itself created the most visible boundary. At times, so did the contexts within which these images appeared. Haggadot and synagogues appealed to Jewish audiences, while hour books and churches spoke to Christians. Neither was designed primarily to address members of the other group, although this undoubtedly occurred. Their audiences largely viewed the interpretations within the confines of their respective groups. The images, therefore, conveyed the group’s theological understandings to its own members rather than engaging in statements aimed directly at outsiders.

After the medieval period, interpreters working within institutional Christianity and Judaism continued to use the burning bush episode to debate and convey their particular theological understandings. John Calvin, for instance, understood the mention of “the angel of the LORD” to refer to Jesus. But he rejected allegories associating the bush with the body of Christ or the stubbornness of the Israelites, preferring instead to see it as the persecuted Church (Calvin 1950: 61–2). George Whitefield (1714–71), in a sermon on Exod. 3:2–3, identified Moses as a Methodist, arguing that even though Moses tended Jethro’s flock, he did not let this hinder him from going to the mountain of God (Horeb), where he met God in the person of Jesus. Whitfield surmises that Moses demonstrated the “methodizing” of one’s time by successfully combining religious devotion and business affairs. He also demonstrated how the bush reflected the persecuted Church or Christian, who suffers but is not consumed. He includes himself in this image, referring to the mistreatment he experienced while preaching (Whitefield 1809: 202–14). This understanding of the burning yet unconsumed bush, symbolizing the resilience of those persecuted for God’s sake, dates back at least as far as Philo. Interpreters generally agreed on this significance of the bush. Even though they may have disagreed on the righteousness of someone else’s cause, they almost always found in the burning bush a way to reconcile the persecution they confronted.

#### DIVINE ENCOUNTER OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

The burning bush, however, increasingly took on meanings outside the realm of the Church or Synagogue. Groups and individuals requisitioned it to express religious or secular ideas apart from the restrictions or interests of institutional



Plate 6 William Blake, *Moses and the Burning Bush*. Reprinted by permission of the V&A Picture Library.

religion. During the first decade of the nineteenth century, William Blake composed more than 135 biblical illustrations as part of a series commissioned by Thomas Butts. One of these works was a watercolor entitled *Moses and the Burning Bush*, currently housed in the Butts Collection of the Victoria and

Albert Museum in London (see plate 6). Moses dominates the scene, standing in the middle of the picture with his sheep grazing behind him, while the bush burns in the background. He holds his shepherd's staff in one hand and a scroll in the other, and turns his face in profile to the right, creating the impression of paying the bush only partial attention; a stoic expression covers his face. Blake's portrayal does not express the awe, fear, or reverence that others do, as Moses' sandals remain on his feet. One scholar has interpreted this scene as reflecting the low value that Blake placed on Moses, asserting that the flock and shepherd's crook represented his care for his people, while the scroll symbolized his ignored prophecy. This intimates Blake's opinion that Moses did not correctly evaluate what God had revealed to him (Damon 1965: 286).

Blake certainly did not hold Judaism in high regard, but his *Burning Bush* reflects more than disdain for Jews. He also struggled with certain aspects of institutional Christianity (as well as political liberalism), contesting its excesses in his writings (Essick 1991: 210). When Blake responded to Bishop Richard Watson's attack on Thomas Paine and his book *The Age of Reason*, he sided with Paine's efforts to expose perversions of the Bible, especially of Christ's words, and condemned Watson's characterization of Paine as a defender of "Antichrist." He acknowledges that while God speaks with honest men, he does not converse with "Murderers & Revengers such as the Jews were, & of course he holds that the Jews conversed with their own State Religion which they call'd God & so were liars as Christ says. That the Jews assumed a right Exclusively to the benefits of God will be a lasting witness against them & the same will it be against Christians" (Blake 1972: "Annotations," 383, 389; italics mine). Blake also makes clear his distaste for religious legalism in a conversation occurring between a devil and an angel in his earlier work, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. When the angel asserts Jesus' divinity and affirmation of the Ten Commandments, the devil proceeds to demonstrate how Jesus had little regard for the Decalogue, and concludes, "I tell you, no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments [*sic*]. Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse, not from rules" (Blake 1972: 158). In *The Book of Ahania*, Urizen, representative of the old and corrupt order (*Dictionary of Art* 1996: "Blake, William"), attacks Fuzon, one of his rebellious sons. Hurling a rock filled with the poison of an enormous serpent, the rock deformed Fuzon and then "fell upon the Earth, Mt Sinai in Arabia" (Blake 1972: *Book of Ahania*, 251; cf. Gal. 4:25). The analogy between Mt Sinai and the poison-filled rock further reflects Blake's negative opinion regarding religious legalism. He was repelled by any religious system that usurped God's ultimate authority.

In light of his negative critiques of institutional religion, Blake's *Burning Bush* arguably criticizes religious leaders, both Jewish and Christian, who

misuse divine power to sustain their hegemony. Moses, representative of both institutional Judaism and Christianity, scarcely pays heed to the divine presence in the bush, giving little more than a sideways glance toward it and not removing his sandals. The flock, representative of these religions' adherents, do not even look up from their grazing as they cluster around Moses. Distance separates Moses from the bush. Blake has used the burning bush to demonstrate institutional religion's departure from God. Whereas the Church had traditionally understood the bush to represent herself as the receptacle of the divine (see above, as well as the use of the burning bush as a symbol of the Presbyterian Church; Cobain 1987; Barkley 1988), Blake's image suggests that the divine no longer resides in the Church. He has thus effectively begun to rearrange the narrative by reconfiguring Moses' response to the divine. The episode no longer represents the revelation of God to the Church (or Synagogue), but instead the Church's departure from the divine.

The emphases reflected in Blake's portrayal of the burning bush continued along two main lines. One developed the bush as a metaphor for encountering God in nature. Interpreters have not necessarily understood this to stand in opposition to the encounter with God in the Church, but it has loosened the Church's control over access to God. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in her verse novel *Aurora Leigh* (1996: book 7, p. 265), penned in 1857 the now famous words,

Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God:  
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,  
The rest sit round it, and pluck blackberries.  
And daub their natural faces unaware  
More and more, from the first similitude.

Browning heralded the ability of nature to act as a conduit to the divine and viewed the burning bush not as an isolated example of contact with the divine, but as a paradigm for constant interaction. Accordingly, most people miss the common burning bushes because they are sensitive only to the spectacular and extraordinary burning bush. Browning's statement comes within the context of *Aurora Leigh's* reaction, in part, to her position as a woman in nineteenth century Victorian society. She asserts that nothing is insignificant, and sees the burning bush as a receptacle of the divine, frequently appearing but seldom perceived. In the twentieth century Robert Frost wrote a poem juxtaposing the burning bush with evolution (1928: "Sitting by a Bush in Broad Daylight"). Comparing the singular instance when life arose from "sun-smitten slime" with God's unique revelation in the burning bush, Frost concluded

God once spoke to people by name.  
The sun once imparted its flame.  
One impulse persists as our breath.  
The other persists as our faith.

First published in 1928, not long after the celebrated Scopes evolution trial, the poem places evolution on the same level as the divine revelation in the burning bush, and highlights the compatibility of religion and science. Frost understands the truths revealed by science and religion to constitute the great metaphors guiding humanity (Stanlis 2000; Squires 1963: 52–3), and implies that divine truth could be found outside the Church, as well as in it.

Within this understanding of the burning bush as encounter with God in nature stands the Danish artist Maja Lisa Engelhardt (see color plate 1, opposite p. 98). Working within the northern Romantic landscape tradition, Engelhardt focused on the burning bush. In 1996 she displayed in her New York City art show entitled *Burning Bush* more than twenty depictions of the bush painted in abstract form (Carrier and Engelhardt 1996; Scott 1996). Understanding the bush as a divine revelation, Engelhardt stresses with multiple images the living, changing God and intimates the insufficiency of a single portrayal. In an array of colors, each painting communicates the divine presence, while resisting the temptation to adorn it with anthropomorphic characteristics. At the same time these images evoke an array of responses, ranging from the fearful to the peaceful. At one moment the bush is blazing with fire, while at others it appears to smolder. One image simultaneously conjures up the peace of God and his passion by juxtaposing soothing colors with those that rage. Some depictions portray light clearly and boldly emanating from the bush; in others, it peeks through and suggests that God's mystery stands alongside his revelation. In another instance the darkness of God, indicative of his mystery, is surrounded by the light of revelation. Mystery and revelation coexist; his revelation penetrates his mystery, but does not obliterate it. The viewer does not consider this episode simply as a spectator, but personally engages with the bush. By participating in the divine revelation, the viewer takes the place of Moses and is encouraged to contemplate and respond to God.

These paintings do not constitute the complete collection of Engelhardt's burning bush artwork. One portrayal adorns the Social Democrats' Committee Room in the Christiansborg Palace Parliament building in Copenhagen and appears as part of a cycle depicting the history of Denmark and the various seasons in the Danish countryside. In this painting she links the burning bush with the crown of thorns, indicating the arrival of Christianity in Denmark. The bush, standing in the center of the painting, represents the Old Testament. The connection of the bush with the cycles of nature can also be seen in a



painting placed in Øster Tørslev Church near Gjerlev in East Jutland and two within Our Lady's Convent at Elsinore in North Zealand. The colors of these paintings reflect the seasons of summer, spring, and late autumn respectively (Wivel 2002: 150, 239–40). The emphasis on nature coupled with the setting of these paintings within a church and a convent bring together two loci for the encounter with God. He is found within and apart from the Church, but the two are connected.

This connection becomes even more evident in a depiction designed specifically for use in a church. Engelhardt's paintings housed in the Øster Tørslev Church and Our Lady's Convent were done originally as independent works, designed without their current settings in mind. But she has also represented the burning bush in one of two stained glass windows located in the nave of the medieval Kullerup Church near Nyborg on Funen. While one window portrays the burning bush, the other illustrates the true vine of John 15. She ties together God's revelation in the bush with his incarnation expressed in Jesus' parable. Understanding both texts as metaphors, Engelhardt presents "faith in the form of nature" (Wivel 2002: 295). The faith expressed by nature stands simultaneously distinct from and in partnership with faith expressed by the Church. Both are conduits for the divine.

Engelhardt's understanding of the burning bush as a metaphor highlights the non-textual nature of the biblical story. This episode is not composed simply of words. The text ceases to be merely a mirror of transcendent reality – that is, a snapshot picturing the divine. Instead it becomes a metaphor for that which cannot be seen. Thus the burning bush cannot be painted once and fully capture the divine. The burning of the bush is a continuous process, both stable and uncontrolled, calling the beholder to contemplate and respond to the mystery and revelation of God. In the words of Henrik Wivel, Engelhardt depicts God in the bush as "tethered passion, eternally burning, not consuming" (Wivel 2002: 301). This "tethered passion" cannot be controlled or contained in a written text, subject solely to the constraints of academic or religious exegesis. Certainly traditional exegetical "flames" appear in the bush's fire, but the passion burns with other "flames" as well.

While some understood the burning bush as an emblem of truth residing outside the Church, others used it to challenge the institution. D. H. Lawrence, in his novel *The Rainbow*, traces the evolution of the modern consciousness through three generations of the Brangwen family. He construes a scene in England's Lincoln Cathedral after Will Brangwen promises his wife, Anna, that they will visit all the country's cathedrals. Upon seeing it from a distance, Will becomes quite excited, believing it to be "the sign in heaven, it was the Spirit hovering like a dove, like an eagle over the earth." As they walk through the cathedral, Will's adoration and ecstasy grow. Anna too experiences wonder and

awe, but she also resents Will's exuberance. She thinks, "After all, there was the sky outside, and in here, in this mysterious half-night, when his soul leapt with the pillars upwards, it was not to the stars and the cystalline dark space, but to meet and clasp with the answering impulse of leaping stone, there in the dusk and secrecy of the roof." As awe-inspiring as the cathedral was, Anna remembered that the open sky was "a space where stars were wheeling in freedom, with freedom above them always higher." To her it was "the ultimate confine." She wished that she could experience ecstasy and rush toward the altar, but she could not. She observed, "The altar was barren, its lights gone out. God burned no more in that bush. It was dead matter lying there. She claimed the right to freedom above her, higher than the roof." Rather than being caught up with its passion, mystery, and awesomeness, she wanted to free herself from it, because she knew "that the cathedral was not absolute." The "little imps" adorning the cathedral told her this. "They winked and leered, giving suggestion of the many things that had been left out of the great concept of the church. 'However much there is inside here, there's a good deal they haven't got in,' the little faces mocked" (Lawrence 1943: 188–91). Lawrence describes a powerful and seductive Church that retains its devotees' loyalty even though the divine is no longer present. One scholar has described this particular chapter as "a symbolic poem, an ode on the emergence of the modern spirit from the world of traditional myth and ritual" (Pinto 1967: 223). It also reflects, however, upon the Church's role in the divine–human relationship. Lawrence indicates that the bush itself was not unique as the divine receptacle, being enlivened by the divine rather than giving life to it. Thus the Church too had at one time housed the deity, but now remained an empty, though powerful, shell. The divine had found other bushes in which to burn.

The interpretations of the burning bush episode by Blake, Browning, Frost, Engelhardt, and Lawrence challenge the reader of Exodus 3 to reconceptualize the passage by re-configuring the bush and offering alternative understandings of it. They remove the focus from the bush as a text establishing religious authority and instead call attention to its usefulness as a metaphor and a conduit for religious experience. Blake and Lawrence confront directly the hegemonic claims of the institutional Church, while Browning, Frost, and Engelhardt offer alternatives to the experience of the divine within the Church. These understandings assert that God transcends the institutional Church, and encourage the reader to think beyond the textual nature of the burning bush episode by considering its experiential dimensions. As a text, the burning bush account has been used as a tool of institutional authority; but as an experience, it competes with and supplements the institutional experience.

This dissatisfaction with the institutional Church also expressed itself in a utopian community popularly known as the Burning Bush Movement. Founded



during the late nineteenth century, the Metropolitan Church Association (the movement's formal name) arose within the context of American evangelical holiness Christianity. By 1902 it had established a newsletter entitled *The Burning Bush*. Within its pages the movement offered scathing critiques of mainstream Christianity and engaged in what amounted to religious muckraking. In 1905 the church began to transfer its base of operation from Chicago, Illinois, to Waukesha, Wisconsin, where it established a community for its followers; in 1915 it established a second community near Bullard, Texas. While the movement continues to exist, its North American membership has diminished greatly. The group spread its message in a variety of ways, including sending out domestic and international missionaries and publishing a newsletter, song books, calendars, and other items (Kostlevy 2000). Its first song book, entitled *Burning Bush Songs*, featured on the cover an imprint of Moses before the burning bush. The bush is engulfed in flames that blaze upward, while Moses, on bended knee and with sandals removed, covers his eyes (*Burning Bush Songs* 1902). It is a traditional rendering of the biblical scene, but it has now been used to illustrate the divine presence residing within this community rather than within mainstream Christianity.

#### SECULAR USES

From the use of the burning bush to herald encountering the divine outside the Church, as well as to assert the absence of the divine from the Church, a completely secular application soon emerged. It usually serves as a metaphor for unusual inspiration, as in James Dickey's introduction to a collection of poems by young American poets. Dickey contrasts his situation as a middle-aged poet who all too often succumbs to the limitations placed upon him by tradition and his contemporaries with that of young poets who hold unfettered potential. He describes this hope as "the promise to bring the reader to the place where the flame breaks forth from the pit and the gods speak from the burning bush, lifting human words from their mere ness, out of the range of teachable amenities and into the realm of salvation, redemption, and rebirth." He calls this kind of poetry the "Poetry of the Impossible: the burning bush itself" (Dickey 1968: 7–8; cf. McNamara 1986). Dickey's metaphor still maintains religious overtones, but it is quite removed from the monotheistic trappings of Judaism and Christianity. Instead it speaks of those rare moments of poetic inspiration, freed from conventional notions of poetry that capture an "animal responsiveness of individuals" (Dickey 1968: 10). Dickey's critique of conventional poetic notions further reveals the burning bush's usefulness in challenging the status quo. It represents an essential goal and helps indicate where institutions have strayed from their purpose. The presence of the burning bush on the seal of the University of Kansas reflects its use as an ideal. The fire

in the bush represents knowledge, while Moses depicts the humility of the scholar in his or her unquenchable pursuit of truth and knowledge (University of Kansas, “Traditions”).

Boris Vasilyev’s short story entitled “The Burning Bush” also reflects the secularization of the metaphor. Vasilyev chronicles the post-war struggles of a Soviet veteran of World War II, Antonina Ivanshina. After being discharged from the military, she attended a school to become a military training instructor. Some of the girls at the institute thought her crazy because she would freely share or give away her things. They did not understand that she did so because “the front had taught her to the end of her life to value only absolute values.” One day one of the instructors referred to her as “a real Soviet Burning Bush.” At first this angered her, because she thought it was a religious reference, but then the girls explained to her that a burning bush simply was one that did not get consumed by fire. Ivanshina replied, “Right, we don’t burn in fire and don’t drown in water.” The story describes the tenaciousness of Ivanshina, with the image of fire recurring repeatedly. She finally dies when a fire breaks out in her apartment and, being an invalid, she cannot escape. Vasilyev details this final episode, concentrating on the thoughts of Ivanshina as she burns to death. Ivanshina had been reading a book and reflecting on the divisions separating men and women. She concluded that only when the two experienced true union – that is, mutual influence that strengthened each other – could happiness be found. This led her to contemplate her actions as a woman in the military who suppressed her feminine qualities to become more “manly.” She then became aware of the fire. The scene moves back and forth between her struggle to live and her reflections on her life, especially the dialectic of the male and female within her. While in flames, she dies when a German pistol in her dresser discharges because of the heat, and a bullet strikes her. She envisions her company commander, who had kissed her after her first combat experience, beckoning her to come and take the next hill. She then “went through the flames, not feeling or remembering her pains or her sicknesses” (Vasilyev 1987: 11–12, 68–70). The burning bush had become a metaphor in the story for enduring values that Ivanshina had embodied. Such values were not exclusively male or female, but evidenced themselves when the two came together. Neither were these values necessarily religious or theological, in spite of the fact that a biblical metaphor characterized them.

With such a rich interpretive heritage *Exod. 3:1–6* demonstrates how the biblical text and its original context serve as only one ingredient used to produce meaning. In addition to these elements, interpreters have also added their own contexts. Among other things, this passage has produced assurance to suffering people, challenges to traditional structures, and materials for building religious understandings and institutions. Perhaps, however,

one of its greatest legacies lies in its provision of a paradigm for encountering the divine. This paradigm is not a monolithic pattern, reproducing itself exactly within each context. It resists simple reduplication, and even subverts itself when such a mass production occurs. Instead it relishes the freshness and diversity found within different circumstances.

### 3:7–4:17 Moses and YHWH Negotiate

This passage continues the action of the previous pericope, but now the center of attention shifts to Moses' divine commission to return to Egypt and his reaction to this assignment. The passage has generated two main fields of work: discussions about the nature of God and explanations of Moses' apparent reluctance in accepting God's call to be Israel's deliverer.

#### *YHWH's divine nature*

Brevard Childs's comment concerning Exod. 3:14 demonstrates this passage's importance to discussions regarding the divine nature. According to Childs, "Few verses in the entire Old Testament have evoked such heated controversy and such widely divergent interpretations" (1974: 61). Some scholars have pointed out that God's reply in Exod. 3:14 ("I am who I am") employs two identical or nearly identical verbs to reveal the divine name. Something, therefore, is defined by itself. Perhaps this rhetorical device is deliberately vague in order to convey the infinite potential of the term or to conceal information (Propp 1999: 224–6). Regardless of the reason for the vague phrasing, it has created a plethora of translations and interpretations among Jews and Christians. The Septuagint translates the Hebrew phrase *ehyeh asher ehyeh* as *ego eimi ho on*, literally, "I am the one being." Philo also used this translation, explaining the phrase as a device designed to teach the Israelites the difference between what is and what is not. It also indicated that no name could properly be used for God (1935: *Life of Moses* 1.75). The Talmud links the name to God's promise to reside with the Israelites (*b. Berakhot* 9b). Some targums (most versions of *Targum Onqelos* and *Targum Neofiti I*), as well as the *Peshitta* and *Samartian Targum*, do not attempt a translation, but simply reproduce the Hebrew (Grossfeld 1988: 8–9). *Targum Neofiti I*, however, provides a brief discourse on the phrase: "Thus shall you say to the children of Israel: 'The one who said and the world came into existence from the beginning; and is to say to it again: Be, and it will be, has sent me to you.'" *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*

gives a similar explanation, adding the translation, “I-am-who-I-am-and-who-will-be” (McNamara, Hayward, and Maher 1994: 19–20, 168). These comments connect the God of the exodus with the God of creation. *Exodus Rabbah* (3.6) records several interpretations. One reflects the unchanging nature of God, explaining that God has been and will be what he is. Another suggests that God’s name reflects his work, indicating that he is called “God” when he judges created beings, and “LORD of Hosts” when he fights against sinners. In other words, “I am that I am” means that God is called various names by virtue of his deeds. Yet another reading emphasizes the freedom of God to do as he wills. The medieval *Midrash Wehizhir* interprets the name as meaning that God will act toward a person in the way the person acts toward God (Kugel 1997: 305). Rashbam, however, understands *ehyeh* to be God’s actual name, while YHWH was his royal name (1997: *Exodus* 3.14–15).

Christian readers have also expressed a variety of understandings. At the very least, this phrase appears to have provided the vocabulary for New Testament passages such as Rev. 1:8 (Childs 1974: 81–2). Along with the “I am he” statements of Deutero-Isaiah, it may also have formed part of the background to the “I am” statements found in the book of John (Beasley-Murray 1987: 90, 139). The Vulgate translates the phrase as *ego sum qui sum* (“I am who I am”). Ephrem and Gregory of Nyssa did not comment on the revelation of God’s name, but Augustine attempted some explanation. God’s revelation of his name as “I am” indicates his unchanging and eternal nature, while his identification as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob suggests his mercy. At the revelation of the first name, Moses perceived the great gulf between him and God and fell into despair. God then revealed the second name to encourage him that God would rescue humanity by taking on human flesh (1990: 228–9, 237–8). Augustine had interpreted the name in the light of Christ. John Calvin, by contrast, understood the phrase to reflect God’s unique claim to be eternal, which, in turn, would fill the minds of humans with “admiration as often as his incomprehensible essence is mentioned” (1950: 73). Shakespeare used variations of the “I am” formula to articulate challenges to God. In at least four instances villains in his works declare their identity through a variation of the formula, highlighting the struggle between God and Satan (Janowitz 2001).

The variety of opinions regarding the divine name in Exod. 3:14 is somewhat ironic because its revelation has often brought confusion rather than clarity. Yet it has given interpreters the opportunity to speculate about God’s nature. Interpreters have also speculated about the term YHWH which appears in Exod. 3:15 and is commonly known as the tetragrammaton. This name for God occurs more frequently in the Hebrew Bible than any other divine name (6,823 times) (*Jewish Encyclopedia* 1903: “God, names of”). Prohibition of pronouncing the name YHWH eventually developed. The Septuagint translates

YHWH with the term *kurios* or “LORD,” suggesting that at least from the third century BCE, the divine name was not pronounced. The word YHWH could be pronounced only by the priest when reciting the Priestly Blessing in the temple (*m. Sotah* 7:6) or by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement while in the Holy of Holies (*m. Yoma* 6:2) (*Encyclopedia Judaica* 1971: “God, names of”). In the latter instance the people, upon hearing the name, would bow to the ground and say, “Blessed be the name of the glory of his kingdom for ever and ever.” The Talmud’s explanation of Rabbi Hananiah (Chanina) b. Teradion’s death illustrates the seriousness with which this prohibition was taken. Rabbi Hananiah lived during the second century CE in Palestine and died a martyr’s death at the hands of the Romans for teaching and studying Torah. As the rabbis tried to explain his death, they concluded that it happened because the rabbi pronounced the divine name in public (*b. Avodah Zarah* 17b–18a). Eventually speakers and readers of Hebrew substituted the word *adonai* (“LORD”), and later *ha-shem* (“the name”) or some combination of it with other terms such as *shem hameforash*, “the Distinguished Name,” or *shem hameyuhad*, “the Unique Name.” During the early medieval period the Masoretes combined the consonants of YHWH with the vowels from the word *adonai*. The new word was pronounced as *adonai*, but later the Masoretic substitution led to its pronunciation as Jehovah by Protestant Christians.

### *Moses’ reluctance*

Interpreters soon began ignoring or downplaying Moses’ reluctance to take up the divine mission to free the Israelites, usually out of efforts to glorify him. Artapanus did not even mention Moses’ protests, but instead moved from his fearful reaction to the burning bush (which caused him to flee) to God’s instructing him to return to Egypt. Moses then “took courage” and decided to lead a force against the Egyptians (*Moses* 3.27.21–2, in Charlesworth 1985: vol. 2). Josephus portrays Moses’ reticence as reflecting doubt over his ability to lead, rather than God’s ability to deliver the Israelites (1974b: *Antiquities* 2.12.2). His questions, therefore, sprang from humility rather than reluctance. Philo bypasses both Moses’ initial question and God’s response to it (Exod. 3:11–12), and instead combines God’s initial command (Exod. 3:7–10), the assurance that the pharaoh who tried to kill him had died, and the instruction to take the elders of Israel with him (Exod. 3:18). Moses, knowing that “his own nation and all the others would disbelieve his words,” and that he would be considered a deceiver if he could not tell them the name of the one who sent him, then asked God his name (Exod. 3:13). By making the Israelites’ disbelief the stimulus for the question, Philo essentially transfers any negative

connotations from Moses to the Israelites. He continues this when he explains that God has revealed his name so that the Israelites might learn “the difference between what is and what is not,” and that no name can properly be used of God. Anticipating the people’s “natural weakness” for using some title, God instructed Moses to tell them that he is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Should the people persist in their disbelief, God then supplied Moses with the three signs found in Exodus 4 (1935: *Life of Moses* 1.1.14). Acts 7 makes a similar use of Exodus 3, but for a different purpose. Stephen, having been accused of speaking blasphemy against Moses and God, recounts a litany of examples demonstrating the people’s opposition to God and his leaders. As he retells the Exodus story, he includes the burning bush episode, but excludes the questions raised by Moses. He next demonstrates how the Israelites constantly rejected Moses (as well as others) and concludes that Judaism’s current leaders have continued their heritage of rejecting God and his leaders. The speech of Stephen combined the traditional glorification of Moses with the disbelief of the people in order to demonstrate the preeminence of Christianity over Judaism. Origen turns Moses’ protest into the attribute of “self-understanding” (1982: 248–9), by reconciling Moses’ training in the wisdom of Egypt with his assertion that he is not eloquent. According to Origen, Moses did indeed speak eloquently, but when comparing himself to the divine voice and word, recognized that he was “feeble in speech” (Philo made a similar argument; 1935: *Life of Moses* 1.83–4).

Interpreters throughout the Middle Ages and into the Reformation continued to glorify Moses by either ignoring or explaining away his apparent reluctance. Ephrem justifies Moses’ first question (“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?”) as something generated by pharaoh’s attitude, explaining that, even as a member of the royal court, pharaoh did not accept him. After working as a shepherd, Moses knew he had no hope of gaining an audience with pharaoh. The signs of chapter 4, however, indicated how Moses would overthrow pharaoh through God’s power (Salvesen 1995: *Exodus Commentary* 3.3; 4.1). Rashbam understood Moses’ first question in a similar fashion (1997: *Commentary on Exodus* 3.11–12). *Exodus Rabbah* 3.4 records various traditions regarding his initial question. One compares it to a king who gave his daughter in marriage, promising her a province and a “maid of gentle birth,” but instead giving her a “negress slave.” Just as the son-in-law questioned the king regarding the discrepancy, so too did Moses question God about the promise to Jacob, “I will go down with thee into Egypt, and I will surely bring thee up again.” Moses wondered why God wanted to send him when he did not promise to bring Jacob out of Egypt. Another reading understands Moses’ question as expressing dismay over his inability to provide the people’s basic necessities. A third focuses on the nature of the Egyptians as robbers and murderers. How could Moses go into the midst of such people and bring out the Israelites?

Regarding Moses' request that God send someone else (Exod. 4:13), the midrash follows the ancient rabbis, who taught that, rather than being reluctant, Moses simply wanted first to pay respect to his elder brother Aaron (*Exodus Rabbah* 3.16). The marginal note to Exod. 3:11 of the 1560 edition of the Geneva Bible explains that Moses did not fully disobey God, but simply acknowledged his own weaknesses. John Calvin has a similar interpretation, explaining that Moses' questioning stemmed from his humility and, therefore, warranted praise rather than blame (1950: 69–70). The King James Bible's translation of Exod. 4:15 has even been adopted into the English vernacular. When Moses asked that someone else be sent, YHWH replied that Aaron would act as his spokesman and that Moses would "put words in his mouth." This phrase has become so commonplace that its biblical origins often go unrecognized (Norton 2000: 424).

Not surprisingly, Christians often explained the details surrounding Moses' reluctance in light of Church doctrine. Ambrose considers Moses placing his hand in his cloak (Exod. 4:6–8) to reflect not only his high regard for virtue, but also Jesus' original glory as part of the Godhead before assuming human form (1955: "Duties of the Clergy," 3.15.95). Caesarius of Arles, who served as bishop of Gaul in the early sixth century, remarks in a sermon that this same sign demonstrates God's rejection of the Synagogue in favor of the Church (1964: Sermon 95, 2.68). Gregory of Nyssa skipped Moses' questions in Exodus 3 and went directly to the signs of Exodus 4, viewing them as references to the Incarnation (1978: *Life of Moses* 1.21; 2.26–36).

Some interpreters, however, readily identified with Moses' reticence. Martin Luther found in the exchange between God and Moses a parallel to his own call to ministry. As God had to ask Moses repeatedly to accept his call, so too with Luther (1967: 12–13). John Knox, on the other hand, understood Moses' reluctance as illustrative of the fear that God's elect have when they doubt God's power and good will (1966: 3.313–14).

Others, such as Lincoln Steffens, have found these chapters to contain useful political implications. In 1926 Steffens, a prominent American muckraker, wrote a book entitled *Moses in Red*. A forerunner to the approach embodied in Michael Walzer's *Exodus and Revolution*, Steffens argues, "Revolutions, like wars, are social-economic explosions due to human (political) interference with natural (and, therefore, divine) laws and forces which make for the gradual growth or constant change called evolution . . . The Old Testament story of the revolt and the exodus of Israel is the history of a revolution, and it has the hand of God acting and His voice speaking all through it; literally." After witnessing revolutions in Russia and Mexico, Steffens was convinced that the exodus had the character of a modern revolution (1926: 18, 21, 44). Thus to him Moses functions as "a loyal labor leader," and the Israelites represent labor itself. Steffens explains Moses' apparent reluctance in terms of the hardest



problem confronted by leadership: “to arouse and move the slaves” (p. 64). Exodus 3 and 4 contain God’s explanation to Moses of “the plot,” “the first great conspiracy.” When Moses recognized the difficulty of motivating the slaves to rebel, God informed him that he and Aaron would convince the people to rebel by using the king’s refusal of their more modest demand to sacrifice to God for a few days. Anticipating the people’s reluctance, Moses continued to object, but God finally convinced him. Arguing that a revolution’s “intellectual” cannot act, but instead “talks and writes for the revolution,” Steffens explains the relationship between Moses and Aaron: “He (i.e., Moses) entered into the great conspiracy of which God himself was to be the master, Moses the executive, Aaron the witless orator and Pharaoh the unwitting tool and driver” (pp. 65–8).

Steffens book did not elicit a positive response. It was largely dismissed as a fable or a piece of Communist propaganda (Wright 2003: 40). Yet it represented a significant understanding of the book as a political tool. Steffens was not the first to read Exodus in this manner. During the modern period the entire exodus experience increasingly became associated with political revolution in the Western world. Savonarola, as well as Machiavelli, understood Moses and Exodus as having political implications (Geerken 1999). Additionally, the African-American experience found particular affinity with the political understanding of Exodus. Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., following the work of Albert J. Raboteau, observes that “No other story in the Bible has quite captured the imagination of African Americans like that of Exodus” (2000: 3). Specific renderings of Exodus 3–4 played prominent roles in this struggle.

### *Moses as modern deliverer*

Oppressed groups have often been comforted and inspired by God noticing the sufferings of the Israelites and summoning Moses to deliver them from Egyptian bondage. During the in struggle against slavery and racial oppression, African Americans believed that Exodus 3 signaled God’s recognition of their suffering and promise of a deliverer. Absalom Jones took Exod. 3:7–8 as his text for a sermon preached in St Thomas African Episcopal Church in Philadelphia on January 1, 1808, the day America banned the transatlantic slave trade. Jones notes that God’s deliverance of Israel was not a unique event. God had since then appeared “in behalf of oppressed and distressed nations, as the deliverer of the innocent, and of those who call upon his name.” The abolition of the transatlantic slave trade stood as “striking proof” that God continued such liberating activities. Jones explains in some detail how God, seeing the brutalities of the African-American slave experience and hearing the slaves’ cries,



had come to bring abolition to the United States and Great Britain. Thus “the mercies of God to our nation” had been demonstrated (Jones 1971: 337–9).

In December 1828 David Walker, a free black born in Wilmington, North Carolina, addressed the General Colored Association in Boston, seeking to demonstrate that because of slavery African Americans were “the most degraded, wretched, and abject set of beings that ever lived since the world began.” Their situation was made worse by the fact that America’s white Christians had perpetrated it. His address was subsequently published in three editions, with the last noting that his appeal had been designed primarily for African Americans. Walker encourages his readers that even though their oppressors were more cruel than the Egyptian pharaoh, “yet the God of the Ethiopians has been pleased to hear our moans in consequence of oppression”; the day of their redemption was near (Walker 2000: 2–3).

Even after emancipation, African Americans continued to struggle against racial oppression. This eventually led to the departure of large numbers of blacks from the South. These individuals were dubbed “exodusters,” indicating that the exodus continued as a contemporary experience. In 1879 John Mercer Langston, a leader in the African-American community, delivered an address on this latest exodus entitled “The Exodus.” He argues that slavery continued to exist as long as the conditions and mind-sets that produced the institution remained intact. The solution, then, lay in the overthrow of the “plantocracy of the South,” the reconstruction of the region’s industrial system, and the relieving of the ex-slave from his dependent status. He argued that this could be accomplished only by a withdrawal from the South of significant numbers of African Americans, thereby depriving the region of much of its labor pool. Believing this to be redolent of Exod. 3:7–8, he suggests that God has seen their miserable condition and has come to bring them into a good land (Langston 1969: 257–8). The correspondence of African-American experiences of oppression with those of the ancient Israelites served to confirm their belief that God was acting on their behalf. It also helped to contextualize their suffering as a temporary state on their way to freedom.

Eddie Glaude has demonstrated that the Exodus story provided nineteenth-century African Americans with the language and metaphors necessary to articulate and develop a sense of nationhood. Exodus was not only a religious story, but also became one with profound political implications, providing the framework for establishing a national identity for African Americans (Glaude 2000). Such understandings can be seen clearly in the previous examples. Absalom Jones referred to God’s mercies toward “our nation,” while David Walker described these as the actions of the “God of the Ethiopians.” John Mercer Langston read the departure of African Americans from the South in terms of a search for a new land. Ironically, however, southerners during the

American Civil War at times appealed to the same Exodus metaphors and language to understand their struggle for freedom. During the meeting of the first Southern Congress held at Montgomery, Alabama, in February 1861, Henry Timrod penned the poem “Ethnogenesis.” The poem heralds the establishment of the Confederate nation and decries the treacheries of the North as waging war on God. Timrod contemplates the possibility of war, resorting to Exodus language to describe his confidence in divine guidance (Negri 1997: 3–6):

To doubt the end were want of trust in God,  
Who, if he has decreed  
That we must pass a redder sea  
Than that which rang to Miriam’s holy glee,  
Will surely raise at need  
A Moses with his rod!

Drawing upon Exodus 3, 4, and 15, Timrod articulated the righteousness of the Confederate cause. God would provide an individual to lead the South from its Egyptian bondage to northern control and aggression just as he had provided Israel with Moses. Another southern poet, Henry Lynden Flash, dubbed the famed Confederate general Stonewall Jackson the Moses of the South in his poem, “Death of Stonewall Jackson” (Stedman 1968: 455; Link 1900: 2.372–3).

He entered not the nation’s Promised Land,  
At the red belching of the cannon’s mouth,  
But broke the house of bondage with his hand –  
The Moses of the South!

Southerners, viewed simultaneously as oppressor and oppressed, and their use of Exodus demonstrated the flexibility of the metaphor. At the same time as Flash was characterizing Jackson as Moses, African Americans, as well as whites, were calling Harriet Tubman the Moses of her people due to her efforts in personally bringing slaves to freedom through the underground railroad (Bradford 1997).

Others struggling for freedom have also used Moses’ call to express hope in a deliverer sent from God. A major advocate of liberation theology, Gustavo Gutiérrez has characterized Israel’s liberation from Egypt as a historical fact, a fertile biblical theme, and a political action. In explicating the latter, Gutiérrez describes Exod. 3:7–10 as the divine awakening of the vocation of a liberator. Historically, Moses came as Israel’s liberator. Politically, his coming provides a paradigm for the struggle to overthrow oppression and to build a “just and



Plate 7 Alain Foehr, *Mandela, New Moses*. All rights reserved/Al Foehr, *Mandela, New Moses*, 2001. Reprinted with permission of Al Foehr.

comradely society” (2001: 87–8). Within African Christian theology, liberation has been the dominant theme, and the exodus the dominant biblical motif, at least since the 1970s. Moses has been understood as the leader bringing his people from bondage to freedom, and, by analogy, African leaders who bring their people out of the bondage of colonialism have been likened to Moses (Mugambi 1995: 23–4). This hope for a Mosaic deliverer is reflected in Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s novel, *The River Between*. Published in 1964, the novel characterized one response to the European missionary effort as initial acceptance followed by rejection. The rejection occurred once Africans realized that their African heritage was being destroyed. For these Africans the Mosaic deliverance from Egypt expressed their hope to be delivered from colonialism. It led them to look for a black Messiah, a black Moses to lead from oppression (Mugambi 1992: 105–6). From an African perspective, many have been labeled as a black Moses, but perhaps the most famous example in recent years arose from the South African conflict over apartheid. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, addressing an audience in Panama City in 1989, found in Exod. 3:7–10 assurance of God’s noticing and acting on behalf of the oppressed (Tutu 1996: 161–5; cf. 115). This same passage inspired Alain Foehr, a white Christian minister, to comment on this section in the form of digital art (see plate 7). Entitled *Mandela, New Moses*,

the image shows Nelson Mandela behind bars; in small print in the lower left-hand corner is the text of Exod. 3:7–8. Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo has been considered a Moses sent by God to deliver his country (*Daily Champion* 2002; Jason 1999). Methodist Bishop Abel Tendekayi Muzorewa, the prime minister of the Zimbabwe/Rhodesia coalition government during the struggle to end white government in Rhodesia in the 1970s, also thought of himself as a Moses (Brockman 1994: "Muzorewa, Abel Tendekayi").

### *Moses as modern pharaoh*

The use of Moses in Zimbabwe to describe political figures highlights another feature of the divine deliverer motif. During the Zimbabwean presidential election of 2002, the Bible Society of Zimbabwe produced an election leaflet entitled "God's Choice for President." The leaflet encouraged Zimbabweans to consider certain qualities of biblical leaders when determining which candidate to support. Moses was one of the biblical figures chosen by the society due to his character as a "meek and courageous leader," and excerpts from Exod. 3:7–10 were used to reflect these traits. Some black Zimbabweans hailed Robert Mugabe, who had ruled the nation since its inception in 1980, as a biblical Moses, sent by God to deliver them from colonial rule (Afrol.com. 2001). Others referred to the opposition candidate in the most recent elections, Morgan Tsvangirai, as a Moses who had been sent by God to deliver the nation from Mugabe and his repressive policies (AllAfrica.com. 2002). In what was widely considered a rigged election, Mugabe retained power as the majority of the international community decried his tactics. Approximately one year prior to the election, one scholar wrote, "No liberation movement in southern Africa has ever lost power, or considers it thinkable that it should do so. Believing that their history of resistance to white rule endows them with a sort of permanent righteousness, Mugabe and his party have felt free to use whatever means they like to stay in power." These means have included beatings, torture, organized gang rapes, house burnings, and other methods of intimidation (Johnson 2001: 59–60). After the election *The Daily News*, a newspaper published in Harare, printed an editorial entitled "Time for a Moses to Lead Nation to Promised Land." Lamenting the deteriorating conditions of the country, the article called for Zimbabweans themselves to take action, rather than waiting on international aid. It expressed the country's need for a Moses to confront the pharaoh (i.e., Mugabe) and lead the people to the Promised Land of "democratic nectar and ambrosia" (2002b). The biblical metaphor had been turned on its head, as the one previously

hailed as the Moses sent by God had now in the eyes of some become a pharaoh.

This same reversal can be seen in Zambian politics. Frederick Chiluba became Zambia's first president elected by a multi-party system in 1991. Like other African leaders, he was often portrayed as a Moses leading his people to freedom, and even declared Zambia a Christian nation (Gifford 1998: 193–5). Ten years later, however, some denounced Chiluba's status as a Moses. Although he continued to refer to himself in Mosaic terms, others contended that he had turned into a pharaoh and that the nation still remained in Egypt (*The Post* 2001b, c, d; *Times of Zambia* 2003).

These uses of Exodus 3–4 reveal much about its ability to function within a political environment. On the one hand, its most common use provides hope and comfort that God has not only taken notice of oppressed and disfranchised suffering, but is actively responding to it. This is not a vague expression of hope, but one that takes solid form by identifying specific individuals with Moses and pharaoh. This use draws clearly defined boundaries and sanctions one cause, while condemning another; it facilitates the process of change. On the other hand, groups holding power have found the Moses/pharaoh analogy useful in maintaining their position. They too can claim divine sanction for their policies and tactics by appealing to their status as deliverers of the people. Exodus 3–4, as well as the entire book, facilitates the process of maintenance. As will be seen in later chapters, it encourages people to have patience and refrain from complaints and challenges. Yet, as illustrated by the examples from Zimbabwe and Zambia, today's Moses can become tomorrow's pharaoh.

The African appropriations demonstrate that in many ways not much distance exists between Moses and pharaoh. One who works to bring liberation is but a step away from becoming one who institutes tyranny. Lincoln Steffens recognized this and commented: "Both the Mexican and Russian revolutions ran straight to a dictatorship. Looking back in history it appears that all other revolutions took on the form of an autocracy. Moses was the chief, the absolute ruler of the Exodus. But so do all great social crises develop into dictatorships" (1926: 35). Both Moses and pharaoh used violence to deal with challenges to, and deviations from, their aims. Both were surrounded by a certain aura of fear and intimidation, and both displayed intense determination, even stubbornness, in accomplishing their goals. While these traits can bring about positive results, they can also result in great harm to the people. In fact, the transformation from Moses to pharaoh may be fraught with even more danger, since the one-time Moses turned pharaoh can invoke the images of Exodus 3–4 with all the attendant authority of a divinely sent leader.

#### 4:18–31 YHWH Attempts to Kill Moses

After encountering YHWH at the burning bush, Moses returned to Jethro and requested permission to go to Egypt. Having received it, as well as the assurance from YHWH that all those seeking his life in Egypt had died, Moses departed with his wife and children. He also journeyed with the divine directive to tell pharaoh that because he had refused to release Israel, who was YHWH's first-born, YHWH would now kill pharaoh's firstborn. Ironically, YHWH now attempts to kill Moses, but Zipporah saves him by circumcising their son. They then continue on their trip, being joined by Aaron, and the two ultimately convince the people of Israel of YHWH's determination to free them.

#### *Jewish and Christian identity*

This short paragraph has caused interpreters much consternation. While the *Book of Jubilees* (48:1–4) indicates that Prince Mastema (Satan) had attempted to kill Moses in order to save the Egyptians, neither Philo nor Josephus mention the episode; both merely recount Moses' departure and his subsequent meeting with Aaron (Philo 1935: *Life of Moses* 1.85–7; Josephus 1974b: *Antiquities* 2.13.1–2). Rabbinic sources, however, did not neglect it, but made sense of it in light of one of the most important ceremonies in ancient Judaism: circumcision. The Talmud records a debate regarding whether vows relating to the circumcised and uncircumcised (i.e., Gentiles, not uncircumcised Jews) were binding. During the discussion, Rabbi Joshua b. Karha attributed the attack on Moses to his having neglected his son's circumcision, asserting that not even Moses was allowed to suspend its performance. Other rabbis found it unthinkable that Moses would have intentionally neglected circumcision, and ascribed his actions to his fear that the journey's rigors might exacerbate any physical complications. Some explained that Moses' preoccupation with the inn and the journey prompted the attempted murder, while others suggested that Satan actually attacked the child instead of Moses. Yet another explained that two angels, Af and Hemah, personifications perhaps of wrath and anger, swallowed Moses' upper body until Zipporah circumcised the child (*b. Nedarim* 31b–32a). The Septuagint and the targums (*Neofiti I*, *Pseudo-Jonathan*, and *Onqelos*) record that an angel of the Lord, not the Lord himself, attempted to kill Moses. *Targum Neofiti I* further explains that Moses had tried to circumcise his son, but that Jethro had prevented it. According to *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, Moses and Jethro had agreed that Eleazar would be circumcised, but not Gershom.

Thus early Jewish interpreters explained the passage in a manner that maintained important practices of Judaism. Some emphasized the importance of circumcision, while others attempted to exonerate Moses or distance YHWH from the attempted murder. Thus the practices and values of ancient Judaism aided interpreters' understanding of the incident. Moses appears as an observant Jew, and the passage therefore upholds the observance of circumcision. Early Christian readers adopted some of these Jewish explanations, but within the context of Christianity they took on new meaning.

Ephrem places the attempt on Moses' life within the context of an argument between Moses and Zipporah. Moses had not had sexual intercourse with Zipporah since the burning bush experience. This angered Zipporah, who did not entirely believe Moses' story about the bush, and an argument ensued. Moses, on the other hand, blamed Zipporah for not allowing their son to be circumcised. As the daughter of a pagan priest, she had not accepted Moses' religion. She did not consent, therefore, to one of their sons being circumcised, but agreed to the other's future circumcision. In the midst of this argument, the angel appeared, seeking to address both issues, but leading Moses and Zipporah to believe that he had come only on account of the child's uncircumcision. Since the Hebrews in Egypt would look unfavorably on Moses because his uncircumcised son made him appear to fear his wife more than God, the angel moved aggressively. Zipporah, although terrified by the angel, recognized the threat to Moses and circumcised the child. Afterward Moses explained that if she had been afraid in the one moment of divine confrontation, he, having had multiple encounters with God, should fear him even more and follow his commands (Salvesen 1995: *Exodus Commentary* 2.8, 4.4–5). Ephrem's interpretation does not reflect an overtly Christian perspective. While it reveals Jewish characteristics by following and combining rabbinic explanations, Ephrem seems more intent on reading the passage in terms of the fear of God. As such, Moses and Zipporah reflect the struggle between those who worship the true God and those who do not. True believers, who for Ephrem would have been Christians, ought to obey God in spite of the obstacles put in their way by pagans.

At approximately the same time, Gregory of Nyssa also used the passage to delineate Christian relations with the secular world. For him Zipporah, or the "foreign wife," represents profane education (moral and natural philosophy), which he recognizes as holding some benefits for those seeking virtue. However, this philosophy could not be accepted completely because it carried some impure elements. It was necessary for these impurities to be circumcised before pure virtue could develop (1978: *Life of Moses* 2.37–41). Moses and Zipporah, therefore, represent the union of Christian teaching with secular philosophy. Gregory encourages Christians to pursue such a union, but with prudence. Just

as Jewish interpreters used the passage to uphold boundaries between Jews and Gentiles, Gregory used it to clarify the boundaries between Christians and non-Christians.

Jerome and Augustine interpreted this passage more overtly in terms of Christian doctrine. In his treatise “Against Jovinianus” (written in the late fourth century), Jerome challenged Jovinian’s teaching that virgins and wives were equal in God’s sight. The Exodus passage demonstrates that the foreskin of marriage had been cut off by the Gospel, prefigured by the knife used by Zipporah. Thus God favored virginity over marriage (1.20). Augustine believed that the passage sanctioned infant baptism, a rite that during his time had not gained universal acceptance among Christians. Scholars debate when infant baptism first arose in Christianity. Although common by the third century, it does not appear to have become standard procedure until the fifth and sixth centuries (Kelly 1978: 207, 430; Grant 1980: 32–7). Augustine argues that since the necessity for infant baptism could be equated with the requirement that male infants be circumcised, the attack on Moses reflected the seriousness of performing infant baptism (1956a: 4.24–32).

These interpretations demonstrate how ancient Jews and Christians used this passage to reinforce their respective identities through distinctive rituals or life-styles. Subsequent interpretations have continued in much the same manner as Jews and Christians alike have explained the incident from their religious orientations. This emphasis is especially evident in its depiction in the fourteenth-century *Rylands Haggadah* (with a similar rendering in the contemporary *Brother Haggadah*) (*Rylands Haggadah* 1988: fol. 14a). The caption accompanying the portrayal guides the viewer with four phrases: “Midian; And Moses took the staff of God in his hand; And Zipporah took a flint; Egypt.” As a point of comparison, the *Golden Haggadah* depicts two scenes: Zipporah holding her two sons while riding on a donkey, and Moses and Aaron meeting. The captions read: “And he placed them on the ass” and “And Aaron met him” (Narkiss 1997: fol. 10v). The action in the picture flows from right to left, beginning with the portrayal of Midian as a city. Moses dominates the scene and travels with Zipporah, who is mounted on a donkey with her two sons. The third episode depicts Zipporah calmly circumcising her son. At the far left, Egypt is pictured as a city. In its entirety, the figure of Zipporah rivals that of Moses. While Moses is the largest figure, being taller than Zipporah sitting on the donkey, she appears twice and is almost in the center of the scene showing her on the donkey. The picture’s captions call attention to what the artist likely conceives to be the main points of the passage. The attack on Moses is not emphasized. All the questions circulating around this passage are put aside as the focus bears down on Moses’ rod and Zipporah’s performance of circumcision. Moses’ rod would be the instrument whereby he



would perform the signs designed to convince pharaoh to release the Israelites (Exod. 4:17). It became a symbol of divine power, while circumcision symbolized YHWH's covenant with Israel. Thus the artist juxtaposes YHWH's covenant and power between Midian and Egypt. The family travels to Egypt with the rod, representing the promise of divine action, and circumcision, representing the people's obedient response. YHWH's response and that of the people are linked together. Moses took the rod of God, and Zipporah took a flint.

### *Challenges to institutional religion*

The modern era brought with it new ways of reading the passage. Instead of harmonizing the passage with traditional Jewish and Christian ideas, readers began viewing it from different perspectives. Historical-critical scholars endeavored to understand the passage in its original setting, suggesting that it may have been designed to explain how an original puberty rite was transferred from adulthood to childhood, or it may have been an etiological story explaining adult circumcision as a sacrifice protecting the bridegroom. Others hypothesized that the story reflected a Midianite tradition explaining measures taken to preserve the firstborn's life. Still others emphasized how the redaction of the story focused on circumcision by explaining Zipporah's actions as fulfilling the rite rather than explaining its origins (Childs 1974: 96–101). While historical critics have generated much research, speculation, and elucidation regarding circumcision's origin, a consensus has yet to arise.

Some readers, however, reshaped the image of Zipporah. Rather than being a supporting actress in the scene, or one who carries out the rites of traditional religion, Zipporah reflects a capable and vital player in society who nonetheless is oppressed because of her gender. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, reading the passage from the perspective of the nineteenth-century American feminist movement, understood Zipporah as the wife who, though deceived by her husband and forced to follow her husband's desires, nonetheless saved him. Even though Moses had married Zipporah under the pretense of accepting her way of life in Midian, he forced her to return to Egypt when he wanted to see his own people. With no choice in the matter, Zipporah followed her husband. When he was attacked, however, Zipporah used her "woman's quick intuition and natural courage," as well as her skill in performing the "necessary operation," in order to save Moses. Stanton then denounces the secondary role assigned to women in religious institutions, as well as canon and civil laws subjecting them to their husbands and contributing to the contempt with which men look upon women (Stanton 1993: 75–6). The Exodus 4 episode thus became a stage on

which to dramatize the disrespect paid to women by nineteenth-century society. Chief among the purveyors of this evil were religious institutions. Just as circumcision relegated women to second-class status in ancient Israel, so too did the religious institutions and ceremonies of Stanton's day.

Others saw a break occurring between Moses and Zipporah. One modern midrash emphasized Zipporah's status as a non-Israelite. She did not understand the need for their son to be circumcised, but nonetheless realized that she must perform the rite in order to save Moses. She also realized that she could not keep Moses from returning to Egypt; so she let him and Aaron continue the journey without her. From that point on Moses and Zipporah lived on "opposite shores of that river of blood" (Spatz 2001: 114). Poul Hoffmann, in his novel *The Burning Bush* (originally published in Denmark in 1956 as *Den braendende tornebusk*), also told the story from Zipporah's perspective. Unable to sleep that night, she struggled with her fear and confusion about the god El, the strange rite of circumcision, the trip to Egypt, and Moses' relationship with El. In contrast to the serene Zipporah of the *Rylands Haggadah*, Hoffman depicts Zipporah performing the circumcision in a state of confused and crazed desperation as she attempts to ward off a creature that had "attacked" Moses in his sleep. Gershom awoke with a scream as his mother, in the early morning hours, desperately circumcised him. She then collapsed. When she later awoke, Gershom had become exceedingly sick with a fever, and Aaron had also arrived. Zipporah sobbed, while "throughout the whole of Egypt suckling babes let go of their mothers' breasts and screamed" (Hoffmann 1961: 316–25). Hoffmann's Zipporah expresses confusion about God and his demands and raises questions regarding his ways. Why must babies scream for this God to be satisfied? Why must humans be involved in creating these screams? Similar questions seemed to have prompted the song "Bridegroom of Blood" by the controversial punk rock, art rock, and techno group, The Residents. As part of the album *Wormwood: Curious Stories from the Bible*, released in 1998, the song reflects views of Moses and Zipporah. Moses, old and tired, receives his call to rescue the needy (Israel is not mentioned). Zipporah, confronted by an apparition seeking to kill Moses, holds her tiny, weak baby in her arms and circumcises him, causing him to cry. The song is filled with ambiguity (as is the biblical story). The tired, old Moses, sent to deliver the needy, is saved by inflicting pain on a weak, tender baby.

The use of this passage to raise questions about God and religion contrasts with the ancients' affirmation of God and religion. The passage is enigmatic and has generated questions throughout the generations. The ancients found the answer to their questions within either Judaism or Christianity. The modern renderings considered here do not always find answers within religious systems and even raise questions about these systems and their beliefs. While the

original author/editor did not clearly indicate the significance of the incident, the reader's context has profoundly influenced its interpretation. Yet, as the text is re-contextualized in the settings of different interpreters, it continues to interact meaningfully with these environments by generating, challenging, and regenerating group identities and beliefs.

# Exodus 5–10

Exodus 5–10 contains the initial encounter between Moses, Aaron, and the pharaoh, as well as nine of the ten plagues. While the tenth plague (the death of the firstborn) is also related to these chapters, it will be considered in conjunction with the Passover and the actual departure from Egypt (Exod. 11:1–13:16). Exodus 5–10 splits into two main series of actions: the initial encounter with the pharaoh (5:1–7:7) and the plagues (7:8–10:29).

## **5:1–7:7 Moses and Pharaoh Begin Negotiations**

The first confrontation with pharaoh follows the meeting between Moses, Aaron, and the Israelites. After performing various signs designed to demon-

strate YHWH's resolve to free them, the Israelites believed and worshipped. The meeting with pharaoh, however, did not go as well. By and large, early commentators have paid little attention to these chapters, tending to combine into one episode the initial encounter with pharaoh (Exod. 5:1–9) and the subsequent meeting (Exod. 7:8–25). They have also developed characterizations of Moses and pharaoh that consistently glorify the former and vilify the latter.

### *Jewish and Christian uses*

Early Jewish interpreters concentrated on pharaoh's reaction to Moses and Moses' response to God. Artapanus, for example, does not record the meeting of Moses and Aaron with the Israelites, but has pharaoh initiating the first confrontation with Moses after learning of his presence in Egypt. Pharaoh then imprisoned him after he communicated God's order to release the "Jews." That night, however, the prison doors miraculously opened, and some of the guards died, while others continued to sleep. Moses left, went to pharaoh's quarters, and found the king asleep. After being awakened by Moses, pharaoh mockingly demanded to know the name of the god who had sent him. When Moses spoke God's name, pharaoh fainted, and then, after being revived, demanded a sign. Artapanus then recounts the inflicting of the plagues (*Moses* 3.27.22–7, in Charlesworth 1985: vol. 2). But he omits pharaoh's decree forcing the Israelites to make bricks without straw, which in turn led to the Israelites complaining against Moses, and Moses questioning God.

According to Josephus, Moses recounted to pharaoh the deeds he had previously performed on behalf of Egypt, as well as his experience at the burning bush. He then encouraged the king to believe God and not oppose him. Nevertheless, the king mocked Moses, whereupon Moses performed the signs given to him at the burning bush. This angered the king, and he accused Moses of deceitfully using magic and tricks. While Josephus records both the king's command to increase the Israelites' labor and the Israelites' complaints against Moses, Moses' reaction differs from that contained in the biblical account. Instead of questioning God, Moses strengthened his resolve to free the Israelites (1974b: *Antiquities* 2.12.2–4).

Philo's rendering follows more closely the biblical story, yet he openly characterizes pharaoh as proud and rejecting a deity discerned only by the mind. The biblical narrator simply recorded the words of pharaoh without comment, save the assertion that pharaoh's heart had been hardened (Exod. 4:21; 7:3). At the same time, Philo omits Moses' questioning of God (1935: *Life of Moses* 1.86–95). Perhaps pharaoh's words and actions needed no comment, but from

the silence of the biblical narrator Hellenistic and Roman interpreters developed a profile of the pharaoh as hot-tempered, arrogant, and merciless. They also characterized Moses as fearless, powerful, and undaunted in the face of opposition. The Talmud, however, records a tradition that Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land because he questioned God's character (Exod. 5:22–3) and asked God his name. Not even Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had done this, despite the difficulties they experienced on God's behalf (*b. Sanhedrin* 111a; cf. *Exodus Rabbah* 5.23). Nonetheless, the majority of Jewish interpreters in the Hellenistic and Roman periods sought to glorify Moses. As they transformed him into an ideal Hellenistic ruler/warrior/deliverer, much of the imagery supporting this endeavor came from Exodus 5–10 (Silver 1982: 50–87).

Christian interpreters largely understood the Mosaic call for freedom as a call to Christian faith and living. Origen understood Moses' demand to pharaoh (Exod. 5:1) as a summons for individuals to leave the world and serve God. He calls this journey "advancing in faith," and turns the Exodus 5 episode into a stage for acting out the Christian faith in this life. Pharaoh represents Satan, who attempts to enslave people with worldly activities. Moses and Aaron represent the prophetic and priestly word calling individuals to renounce the world and follow God. Those who do so are subject to ridicule and abuse (Exod. 5:5–9, 14), causing some to fall away from the Christian faith (Exod. 5:21–2), while others endure. Just as the words of Moses and Aaron provoked pharaoh, so too does God's word precipitate a struggle between virtues and vices. The Christian must stand against vices in the same way as Moses stood against pharaoh (Origen 1982: 252–9). Gregory of Nyssa follows this tradition, understanding the bricks to represent material pleasures. The making of bricks, therefore, causes one to neglect heavenly concerns and indicates that Christians must still deal with Satan's temptations (1978: *Life of Moses* 2.56–62).

Christians continued throughout the Middle Ages and into the Reformation to use Moses' confrontation with pharaoh to articulate the proper response to Satan and worldly ways. It was also used to encourage Christians who were being persecuted by earthly pharaohs. John Knox held up Moses to Christians in England as an example of one who boldly confronted tyrants. The repercussions of Moses' and Aaron's meeting with pharaoh demonstrate that, as the salvation of God's people grows more imminent, the temptation of the "Church of God" and the cruel arrogance of the "reprobate" increase. Moses' questioning of God, however, demonstrates the difficulty of standing up to tyrants. Even Moses considered the possibility that God either was powerless to deliver the Israelites or had unjustly changed his mind (Exod. 5:22–3). Yet God responded only by reiterating his former promises, which in turn strengthened Moses. To

Knox this demonstrates the power of the “Word of God” (Knox 1966: 3.284, 291, 301, 310).

### *Political and social conflicts*

Interpreters increasingly applied the confrontation with pharaoh to political and social conflicts, rather than spiritual battles with the world and Satan. The passage provided a framework, often understood within the realm of divine providence, in which to make sense of these issues. John Adams, in a letter written to his wife, Abigail, just a few months before the American colonies declared their independence from Great Britain in 1776, reflected on his role in these events (*Letters of Delegates* 1976–2000: 4.17). Adams had heard a sermon on the “signs of the times” which drew a parallel between pharaoh’s conduct in decreeing the Hebrew infanticide and increasing the Hebrews’ workload and the conduct of King George III. The speaker concluded that divine providence had decreed the American separation from Great Britain. Adams reflects:

Is it not a Saying of Moses, who am I, that I should go in and out before this great People? When I consider the great Events which are passed, and those greater which are rapidly advancing, and that I may have been instrumental of touching some Springs, and turning some small Wheels, which have had and will have such Effects, I feel an Awe upon my Mind, which is not easily described.

Adams is probably referring to Exod. 3:11. Whether or not he intentionally changed the object of Moses’ going in and out from pharaoh to “this great People” is unclear. What is clear is that the biblical exodus provides Adams with a referent for understanding and explaining the actions of the Americans as momentous, of great import, and divinely sanctioned and designed.

The referential use of the exodus is particularly evident in the struggles between African Americans and whites during the nineteenth century. In 1838 the African-American newspaper *The Colored American* published an article entitled “Dialogue between Moses, Pharaoh, and Others.” The dialogue roughly follows the confrontation between Moses and pharaoh as recorded in Exodus 5, but the subject matter is the freedom of African-American slaves. It begins with Moses commanding pharaoh to let God’s people (i.e., African Americans) go, so that they may serve him. Pharaoh’s resistance is expressed in arguments typically used to defend slavery in the United States. Pharaoh espouses his right to make laws for his own kingdom, asserting that “This is my own affair; my own peculiar institution.” He also points out that he did not create the slave

system, but inherited it. When Moses retorts that how or when the slaves were placed in bondage is unimportant, pharaoh contends that slaves cannot take care of themselves. Moses presses the issue, refusing the offer of wealth if he will cease his demands. A friend of pharaoh accuses Moses of disturbing the national peace, asserting that the slaves are content with their current status. Pharaoh's private secretary argues that slaves are not prepared for liberty and would instead ravage the country. Another friend of pharaoh speculates that Hebrews (i.e., African Americans) and Egyptians (i.e., white Americans) would intermarry and destroy honor and happiness. One of pharaoh's relatives urges stopping the discussion on the grounds that it will destroy the country. Moses objects throughout the dialogue that God has made all people, has chosen enslaved African Americans as his own people, and therefore wants them freed and will provide for them. When pharaoh refuses to release them and exits the scene, Moses says to God, "O, Lord God, thou seest the hardness of Pharaoh's heart. What shall I do?" The article ends with God's reply: "Go tell Pharaoh to let my people go!" (*Colored American* 1838).

Placing the debate about slavery within the framework of Exodus 5 makes a clear point. In the eyes of the author, the existence of slavery is an affront to God, and is not merely a social or political issue, but a theological one. God has taken up the abolitionist cause. The dialogue's author has subtly shifted the emphasis of the biblical passage. The book of Exodus was not concerned primarily with the abolition of slavery as an institution, but with the freedom of Israel. YHWH wants his people freed so that they can serve him, but he does not condemn the institution of slavery, only the enslavement of Israel. The author of the dialogue, however, uses Exodus to condemn slavery and essentially shifts the book's focus from Israel to slavery as an institution. In doing so, the author makes the biblical story a contemporary event. A similar process occurs in the African-American spiritual "Go Down, Moses." The spiritual retells the Exodus story, often repeating the command of Moses to pharaoh to "Let my people go." The retelling of the story expresses the hope of slaves that the exodus will be realized anew in their emancipation.

Ironically, nineteenth-century American southerners also used the exodus to articulate their hopes for liberation. As seen in the previous chapter, Henry Timrod's poem "Ethnogenesis," written during the meeting of the Confederacy's first Congress, expressed this sentiment (Negri 1997: 3–6). Reflecting wonder and hope over the birth of the Confederacy as a new nation, as well as disdain for northern treatment of the South, Timrod characterizes the southern cause as righteous. He shifts the focus of Exodus from God's fulfillment of his covenant with Israel to the creation of a new Confederate nation.

Interpreters in subsequent centuries continued to focus on the confrontational aspects of Exodus 5–7. A Zionist Haggadah published in 1934 in Warsaw



changed Moses' demand to "Let my people go!" to "Let my people in!" to protest British restrictions on Jewish emigration to Palestine. It illustrates the scene of Moses before pharaoh as Zionist leader Vladimir (Ze'eb) Jabotinsky standing before King George V with a petition demanding that Jews be allowed to enter Palestine (Yerushalmi 1975: plate 155). Moses' command has also proved useful in African struggles for independence from Western colonialism (Temple 2002), as well as from African regimes perceived as repressive, such as those in Uganda (*Monitor* 2002) and Zimbabwe (*Daily News* 2002b). Alain Foehr's computer-generated images in his series *Apartheid* depict the South African struggle in terms of the exodus. In one image entitled *Liberation*, Foehr portrays the contemporary enacting of Exod. 6:6 with an anti-apartheid demonstration, suggesting that divine liberation manifests itself in the overthrow of the apartheid system. An individual wearing a shirt with the slogan "Stop Apartheid" is highlighted. In another image entitled *Let My People Go*, Foehr illustrates the oppressive measures used against blacks by showing a black man holding up his identification document.

The tyrannical nature of pharaonic rule has also been characterized by the phrase "bricks without straw." The phrase itself does not actually appear in the biblical text, but alludes to the overwhelming oppression forced on the Hebrews (see Exod. 5:7, 10–11, 16). By at least the seventeenth century, the phrase appeared in various works of English literature (F. P. Wilson 1970: 85). Since then it has denoted virtually impossible tasks forced upon subordinates by those in power, as, for example, in the efforts of African Americans after the Civil War to build on their new freedom. Albion Tourgee, a radical Republican, carpetbagger, and one of the lawyers involved in the landmark *Plessy v. Ferguson* court case (that in 1896 unsuccessfully challenged Louisiana's law creating segregated railroad cars), wrote a novel in 1880 entitled *Bricks Without Straw* (Curtis 1996). Set during the period of Reconstruction, the novel chronicles the struggles of African Americans to overcome racism even after having received their freedom. Tourgee explains Reconstruction's failure by indicating that the North had expected African Americans to function as modern citizens without status, rights, or property. White southerners possessed intelligence, wealth, and pride, while black southerners had only ignorance, poverty, and a hated race. Blacks could not cope with whites' power, while whites failed to understand that freedom for slaves must also result in a stronger social, civil, and political status. African Americans, therefore, were forced to make bricks without straw and were doomed to failure. Their liberty could not be maintained, nor prosperity achieved, with ignorance and poverty (Tourgee 1880: 399–401; Stephens 1989). About the same time as Tourgee published his book, Booker T. Washington established a school in Tuskegee, Alabama, designed to teach African Americans the necessary skills for various trades. Washington refers to the early challenges

confronting the school as “a harder task than making bricks without straw.” As part of their workload, students made bricks, causing Washington to sympathize with the Israelites (Washington 1993: 109–11).

The metaphor has continued to be used to characterize the struggles of African Americans for civil rights, describing the efforts of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s Legal Defense Fund during the mid-twentieth century (Clemon and Fair 1991). Yet its use has not been restricted to the struggle for racial equality. Groups such as women seeking significant leadership positions in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, or primary care physicians struggling with the demands of managed care, and an inter-religious group dealing with the challenges of urban life have used the phrase to represent their plights (Pope 1994; Blum 2002; Worldwide Faith News 1996). By identifying with the Israelites, who found themselves in a virtually impossible situation, groups in similar circumstances find comfort and hope. A deliverer came to the Israelites. When groups, both secular and religious, resort to the exodus story, they articulate hope that they too will experience relief.

The exodus story’s ability to communicate apart from its biblical setting illustrates its transcendence. Moses’ appearance before pharaoh has become so synonymous with the confrontation of oppressive injustice that at times phrases such as “Let my people go,” “bricks without straw,” and “Go and tell pharaoh” (Exod. 6:11) are used without reference to their biblical origins. In January 1943 Victor Gollancz published a pamphlet appealing to the British public to pressure their government to oppose Hitler’s massacre of the Jews. Although the pamphlet was entitled *Let My People Go*, Gollancz never mentioned the biblical story. In 1776 William Williams complained in a letter about the expectation that the American army could defeat the British in spite of being poorly supplied and supported. This was tantamount to making “Bricks without Straw or even Stubble” (*Letters of Delegates* 1976–2000: 4.637–8). While Williams did not specifically cite the biblical story, the phrase indicated the challenge of performing a task without sufficient means. The Reverend Al Sharpton, an African-American activist, entitled his autobiography, *Go and Tell Pharaoh*, but hardly refers to the biblical event. A verse from the spiritual “Go Down, Moses” that contains this phrase is quoted without comment at the beginning of his book. Toward its end, Sharpton counsels young African Americans that “you can’t beat pharaoh by matching his tricks.” He concludes by asserting, “I want to help get my people out from under the grip of Pharaoh – the blind and arrogant indifference to their lives and hopes by individuals and institutions in the country of their births that has maimed, for no reason, so many for so long” (Sharpton and Walton 1996: 264, 270). In no instance, however, does he explain these references in terms of the biblical exodus. Sharpton assumes that

his readers understand that to go and tell pharaoh means to confront injustice. At least two reviews of the book do not refer to the biblical exodus either; the closest reference comes when one reviewer calls Sharpton a “would-be Moses” (Sleeper 1996; Goodman 1996).

### *The hardening of pharaoh’s heart*

#### RELIGIOUS USES

Whereas Exodus 5–7 helped interpreters articulate their hopes for deliverance, it also helped them understand the opposition to their efforts. The Bible explains Egyptian opposition rather enigmatically as the hardening of pharaoh’s heart, a reference occurring over two dozen times in Exodus 5–10. A variety of Hebrew terms describes the hardening: “strengthen his heart” (4:21; 7:13, 22; 8:19 [Hebrew: 8:15]; 9:12, 35; 10:20, 27; 14:4, 8, 17), “make hard” (7:3), and “heavy heart” (7:14; 8:15, 32 [Hebrew: 8:11, 28]; 9:7, 34; 10:1). At times the biblical text indicates that YHWH hardened pharaoh’s heart, while in other instances pharaoh hardened his own heart. The only other explicit reference to this event in the Hebrew Bible is found in 1 Sam. 6:6 (although Isa. 63:17 refers to YHWH hardening Israel’s heart). There the Philistine priests and diviners advise the Philistines to return the ark of the covenant to the Israelites with a guilt offering and avoid becoming like the Egyptians and pharaoh who hardened their hearts. Ironically this reference comes from the mouth of Philistines, not Israelites. In all cases the phrase describes disobedience. In the New Testament, the Gospel of Mark employs it to express Jesus’ dismay over the disciples’ inability to understand his teaching (Mark 8:17). In Rom. 9:15–18 it indicates the freedom of God to choose who he will have mercy on, while in Hebrews 3 Christians are encouraged to continue in their belief in Jesus, not hardening their hearts like the Israelites in the wilderness. The Talmudic rabbis focus on pharaoh’s pride as the main factor leading to his punishment, and contrast the response of Moses and Aaron after God bestowed greatness on them with that of pharaoh. Whereas Moses and Aaron responded in humility, pharaoh responded blasphemously, “Who is the Lord?” (Exod. 5:2; *b. Chullin* 89a; *b. Sanhedrin* 94a–b).

In both early Christian and Islamic discourse the hardening of pharaoh’s heart continued to be understood in terms of disobedience. The Qur’an portrays pharaoh as willingly and arrogantly rejecting God’s signs. When the Egyptian sorcerers confronted Moses and Aaron, they were convinced and converted. But pharaoh in his arrogance refused to see the truth and had the sorcerers killed (Suras 7.103–29; 20.56–73; 26.10–51; 40.21–60; 43.45–56; 79.15–26). The Qur’an conversely holds up pharaoh’s wife, who prayed to be

saved from pharaoh and his actions, as an example of obedience (Sura 66.11). Among Christians, the author of *1 Clement* encouraged readers to confess their sins and not harden their hearts as pharaoh did (51.3–5). By the time of Origen, this passage had generated fierce disputes in Christian circles regarding free will. Origen notes that “heretics” used this passage to “practically destroy free will,” and explains that God hardens the hearts of those who are already hardened because such hearts result from the evil within a person, not from God’s predetermination (1973: *On First Principles* 3.1.7–14). Gregory of Nazianzus considers the hard-hearted pharaoh as exemplifying God’s power over and judgment on the ungodly (1952–7: “On His Father’s Silence,” 248). To Augustine the hardening resulted from pharaoh’s mistreatment of the Israelites, and therefore was not synonymous with disobedience, but divine punishment for disobedience (1982: 162–5). Ephrem contends that God did not harden pharaoh’s heart, because had he done so pharaoh would have been unable to change his mind and allow the Israelites to leave Egypt. Pharaoh’s hardness came from the type of mind that submits to God during periods of punishment, but then disobeys once the punishment has ended (Salvesen 1995: *Exodus Commentary* 8.5). Gregory of Nyssa also argues that because each person has the power to make choices, God did not harden pharaoh’s heart. Reading the passage in light of Rom. 1:26–8, Gregory concludes that “the Egyptian tyrant is hardened by God not because the divine will places the resistance in the soul of Pharaoh but because the free will through its inclination to evil does not receive the word which softens resistance.” Each of the plagues, then, arose from sinful choices (1978: *Life of Moses* 2.73–88). Caesarius of Arles gives a similar interpretation, explaining that pharaoh’s hardness resulted from God’s patience rather than his power. As long as God was punishing pharaoh, he confessed his sins. But when God relented, pharaoh hardened his heart. Caesarius also notes that the Manicheans used the subject of pharaoh’s hardening “to rebuke the writings of the Old Testament” (1964: 98–103).

The focus of discussion had subtly begun to shift. While many early Christians still maintained that pharaoh’s heart was hardened due to his disobedience, others began contemplating the part played by God. Most emphasized the hardening as God’s response to pharaoh’s sinfulness. By the time of the Reformation, however, fierce debates regarding free will and predestination were taking place. Rather than reflecting the willful disobedience of pharaoh, it was increasingly understood in light of certain doctrinal assertions about God and his sovereignty. John Calvin understood the phrase to reflect God’s complete control over the engagement with pharaoh. God did not merely permit pharaoh to harden his heart; he punished pharaoh by hardening it. Calvin distinguishes between the heart’s hardness as a product of human sin

and the hardening of the heart as divine judgment (1950: 101–2, 140–1). The dichotomy between the two understandings can best be seen perhaps in the debate between Erasmus and Luther. Erasmus, arguing in favor of free will, admits that the hardening appears to contradict this doctrine. Following Origen and Jerome, he contends that God’s justness and goodness indicate that pharaoh’s disobedient choices, not God’s decision to destroy him, led to his heart’s hardening. God then turned pharaoh’s sin into an opportunity to demonstrate his power and glory. Luther decried Erasmus’ reliance on Origen and Jerome, arguing that “hardly any of the ecclesiastical writers have handled the Divine Scriptures more ineptly and absurdly” than them. Luther insists that the phrase be interpreted in light of the plain meaning intended by the author. Clearly God hardened pharaoh’s heart, and did not merely permit it to be hardened. “Thus it comes about that when we do not let God’s will alone have the will and power to harden and to show mercy and to do everything, we attribute free choice itself the ability to do everything without grace, despite our having denied that it can do anything good without grace.” God hardened pharaoh’s heart to demonstrate his power and thereby to strengthen the faith of the weak (Rupp and Watson 1969: 64–6, 223–31, 237–9).

#### SECULAR USES

While fierce debates over free will and predestination within the Church influenced the phrase’s interpretation, the understanding of pharaoh’s hardening as indicative of stubbornness and resistance characterized its use in the secular realm. The phrase continued to signal human resistance to God, but also human resistance to human initiatives. At times the two understandings combined to create support for certain movements by indicating divine support and thus strengthening the resolve of those involved in conflict. Samuel Adams employed the phrase when he wrote to Joseph Hawley on April 15, 1776, just under three months before the American declaration of independence from Great Britain. Contending that the American colonies needed to declare their independence, and that “moderate Whigs” were fooling themselves regarding the prospect of reconciliation with the king, Adams asserts, “I scruple not to affirm it as my Opinion that his heart is more obdurate, and his Disposition towards the People of America is more unrelenting and malignant than was that of Pharaoh towards the Israelites in Egypt” (*Letters of Delegates* 1976–2000: 3.527). James Duane expresses a similar sentiment in late September 1782 when, despite American successes against the British, he believed that recent British naval victories had “hardened the Heart of the British Pharaoh” (*Letters of Delegates* 1976–2000: 19.195; peace talks between the two countries had begun in April, but a treaty was not signed until September 1783). Just a few months prior to Duane’s letter, Robert R. Livingston wrote to John Jay that

Americans still believed “that God has hardened the heart of Pharaoh” even though changes had occurred in the British administration (Wharton 1889: 5.405). The phrase was also employed during the American Civil War by members of the Confederacy, to express their interpretation of northern efforts to obstruct secession. M. S. Perry, governor of Florida, in attempting to persuade the state legislature to secede, argued that “the non-slave-holding States are hardening their hearts against all signs and evidences which justify our exodus from among them” (*War of the Rebellion* 1880–1901: ser. 4, 1.85–8). Benjamin Morgan Palmer, pastor of New Orleans’ First Presbyterian Church, delivered a sermon on a Confederate day of fasting in June 1861, only a few months after the Confederate states seceded from the Union. Palmer compares the plight of the Confederate states to that of the Israelites in Egypt. Eleven “tribes” (i.e., states) sought to leave peacefully their “house of political bondage,” but “the heart of our modern Pharaoh (i.e., Abraham Lincoln) is hardened” (Palmer 1861: 1). Confederate general Kirby Smith attributed his failure to gain popular support for the Confederacy in East Tennessee in 1862 to God’s hardening the hearts of the Egyptians (Union sympathizers) in order to make their destruction more complete (Parks 1962: 209). A columnist writing in the Zimbabwean newspaper *Financial Gazette* applied the biblical analogy to the plight of Zimbabwe in 2001 under President Robert Mugabe and the ruling party ZANU PF. Calling for a new government, the writer parallels the suffering of Zimbabweans under Mugabe’s leadership with the sufferings of the Israelites in Egypt. “Pharaoh and his cohorts” (i.e., Mugabe and ZANU PF) had hardened their hearts to divinely sent plagues (natural disasters, starvation, unemployment, etc.) and repeated calls for change (Mudzimu 2001). Another Zimbabwean wondered about the role of God in the re-election of Mugabe in 2002. He likened the people to the Israelites suffering from the increased oppression heaped upon them by pharaoh after Moses and Aaron confronted him. The re-election of Mugabe, like the pharaoh’s demand to make their brickmaking more difficult, heralded his future destruction. Just as Moses and Aaron did not give up when pharaoh’s heart hardened, so Zimbabweans should not lose hope in their struggle against their government (*Daily News* 2002a).

## 7:8–10:29 The Plagues

### *Ancient religious uses*

After having been rebuffed by pharaoh, Moses and Aaron returned to the palace and resumed their demand to free the Israelites. This encounter pro-

voked the unleashing of the plagues, understood by Exodus to reflect the signs and wonders of YHWH (Exod. 3:20; 4:17, 21, 28–30; 7:3, 9; 10:1–2; 11:9–10). Surprisingly the plague tradition does not play a prominent role in the Hebrew Bible (Childs 1974: 163). The plagues are usually referred to generally or subsumed within the totality of signs and wonders performed by YHWH (Deut. 4:37; 7:15–19; 11:2–3; 29:2–3; Josh. 24:5; Pss. 77:14–15; 106:21–2; Hab. 3:5). Psalms 78 and 105 deal with the plagues in more detail (although not in the same order as in Exodus), but still understand them as reflections of signs and wonders. Psalm 78 encourages obedience to YHWH by detailing a number of his deeds from the exodus through the United Monarchy. It portrays the exodus generation as seeing YHWH's acts, but not remembering them. Psalm 105 praises Yahweh for his great actions and affirms his faithfulness to Israel from the time of Abraham through the wilderness wanderings. Upon contemplating the plagues and other examples of his power and faithfulness, the people should respond with praise and obedience.

Subsequent interpreters often understood the plagues in the same way as the psalms. Although in the psalms slight differences in the order and identity of the specific plagues occur, this did not cause any consternation; the focus remains God's actions and his people's response. The *Book of Jubilees* briefly enumerates the plagues, explaining them as God's vengeance that fulfilled the Abrahamic covenant (48:5–8). According to Israel's wisdom tradition, wisdom guided Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness. In the *Wisdom of Solomon*, wisdom entered Moses' soul and then produced wonders and signs that liberated Israel (10:15–16). In an extended discourse on the deliverance from Egypt (10:15–19:22), the author juxtaposes the plagues and the blessings experienced by Israel. The plague on the Nile River matches the water produced from the rock in the wilderness (Wisd. 11:6–8; Exod. 17:1–7). Animal plagues (apparently the frogs or a conflation of frogs, lice, and locusts) parallel the provision of quail (Wisd. 16:1–4; Exod. 16:13–36). The plagues of locusts and flies correspond to the bronze serpent event (Wisd. 16:5–14; Num. 21:6–9), while the destruction of the crops reflect the provision of manna (Wisd. 16:15–29; Exod. 16:1–12). The darkness parallels the pillar of fire (Wisd. 17:1–18:4; Exod. 13:21–2), and the death of the firstborn matches the death caused by Korah's rebellion (Wisd. 18:5–25; Numbers 16). This correspondence effectively illustrates the life and fate of the unrighteous (i.e., the unwise) and of the righteous (i.e., the wise), and upholds the superiority of the way of wisdom (Cheon 1997: 24–6). A wisdom poem found among the Dead Sea Scrolls also advocates remembering the miracles as a way of encouraging obedience to God (4Q185; Martinez and Tigchelaar 1997: 1.378–9). Pseudo-Philo, by contrast, relates the plagues in a single verse to illustrate God's reaction to the Israelites' prayers (10.1).



When addressing non-Jewish people, interpreters often refashioned the significance of the plagues. Artapanus (3.27.27–33) spends more time than most discussing them, but he also departs from the biblical account more often and fashions a new emphasis. After pharaoh imprisoned Moses, the latter was miraculously freed and sought out the pharaoh. Upon learning the identity of Moses' god, pharaoh asked him for a sign, whereupon Moses first turned his rod into a serpent and then caused the Nile to flood. The waters stagnated, killing fish, animals, and people. Pharaoh next demanded a miracle from his priests, who responded by creating a serpent and changing the Nile's color. This emboldened pharaoh and in turn compelled Moses to bring about the remaining plagues. Artapanus intensifies their effect by making the Egyptians appear utterly unable to cope with the plagues. For example, Exodus records that the Egyptian magicians matched Moses' first plague, resulting in the fish dying, but Artapanus has the Egyptian priests capable of performing only a lesser miracle. Furthermore, in Artapanus's account of the first plague, more than just the fish die. Artapanus's second plague, the release of winged creatures (perhaps flies) creating sores on the Egyptians (perhaps a conflation of the fourth and sixth plagues of Exodus), could not be remedied by the physicians (who do not appear in the biblical account). Artapanus also has Moses bringing about not only hail, but earthquakes. The two combine to kill many Egyptians, as well as to destroy all houses and most temples. Intensifying the plagues adds to the glorification of Moses. So too does the secondary role played by God in Artapanus's account. Moses came to Egypt in the name of God, but Moses, not God, initiated divine involvement. God encouraged him to go to Egypt only after Moses had raised the issue of Israelite suffering. When pharaoh demanded to know the identity of this God, Moses whispered it in the king's ear. The reader never learns it, further de-emphasizing the divine role. Also, during the plague episode God is never mentioned. Artapanus essentially converts the biblical emphasis on the plagues reflecting YHWH's power into a reflection of Moses' power. This aids him in presenting Judaism as a worthy religion to non-Jews.

Philo and Josephus, both of whom were writing for non-Jews, seem to have used the plague episode to issue a subtle warning. Philo discusses the plagues at length (1935: *Life of Moses* 1.16–26) and emphasizes their divine origin, asserting that even the Egyptians recognized this, but refused to submit because of their pride and stubbornness. He furthers this emphasis by explaining that the plagues differed from other punishments because they emanated from the elements of the universe, something that only God himself could produce (1.16). The power of the Israelite God was perhaps most clearly seen in the plague of gnats. Philo suggests that someone might wonder why God chose such a small, insignificant creature to punish the Egyptians instead of large



animals like bears or lions. He answers that God did not want to utterly destroy the Egyptians, but only to chide them. Furthermore, unlike God, humans typically employ the strongest and greatest weapons in a war. God, however, uses the smallest, but in such a way as to cause the Egyptians to lose heart and cry out, “This is the finger of God.” Had God used his whole hand, the entire universe could not have withstood it (1.19). Indeed, the plagues demonstrated the power of God, but Philo made sure his audience understood that this divine power had been deployed on behalf of the Israelites. He concludes, “For never was judgment so clearly passed on good and bad, a judgment which brought perdition to the latter and salvation to the former” (1.26). Josephus came to a similar conclusion, asserting that the plagues warned readers to avoid provoking God because he might be angered and moved to vengeance (1974b: *Antiquities* 2.14.1). Philo and Josephus thereby illustrated for their non-Jewish audience divine protection of the Jewish race and encouraged respect for God by favorable treatment of his people.

For the early Christians the plague account became paradigmatic for understanding a variety of issues. In Revelation 8–9 and 16 certain plagues form part of the apocalyptic understanding of the wrath to be poured out on the earth. But, as in the Old Testament, the plagues do not appear prominently in the New Testament. Origen understood them as metaphors or models for the Christian living in a sinful world (1982: 267–74). Moses represents God’s Law, which corrected the world through the ten plagues, while his rod represents the cross of Christ, which subjugated worldly powers much as Moses did in Egypt. The various plagues demonstrate the conquering of certain undesirable worldly elements. The waters of the Nile represent the teachings of the philosophers, the frogs correspond to the deceptive songs and stories of the poets, the mosquitoes represent the deceptive art of dialectic, and flies relate to the Cynics who deceive the world by promoting pleasure as the highest good. The plague on the cattle demonstrates the foolishness of humans who worship idols in the form of animals. The festering nature of the boils points to the judgment on malice, pride, and anger, while the hail and fire destroy immature vices and passion. The locusts, who have no king (Prov. 30:27), represent the inability of rational humans to rule themselves in an orderly manner or submit to God as king. Darkness indicates either a reproof to the blindness of the human mind or the obscurity of divine providence and, therefore, a rebuke to those who rashly draw conclusions about this providence. The death of the firstborn represents the demise of either world powers or false religions. Origen transforms the plague account from an example of God’s power over the ancient Egyptians into a contemporary manifestation of God’s power over the sinful world. He does not merely draw a general principle from this past event (such as affirming God’s power and the people’s necessary obedience). Instead, he

makes the plague account an explicit and current act of God. God was enacting the plagues in Origen's day.

Origen not only understood the plagues within the context of the larger world (called by him the mystical meaning), but he also applied them to the individual (reflecting the moral meaning). These events illustrate how a person, living ignorant of the truth in the world (Egypt), is freed. The Law of God systematically deals with those things obstructing the individual's freedom from ignorance: the "fluid and slippery life of youth" (water into blood), vain complaining about divine providence (croaking frogs), the stinging power of craftiness (stings of mosquitoes), "bites of the passions" (bites of flies), foolish understandings (the stupidity of cattle), arrogance (the swelling of the boils), the pursuit of pleasure (restrained by the hail) and fire of penance (lightning), the devouring of the soul's "restless and disturbed motions" (locusts), and the recognition of God as the author of the plagues and the darkness (gloom) of the soul's conduct (darkness). After overcoming them, the firstborn of the Egyptians can be destroyed. Origen seems to understand this as a conversion experience, wherein the soul's sinful nature defends itself against the Law of God, but is defeated. The soul's initial impulses to sin must be destroyed by God's Law, and once this is accomplished, the individual can join the Israelite people in their exodus from Egypt. Origen has essentially refashioned the plague narrative from a national experience to an individual one explaining how a person becomes a member of God's people. The biblical account provides the framework, as well as the guiding principles, for Origen's interpretation, and some characteristic of each plague inspires his contemporary analogies. By placing the individual's conversion experience within this context, Origen indicates that entrance into God's kingdom does not come instantaneously, but only through a long and difficult struggle. This conversion is not merely an intellectual experience, but also includes taming the soul.

Origen's careful reading of the plague account helped him draw lessons from the story's subtle variations. He points out that some plagues were brought about by Aaron, some by Moses, and some by God (Philo had made a similar observation). This suggests that some things were to be purified by priestly sacrifices, some by knowledge of the Law, and some by the power of God himself. Origen also found a strategy for struggling against Satan by observing that the first plague occurred when God instructed Moses to approach pharaoh by the waters (Exod. 7:15) and the second when God told Moses to "Go in to pharaoh" (Exod. 8:1). Since the waters represent the teachings of the philosophers, the struggle for souls should begin by confronting and refuting pagan philosophies. Afterwards the "deeper subjects of the struggle" can be addressed. While some might argue that this interpretation imposes outside elements on the biblical passage, it does represent a commingling of scriptural elements

with contemporary factors. Origen does not try to separate the passage's historical context from his own. Instead, he opens the gates between the two and lets them interact. There is not a linear progression from historical truth to contemporary application, but a mutual informing.

While Origen read the plagues in light of the Christian's struggle with evil, Gregory of Nazianzus saw in them an explanation of recent natural disasters that had befallen his community. In the year 373, the town of Nazianzus experienced a deadly cattle plague, a drought, and the destruction of its crops by hail. Gregory explains them as divine punishments, but he also sees in them God's mercy. Rather than sending the first four plagues of the Exodus account against the people, God began with the fifth, the killing of the cattle, and thus indirectly chastised the people and limited the severity of their punishment. When the people did not respond to this divine message, God sent a drought followed by a hail storm. This too apparently went unheeded, and Gregory encourages the people to repent, warning that God still has the remaining plagues at his disposal (1952–7: "On His Father's Silence," 247–51). Gregory's interpretation does not distinguish between the wicked and the righteous, but essentially designates all the people of his city as Egyptians. His application of the biblical plague account to the contemporary situation changes the plagues' significance from being instruments designed to free God's people from a secular power to being instruments designed to effect general repentance and gain freedom from divine wrath. The similarity between the plagues of his day and those of the biblical period likely provided the stimulus to see them as a framework for making sense of natural disasters.

Readings like that of Gregory of Nazianzus, however, paled in popularity beside those like Origen's. Christians constantly used the plague story to understand the Christian life. Ambrose considered Moses' responses to pharaoh's requests as exemplifying the virtuous life. Moses "knew that the king would not keep true to his promises, yet he thought it right and good to pray when asked to do so, to bless when wronged, to forgive when besought" (1955: "On the Holy Spirit," 82). Gregory of Nyssa focused on the distinctions that the plagues created between the Israelites (the righteous) and the Egyptians (the unrighteous) (1978: *Life of Moses* 2.63–72). He explains that the plagues did not harm the Israelites because even though God's word is presented equally to all, its impact depends on the individual's disposition. Those who are open to it receive enlightenment, whereas those who are obstinate remain in ignorance. Noting that miracles occur for the benefit of those being saved and not to terrify others who happen to be present, he explains the ability of the Egyptian magicians to match some of Moses' miracles as nothing more than deception. The "master of deceit" may try to pollute the water of the Hebrews (Christian doctrine) with falsehood, but he is unable to harm the water.

Caesarius of Arles (1964: 2.81–5) and Isidore of Seville (Lienhard 2001: 43–54) also gave interpretations strikingly similar to Origen's.

### *Medieval religious uses*

Midrashic literature read the plague account from a variety of perspectives. Reflecting the biblical explanation of the plagues as punishment for Egyptian stubbornness, the medieval *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu* likens God's use of the plagues to a king's military tactics. If an effort to make a people succumb does not work, the king then employs successive methods until the people capitulate (*Midrash Tanhuma*, Exodus 3.4). *Tanhuma*, however, goes further, asserting that each plague also occurred for a specific reason. Thus the plague of blood happened because the Egyptians did not allow Israelite women ritually to immerse themselves after menstruation. Since ritual immersion laws prohibited intercourse after menstruation without first purifying oneself, the Egyptians hoped to curtail Israel's population (Exodus 2.14). *Exodus Rabbah* reasons that the Nile was turned to blood because the Egyptians worshipped the Nile (9.9), and that frogs were sent due to the Egyptians having forced the Israelites to bring reptiles and creeping things (10.4). Following traditions found in *Tanhuma* (Exodus 2.14), *Exodus Rabbah* sets forth explanations for the remaining plagues. Gnats were sent because the Egyptians had made the Israelites street scavengers (10.7). A tradition arose regarding the fourth plague that, instead of sending swarms of flies, God sent swarms of wild beasts. This resulted from a controversy over the meaning of the Hebrew word *arov* ("swarms"), often translated as "swarms of flies." *Exodus Rabbah* explains that God sent swarms of wild beasts because the Egyptians had forced the Israelites to bring bears, lions, and leopards (11.3). God sent a murrain on the cattle because the Egyptians had made the Israelites their shepherds and then purposely scattered their cattle in order to prevent them from procreating (11.4). Presumably the Israelites would have been unable to reproduce as much because they spent so much time away from home searching for the Egyptians' cattle. The boils were punishment for the Israelites being assigned the task of heating warm things and keeping cold items cool (11.5). Since the Israelites had been forced to tend the vineyards, gardens, orchards, and trees of the Egyptians, hail was sent (12.3). Similarly, God sent the locusts because the Israelites had been forced to sow wheat and barley (13.6). Darkness was sent to punish the sinners in Israel who had been supported lavishly by Egyptian patrons and, therefore, did not want to leave Egypt. Under the cover of darkness they could be killed and disposed of without the Egyptians' knowledge. Had the Egyptians known about the death of the Israelite sinners, they would have concluded that since the plague passed from Israel, so it would from Egypt

(14.3). These explanations imply that the Egyptians deserved the punishment they received and in a sense imply a need to explain the plagues' violence. Jewish interpreters go beyond the biblical account's generalization of the plagues as punishing the Egyptians for refusing to release the Israelites. God had not arbitrarily or unjustly sent his wrath, nor had he used excessive force. Each plague was necessary to avenge a specific wrong done to the Israelites. The plagues, therefore, punished not only the stubbornness of the Egyptians, but also specific acts of cruelty.

Beginning in the eleventh century, the midrashic approach, which encouraged an imaginative interpretation of Scripture, began to be challenged by an emphasis on the passage's literal meaning. Rabbi Shlomo ben Isaac, better known as Rashi (1040–1105), produced biblical commentaries that interacted with the midrashim, but focused on the literal meaning by treating issues such as grammar, syntax, philology, chronology, and geography. Commenting on Exod. 6:9, for example, Rashi writes: "Let Scripture be explained in its literal sense so that each statement fits into its proper setting, but the Midrashic exposition may also be given, if you like" (1934: 26). While Rashi considered midrashic interpretations to reflect at times the plain sense of a text, his methods were refined in the next century by Joseph Kara, Samuel ben Meir (Rashi's grandson, known as Rashbam), Eliezer of Beaugency, and Joseph Bekhor Shor, resulting in a lessened emphasis on the midrashim (Doron 2000: p. xxiii; Smalley 1964: 149–52). This approach led to understanding the plagues solely as they were presented in Exodus. So, for instance, Rashi counters the Talmudic and midrashic explanation regarding the frogs on the basis of grammar. In Exod. 8:2 the Hebrew term for frog is singular, leading to rabbinic speculations on how a multitude of frogs came from a single frog (*b. Sanhedrin* 67b; *Exodus Rabbah* 10.4). Rashi, however, explains that a collective singular noun denoted the multitude (1934: 34). Concerning the fourth plague of "swarms," Rashi agrees with the midrashim that it refers to swarms of beasts, but he does so on the basis that the phrase "I will send (incite) against you" (8:17) was used in Deut. 32:24 of animals being sent against people (1934: 37–8). Rashbam, by contrast, argues philologically that the term *arov* refers to wolves because it is related to the Hebrew word *erev*, "evening," and wolves are nocturnal (1997: 79–80). Joseph Bekhor Shor sought a rational explanation of the plague of boils (Exod. 9:8), understanding it as a miracle occurring according to natural laws. When the hot ashes landed on the skin, they caused boils to form (Smalley 1964: 153). Rashi uses geography to explain the phrases *ruach yam*, literally "a sea wind," and *yamah suf*, "Red Sea" (Exod. 10:19). He translates *ruach yam* as "west wind," reasoning that because Exod. 23:21 and Zeph. 2:5 located the Philistines on the sea coast, the Red Sea must then be located south and east of Israel. A wind coming out of the west, therefore, drove the locusts into the Red Sea (1934: 48). This type of interpretation potentially

limited the scope of meaning that could be drawn from the plague account (as well as all of the biblical text). As some interpreters allowed the historical context to exercise more and more control over the text's meaning, the influence of interpretations drawn from other realms slowly receded. This interpretive shift also began to occur within Christianity. Although the literal approach did not in any sense obliterate or overwhelm the emphasis on multiple meanings of Scripture, it did gain ground and later even contributed to the Protestant Reformers' ability to challenge the Catholic Church's doctrine and practice (Hayes 1999: "Quadrige").

As some scholars increasingly came to prefer the literal meaning of Scripture, ideas embracing multiple meanings continued to be transmitted to the laity. In general the masses of people came to understand the plagues through the eyes of the midrashic rather than the plain or literal (*peshat*) meaning. Midrashic interpretations remained part of medieval haggadot (and continue to do so) with representations in one haggadah often appearing in others. The late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century *Hispano-Moresque Haggadah* portrays the first plague in keeping with *Exodus Rabbah* 9.11 (Narkiss 1982: 1.1.47–8). Rabbi Judah's mnemonic device for remembering the order of the ten plagues as given in Exodus is elaborately illustrated in the early fourteenth-century *Mocatta Haggadah* (Narkiss 1982: 1.1.54). The fourteenth-century *Golden Haggadah* portrays the plagues of animals and darkness according to interpretations found in *Exodus Rabbah* (11.4; 14.3) and *Midrash Tanhuma* (2.14) (Narkiss 1997: 42–5, 63). The mid-fourteenth-century *Rylands Haggadah* (1988: 34) reflects a rabbinic discussion based on Exod. 8:15 indicating that the Egyptians experienced ten plagues while in Egypt, but fifty at the Red Sea. This haggadah also illustrates the fourth plague as a swarm of animals (1988: fol. 16b). The mid-fifteenth-century *Ashkenazi Haggadah* reflects a similar treatment (Narkiss 1997: 25–6; fol. 17a). During the medieval period a custom also began whereby each participant in the seder removed drops of wine from the cup as each plague was recited. According to some commentators, this reminded the people of the suffering inflicted upon the Egyptian people (Elwell 2002: 53; Elias 1994: 126–37).

In Christian circles as well, non-literal approaches continued to abound, as illustrated by Martin Luther's commentary on Psalm 78. He justifies a multi-layered interpretation, because the plagues were referred to as "signs in Egypt," rather than "things," meaning that they signify something beyond the literal. In general, they indicate "spiritual evils done for the wicked and the unbelievers." So, for example, the mystical sense of changing the Nile into blood refers to the Jews, while Egypt indicates the synagogue and its rabbinic doctrines, and the water signals Scripture. Asserting that the Jews had changed the water of Scripture into blood, Luther contends: "In the same way all heretics by their

own carnal mind change Scripture into blood, so that souls cannot drink it.” The mystical interpretation enables Luther to condemn not only Jews, but also heretics (which presumably included Roman Catholics). Allegorically, the first plague indicates that those who follow a particular doctrine will also embody the nature of that doctrine. True Christians, therefore, have been changed from blood (death) to water (life) by true doctrine. On the moral level, the first plague refers to exchanging the fleshly life for the spiritual, i.e., the crucifixion of the flesh (1976: 73–4). The multi-layered approach thus allows Luther to change the structure of the passage, something that a literal interpretation would have prohibited. In Exodus, Moses changed the water into blood as divine punishment on pharaoh and the Egyptians. Luther, by contrast, indicates that Jews and heretics changed the water into blood, thereby emphasizing the effect produced by the change more than its nature as divine punishment. Water turning into blood took something that brought about life and changed it to produce death. The passage thus provides Luther with the stimulus for the interpretive application, but not the boundaries. The boundaries were produced as Luther took the effect of the first plague and implanted it in a variety of contexts.

### *Modern secular uses*

An increased emphasis on the text’s literal meaning did not insure that only readings with religious meanings would be produced. The religious understanding of the Bible proved itself to be a reading dependent on a certain context, as did the literal interpretation. When interpreters gave the Bible a new context outside the church or synagogue, different understandings proliferated. Niccolo Machiavelli (1469–1527) was one of the first to read the Bible as a secular text, in a manner similar to the reading of classical histories. The spiritual lessons associated with the plagues receded in favor of political ones, as his interest in politics, religion, war, and especially the founding of new states or social orders led him to focus on these features in the biblical text. Machiavelli looks to Moses as one of several ancient object lessons in developing virtue, defined by him as virility, valor, strength, and cleverness. The ten plagues, then, illustrate the necessity of establishing credibility in the eyes of one’s enemies by heaping punishment on them, which, in turn, builds the confidence of one’s followers, another necessary element in establishing a new state (Marx 1997).

The recession of strictly religious readings can also be seen in a painting housed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and entitled *Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh: An Allegory of the Dinteville Family* (see plate 8).





Plate 8 *Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Scholars have disputed its attribution to Hans Holbein the Younger, as well as the exact date of its production. It can be dated with confidence, however, to the late 1530s or early 1540s. The painting uses the confrontation between Moses, Aaron, and pharaoh described in Exodus 7 to play out a contemporary conflict between members of the Dinteville family and either King Francis I of France or a composite of Francis and Pierre of Mareuil, administrator of the bishopric of Auxerre. François II de Dinteville, bishop of Auxerre, is portrayed as Aaron, while his brother, Jean, *bailli* of Troyes, is cast as Moses. Their two other brothers, Guillaume and Gaucher, who along with Jean served in the households of the sons of Francis I, also appear in the painting. The painting depicts the moment when Aaron's rod was turned into a snake, but it is not about the event in Exodus. It is, instead, an allegorical commentary on the



Dinteville brothers falling from the favor of the royal household when in 1538 Gaucher was accused of sodomy. This led to a series of events resulting in Gaucher, François, and Guillaume fleeing to Italy, and Francis I subsequently denouncing them in 1539 and naming Pierre de Mareuil as the administrator of the bishopric of Auxerre during François' absence. Mareuil immediately began plundering the assets of the see, but eventually the brothers were allowed to return, in large part due to the actions of their brother Jean. The painting was probably done while the brothers were in Italy and perhaps represents a defense of their leaving France. Although the painting itself reflects the moment when Moses and Aaron began their struggle against pharaoh, no meeting between the brothers and Francis I is known to have occurred. It thus allegorizes the brothers' struggle to vindicate themselves not only by expressing their belief in their innocence, but also by indicating their hopes for deliverance. Jean, represented as Moses, stands between his brothers and pharaoh, interceding on their behalf as their deliverer (E. A. R. Brown 1999). The choice of this scene to depict their plight indicates that to the Dinteville brothers the biblical story was an omen of hope. Hope, springing to life in the midst of the brothers' weakened position, enabled them to contest the accusations brought against them by those in more powerful positions. The details of the biblical story provide the shell in which to encapsulate their beliefs. As Jean and François replace Moses and Aaron, and Francis I replaces pharaoh, the biblical text loses its emphasis on Israel's historical experience, as well as the subsequent religious stress on deliverance from sin. Instead, it becomes a story about personal deliverance from injustice.

Increasingly, an interplay between the cosmic, national, and personal applications of the exodus story developed. In *Paradise Lost*, John Milton portrays the exodus in cosmic terms as part of God's overall plan for redeeming humanity (which culminates in Jesus). As the angel Michael reveals to Adam, the primary problem in society is the rule of one human over another. People lived harmoniously "by families and tribes under paternal rule" for several generations after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden. Then an individual "of proud ambitious heart, who not content with fair equality, fraternal state" forced his rule upon others, resulting in the building of the tower of Babel. Adam condemns this effort, asserting that God has given humans the right of dominion only over "beast, fish, fowl," and has reserved the right of ruling humans as a divine prerogative. Michael concurs, and interprets such efforts as attempts to subdue "rational liberty," noting that original sin caused the loss of "true liberty" (which was inseparable from "right reason"). "Inordinate desires and upstart passions" cause governments to forget reason and to enslave people. Michael concludes:

Therefore since he permits  
Within himself unworthy powers to reign  
Over free reason, God in judgment just  
Subjects him from without to violent lords;  
Who oft as undeservedly enthrall  
His outward freedom: Tyranny must be,  
Though to the tyrant thereby no excuse.  
Yet sometimes nations will decline so low  
From virtue, which is reason, that no wrong,  
But justice, and some fatal curse annexed  
Deprives them of their outward liberty,  
Their inward lost

God leaves humans in this state until he decides to choose one nation from whom the savior of the world will come (1943: xii.368–75). The exodus story thus foreshadows Christ's salvation of humanity from the ultimate expression of evil – tyrannical governments. Pharaoh represents these tyrannous governments, while Moses, foreshadowing Christ, frees the people by taming the "river-dragon" (i.e., pharaoh) with the "ten wounds." Thereafter he establishes a just government with God as its ruler. Milton uses the exodus story to make both political and theological assertions, arguing that obedience to rational law brings true freedom (Jablonski 1997: 109–12, 116–17). Governments and their subjects, therefore, must operate in accordance with divine rational law. A cosmic understanding of the exodus is also illustrated in Milton's earlier use of the locust plague to describe the gathering of the fallen angels at Satan's behest (1943: i.102). In a similar fashion, Bartholomeus Breenbergh's painting, *Moses and Aaron Changing the Rivers of Egypt to Blood* (1631) reflects cosmic overtones. Done in the Dutch landscape tradition, the scene's action is subordinated to the landscape. The characters appear tiny in comparison to the dominating landscape, and they stand in the shadows before ancient ruins rising above them. Looking at the painting, the viewer sees in succession the scene from exodus, followed by the ruins, and finally, the clouded sky. The first plague is thus contextualized within, subordinated to, and connected with history and nature.

Nicolas Poussin's *Moses Turning the Rod of Aaron into a Serpent* (1647) depicts the same episode as does the Dinteville allegory. Yet, unlike the Dinteville allegory in which contemporary figures in contemporary dress play out the biblical scene, the characters in Poussin's work appear in Roman attire, reflecting seventeenth-century conventions for portraying ancient scenes. He may also have wanted to depict the story as told by Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews* (2.13.3), emphasizing the superiority of spiritual power over temporal. Furthermore, Poussin's patron, Camillo Massimo, for whom Poussin

painted the picture, had a great interest in neo-Stoicism, which also asserted the superiority of the spiritual to the material. Poussin's painting, therefore, likely reflected the same idea (Coates 2001). If so, it demonstrates an understanding of the biblical account as paradigmatic for expressing the divine–human relationship.

The late seventeenth-century play *The Spanish Friar; or, the Double Discovery*, by John Dryden, combines national and personal expressions of the exodus. Dryden uses the exodus story as the framework for the play's main plot and subplot. The main plot plays out the struggle of Torrismond, a Moses-figure who, when he returns to his homeland, encounters a queen who has usurped power, with his love for Leonora, the queen who inherited power from her father (who himself had overthrown the rightful king). References and allusions to Exodus abound. In the end the legitimate king is restored, but Torrismond still defends Leonora, who is repentant and thereby justifies Torrismond's actions. God had apparently allowed the usurpation of the throne for some purpose, much in the same way as he had hardened pharaoh's heart for a purpose. Dryden's use of Exodus in the story's plot allows him to point out the incomprehensibility of God's ways with humans. Within the subplot the Exodus references, particularly those to the plagues, take on a more personal aspect. Here another Moses-figure, Lorenzo, attempts to free Elvira, "a lusty young wife," from Gomez, her "old and impotent husband." Lorenzo is joined by his brother Dominic, a corrupt friar. The brothers besiege Gomez much as the plagues fall upon pharaoh, but in this instance the plagues are used for evil purposes. Lorenzo and Dominic, Dryden's Moses and Aaron, resort to numerous questionable efforts to free Elvira from Gomez so that she may be united with Lorenzo. As Gomez attempts to prevent this union, more plagues fall on him. Lorenzo vows to bring on Gomez a "thousand red locusts" to devour him, and Gomez eventually characterizes marriage as a "household plague." Lorenzo and Dominic, however, stand in contrast to Torrismond. Whereas Torrismond delivers his people and Leonora, Lorenzo and Dominic cannot deliver Elvira, because they discover her to be Lorenzo's sister. God's law forbids such a union (Paige 1996). The plot and subplot demonstrate God's actions with humans on the national and personal levels and their impotence to obstruct God's goals. The exodus story thus transcends the boundaries of time to become an allegory of the various levels of the divine–human relationship. The plagues reflect the divine ability to thwart and confound humanity.

As the plagues, both collectively and individually, move farther away from their original association with the exodus, they become metaphors for terrible situations. Applied to historical and natural events as well as persons, they are frequently used without direct reference to the exodus story, and often lose their religious significance, or at least have it muted. Numerous examples

illustrate the point. During the American Revolution, Josiah Bartlett described the conditions in Philadelphia after the British withdrew. He complained that the British had left one of the plagues of Egypt – swarms of flies – which lessened only after the Americans had cleaned the place of “Filth & Dung” (*Letters of Delegates* 1976–2000: 10.275–6; “Josiah Bartlett to Mary Bartlett,” July 14, 1778). In 1848 Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri compared the seeming omnipresence of the slavery question to the plague of frogs, because it constantly provoked discussion (Goen 1985: 122). In March 1864, during some of the most difficult days for the Confederacy, one southern woman wrote of her struggles to care for several ill slaves while simultaneously handling a constant stream of visitors. On top of all this she had “the little ‘plagues of Egypt’ in the house” (Myers 1972: 1145; “Mrs. Mary Jones to Mrs. Mary S. Mallard”). The exact meaning of this reference is unclear, but it nonetheless signals unusual difficulties. In 1866 Thaddeus Stevens, a Radical Republican Congressman from Pennsylvania, expressed his extreme dissatisfaction with President Andrew Johnson and his policies regarding Reconstruction by comparing Johnson to a plague worse than that of lice (Brodie 1959: 284). Likening Johnson to pharaoh would have implied that Johnson was a tyrant, whereas comparison to the lice plague reflected the destructive and irritating impact of Johnson’s policies.

A physician writing in the late twentieth century described the resurgence of infectious diseases as viral and bacterial micro-organisms striking back “in concert like the plagues of Egypt” (Dunea 1996). The plagues have also been invoked to describe natural disasters, with some explaining them as naturally occurring phenomena (Bryant 1794; Hoyte 1993; Wein and Hoyte 1993), while others have understood them as ecological portents of looming historical disaster. As such they caution against the adverse impact of human actions on the environment (Fretheim 1991). The punk rock group, Lars Frederiksen and the Bastards, recorded a song entitled “10 Plagues of Egypt,” in which the plagues become emblematic of a modern worldwide catastrophe. One reviewer described the song as “built around total annihilation and civic unrest” (AMZ/music-reviewer.com. 2001). The song portrays the plagues as something demanded by both the Israelites and freedom itself. Yet, instead of leading to freedom, the modern plagues lead to total destruction. Even natural disasters having nothing to do with the biblical plagues have been characterized in biblical terms. Claudia Emerson Andrews, an American poet, describes the oppressiveness of a drought by personifying the noise made by a massive infestation of locusts as the rhythmic chant, “Pharaoh, pharaoh.” As the people listen to the relentless sounds, the chant becomes their hopeful expression for release from the pharaonic drought (1997: 30). The locusts in Andrews’s poem become a voice for humans to express their desire for liberation from a

non-human pharaoh. Finally, although locust plagues typically have a negative connotation, among some Africans and Arabs they are welcome. The locusts provide an important food source, and have been compared to manna rather than one of the biblical plagues (Mwanza 1995).

### *Modern religious uses*

The plagues, however, have still retained their religious significance. Heralding God's pending liberation, oppressed people have found the ancient plagues reflected in modern calamities. For example, two members of Kenya's Parliament accused the government of using force to harass its critics. As part of their criticism, they likened their government's policies to those of repressive regimes in Haiti and Zimbabwe, and compared the country's difficulties to the plagues sent by God to liberate his people (*Daily Nation* 2000). The rule of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe has been similarly characterized. Problems such as drought, foreign currency shortage, inflation, Aids, and hunger have been interpreted as Exodus-like plagues designed to free the country from oppression (*Daily News* 2003; *Zimbabwe Independent* 2003).

Yet the more traditional understanding of the plagues as God's just punishment upon a stubborn pharaoh has remained. Isaac Leeser (1836), an important figure in nineteenth-century American Judaism, maintains this view. Yet in both Jewish and Christian circles this has recently been questioned. Rather than illustrating the power and faithfulness of God and thereby provoking an obedient response by his people (as Psalms 78 and 105 encouraged), the plagues have now caused some to question God. One reviewer of the animated film *The Prince of Egypt* points out that the film portrays the exodus story in terms of a sibling rivalry between Moses and Rameses, while exploring the personal and psychological aspects of the brothers' lives. He wonders, "If the point of the miracles in Exodus is to show forth the power and glory of God, it must be admitted that Katzenberg's renditions of these signs are impressive, even breathtaking. Still, after seeing the film I found myself wondering just what the real miracle of the Exodus story was, or indeed what the lesson of the various miracles were [*sic*]." The miracles do indeed reveal God's power, yet at the same time, God hardens pharaoh's heart in order to demonstrate to the Hebrews his determination to free them. Perhaps, then, the miracles reveal God's compassion for oppressed people. But the reviewer admits: "I was disturbed by the tale of a God whose miracles are sometimes plagues, a God who once sent an angel to kill the children of the Egyptians. What sort of God is this? What sort of story is this?" He then raises the possibility of reading Exodus by replacing Egypt with the United States. "If you're going to show the marginalized that

you're a powerful deity capable of bringing down the proud and mighty, who better to take on than the last remaining superpower?" (McCormick 1999). A Jewish interpreter expressed similar doubts when she compared her childhood adoration of the plagues as recited in the Passover seder with her realization as an adult that the plagues had human victims. Admitting that the exodus story has compelling and inspirational aspects, she also concedes that the death of the firstborn was "genocide without apology." Reflecting on her childhood celebration in the seder of the death of the firstborn, she concludes,

How ironic that I, a child, should have rejoiced in this evidence that the lives and deaths of children meant nothing, that they were merely pawns to be used or eliminated because of political exigencies. First the Hebrew children, then the Egyptian children. And thousands of years later, an American child dipped her finger in her wine and learned – without being told – that the suffering of the innocent, the murder of children, was not merely pardonable but a holy thing when the freedom of the other group was at stake. (Prose 2003: 44)

These readings encourage consideration of the story from the Egyptians' perspective and focus on the suffering of all humans in the story. Ironically, the text used by interpreters to inspire its readers to greater devotion to God has also raised questions about him. Not that these questions are necessarily new. Readers who ponder the human tragedy of the story are essentially addressing the same issues as those who explain that pharaoh and the Egyptians deserved the punishments they received. Far from simply detailing the means by which God gained the release of the Israelites, the plague accounts have sparked contemplation of the divine–human relationship from myriad perspectives. A story that in one sense seems so clear and simple has challenged its readers with complex mysteries. For some the answers have come easily, while for others the questions remain.

# Exodus 11:1–13:16

These chapters represent a climactic point in the chronicling of the exodus from Egypt, marking both an end and a beginning. The struggle for liberation ends with the Israelites' exodus, but at the same time the struggle to work out the implications of that freedom begins. Eventually the exodus became paradigmatic in ancient Israel's history and religion, as well as in Judaism and Christianity, with its impact also extending into the secular arena.

## **12:1–13:16    The Passover**

### *Ancient judaism*

Exodus 11–13 recounts the death of the firstborn (the tenth and final plague), the Passover experience, and the departure from Egypt. In the Hebrew Bible the

exodus theme is referred to approximately 120 times, which, according to Nahum Sarna, “bears unequivocal testimony to its centrality in the religion of Israel” (*Anchor Bible Dictionary* 1992: “Exodus, Book of”). Even within the book of Exodus, YHWH became known as the one who brought Israel out of Egypt, an action forming the basis for subsequent commands (Exod. 20:2). While it is difficult to reconstruct the historical development of this understanding within the Hebrew Bible, it was clearly significant because ancient Israelites understood and related to YHWH on this basis. The Deuteronomist uses the exodus experience to demonstrate YHWH’s uniqueness and to inspire exclusive devotion to him (Deut. 4:32–40; 5:6–7, 16; 6:20–5; 8:11–20; 11:1–5; 26:1–11; Josh. 24:5–7, 16–17). The exodus also illustrates YHWH’s faithfulness and power, and thus provides a motivation for obeying him (Deut. 7:7–11, 17–26; Pss. 78:9–16, 51–4; 81; 105:36–9; 106:6–12; 135:8–9; 136:10–15). When the Israelites did not obey YHWH, the exodus served as reason for condemnation and judgment (Judg. 6:7–14; 1 Sam. 10:17–19; 12:6–9; 1 Kings 9:1–2, cf. 2 Chron. 7:19–22; 2 Kings 17:7; Nehemiah 9; Amos 2:10; Mic. 6:3–5; Ezekiel 20). Some biblical writers even consider the results of the exodus to be reversible, holding out the possibility that the Israelites might be taken back to Egypt should they continue in their disobedience (Deut. 28:58–68); others understand the return from exile in terms of a second exodus (Hag. 2:1–9). The exodus also solidifies Moses’ status as the ultimate prophet (Deut. 34:10–12). Susan Gillingham sums up the use of the exodus tradition in the Hebrew Bible as “one way of ratifying the community’s sense of special election” (1999: 26).

Occasionally, however, the exodus is not prominent where one might expect to find it. It is absent in the recitation of covenantal acts in 1 Chronicles 16, and occurs simply as a chronological reference in Solomon’s dedication of the Temple (1 Kings 8:14–16, cf. 2 Chron. 6:4–5). Furthermore, aspects of Passover observance apparently changed with time and circumstances. Whereas the instructions in Exodus indicate that each household is to individually slaughter the Passover lamb, the account in Ezra 6 reflects the Levites performing this deed. According to 2 Kings 23, Josiah observed a Passover unlike any since the day of the judges. Scholars have debated the meaning of this reference. Given that Passover is not mentioned in 1 and 2 Kings until the time of Josiah, this may indicate that it had not been observed for some time. Most scholars, however, believe that the Josianic observance reflected a reform of the festival from a private domestic ritual to a public one administered by a central government in accord with the regulations given in Deuteronomy 16. This move would conform to Josiah’s centralization of the cult in Jerusalem (Brueggemann 2000: 557–8; Y. Kaufmann 1960: 288). In deference to the Deuteronomistic presentation, however, many consider the assertion made in 2 Chronicles 30 that Hezekiah celebrated Passover to be an anachronism modeled



on Josiah's. Sara Japhet, though, has raised questions regarding this judgment and concludes that the Chronicler's story "quite likely" was based on authentic tradition (Japhet 1993: 935–6). Whatever the resolution of this complex issue, one can safely conclude that the observance of the Passover as recorded in Exodus differed from its Second Temple counterpart (elements of which appear in the Chronicler's version of Josiah's Passover; 2 Chronicles 35; Japhet 1993: 1041). Although the commemoration of the exodus significantly influenced Israel's self-understanding, it was by no means a static ritual. As one of the most important rituals in ancient Israel, it served religious and political purposes in articulating faith, as well as reshaping governmental administration.

Early Judaism continued to emphasize the importance of Passover. It appeared in a fifth-century BCE letter sent to the Jews at Elephantine containing instructions on its observance (Porten 1986: 7). In the second century BCE the writer of *Jubilees* devoted far more space to the discussion of Passover (49:1–23) than to the actual exodus from Egypt (48:12–19). Perhaps reflecting a similar tendency in Exodus 11–13, *Jubilees* places great importance on its correct observance. The author even asserts that when it has been observed at its proper time and manner, "the plague" will not "come to kill or to smite" during that year (49:15). Likewise, the Hellenistic dramatist Ezekiel spent more time detailing Passover than the actual exodus (*Exagoge* 150–92). This may indicate the significance it held for Jews viewing Ezekiel's play, while also explaining Jewish customs to non-Jews (H. Jacobson 1983: 135–6). If so, it then reminded Jews of their heritage and taught non-Jews about distinctive Jewish traditions. By the time of the Mishnah, an entire tractate (*Pesachim*) had been devoted to explanation and regulation of Passover. The Tosefta also includes a tractate addressing it (*Pisha*), both detailing its proper observance and distinguishing between the first Passover in Egypt and those in subsequent generations (*m. Pesachim* 9.5; *t. Pisha* 8). The ritual surrounding its observance, called the *seder*, also developed. It includes the eating and drinking of specific items designed to symbolize the Israelites' experience in Israel, as well as elements of the story as recorded in Exodus. According to Gamaliel (*m. Pesachim* 10.5), three passages had to be recited during the observance: concerning Passover (Exod. 12:27), unleavened bread (Exod. 12:39), and bitter herbs (Exod. 1:4). Furthermore, each "man" was to consider himself as having participated in the first exodus. The ritualization of the exodus experience in the Passover, therefore, had become one of the most important ways of expressing and experiencing Jewish identity and faith. References to the exodus in the daily recitation of the Shema (consisting of Deut. 6:4–9, 11:13–21, and Num. 15:37–41) further emphasize this expression (see also *m. Berachot* 1.5 and *t. Berachot* 1.10, 2.1).

Other Jewish works, by contrast, paid little attention to Passover. Pseudo-Philo briefly summarizes the ten plagues before moving to the Israelite

crossing of the Red Sea, all the while ignoring the relation of Passover to these events (see chapter 10). Philo also pays no attention to Passover in his *Life of Moses*, but instead focuses on Moses' leadership, glorifying him by pointing out his exceptional character and abilities. So, for example, Moses attained his status as Israel's leader by divine appointment, in contrast to others who gained leadership positions by force. God rewarded him for renouncing his position in Egypt after witnessing so many evils. Moses also ruled his people by considering their best interests, rather than how he could advance himself and accumulate wealth. God again rewarded him by making all natural elements subject to his command (1935: *Life of Moses* 1.27–8). Philo thus demonstrates to his largely non-Jewish audience that Moses, and by implication Jews and Judaism, deserve respect (see 1935: *Life of Moses* 1.1).

Philo, as well as Josephus, wrote in an environment that was often hostile to Jews and Judaism. Apollonius Molon, Lysimachus, Apion, and others had written derogatorily of Moses and the Jews (Feldman 1998: 374, 441; Josephus 1974a: *Against Apion* 2.2, 15). Philo himself had participated in the Jewish delegation seeking to appear before the Roman emperor, Gaius Caligula, in order to answer charges made against the Jews of Alexandria (Josephus 1974b: *Antiquities* 18.8.1). He therefore deems it important to show how Moses, with his superior character, provided an example of leadership worthy of emulation, and uses the exodus to bolster his people's standing among the nations, while the event's divine nature, still important, recedes in favor of its racial elements. To him, the exodus not only articulated Jewish understandings of their relationship to God, but in relation to Gentiles also demonstrated Jewish virtue. This shift away from emphasizing the divine role in the exodus can also be seen in his *Hypothetica*, a work intended to defend Jews against negative accusations. There he attributes the exodus to a variety of factors, including the land's inability to sustain the large Hebrew population, the "high spirit of the enterprise in which they had been bred," a yearning for their homeland, and divine revelations that came through dreams and visions (6.1). While still affirming God's role in the exodus, he does not view it as resulting from an exclusively divine act. He answers those accusing Moses of being an imposter that an imposter could not have led so many people out of Egypt and through the difficulties of the wilderness "in complete safety" and "free from internal factions and above all obedient to himself" (6.2–4). Philo's evaluation of the wilderness wanderings can certainly be contested, but he seems intent on showing that Jews were honorable people.

Josephus also uses the exodus to address non-Jews. His discussion of Passover and Unleavened Bread explains their rationale to his non-Jewish readers, with the former commemorating God's salvation from the Egyptians, the latter reminding Jews that after leaving Egypt they only had enough bread to eat for

thirty days (1974b: *Antiquities* 2.14.6–15.1). He also modifies the biblical account by casting Moses and the Jews in terms that would make them appear favorably to his non-Jewish audience. For instance, he notes that Moses organized the Hebrews by tribes as they readied for their departure (1974b: *Antiquities* 2.14.6). This detail does not appear in the biblical text, but Louis H. Feldman has argued that Josephus added it to demonstrate Moses' ability as a good general (1998: 437). Josephus also points to Moses safely leading tens of thousands of people from desperate circumstances to the Promised Land as evidence of his prowess as a general and counselor (1974a: *Against Apion* 2.1.16–17).

While writers like Philo and Josephus found the exodus valuable in addressing the prejudice and ignorance of non-Jews, they continued to relate it to a Jewish context. Philo in particular did so. He interprets Passover as the renunciation of physical passions as the soul journeys to attain virtue. Thus, girding up the loins in Exod. 12:11 refers to restraining physical desires (1929: *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.52, 57). He also devotes the entire first book of his work *Questions and Answers on Exodus* to matters springing from Exodus 12, posing twenty-three questions, and answering them in terms of the literal meaning and the "deeper meaning." For instance, he first explains the Passover sacrifice of Exod. 12:11 in light of the text's literal details, asserting that the Israelites performed it while leaving Egypt, and out of gratitude for YHWH's having sustained and protected them through the plagues. Believing that people make the Passover sacrifice when their souls move from physical disorder and confusion to spiritual wisdom (question 4), he transforms it from a historical experience into an ongoing event significant to the individual, not just the nation. Philo also notes that the people, rather than the priests, slaughtered the Passover sacrifice (Exod. 12:6) because at that time no temple had been built, nor had the Levites been assigned the priesthood. He concludes that "the Saviour and Liberator, Who alone leads out all men to freedom, deemed them (all) equally worthy of sharing in the priesthood and in freedom as well, since all who were of the same nation had given evidence of equal piety." Furthermore, the temple's absence demonstrated "that the dwelling together of several good persons in the home was a temple and altar" (1937b: *Questions and Answers* 1.18). All participated as priests in this, the nation's first sacrifice, and thus set an example for those later designated to perform such functions. This clarified why Moses had called Israel a congregation rather than a multitude, nation, or people (question 10).

Philo gives a similar explanation in book 2 of his treatise, *The Special Laws* (1934: 2.2.27). There he refers to Pascha (Passover) as the Crossing-feast (*diabateria*) because it reflects the soul's purification as physical passions are left behind. During its first observance, the entire nation had acted as priests

because the people were so excited that they spontaneously made the sacrifice without waiting for priests. For Philo the liturgical anomaly emphasized the priestly status of the entire nation. Likewise, the offering of the first fruit, a ritual observed on the day after Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23), emphasized Israel's nature as the first fruits of the whole earth. According to Philo, "the Jewish nation is to the whole inhabited world what the priest is to the State. For the holy office in very truth belongs to the nation" (1934: *Special Laws* 2.2.29). The Passover sacrifice, therefore, reflected the priestly status of all Israel, a concept taken up and recast by the early church.

### *The early church*

The early church used the exodus to articulate its understanding of the death and resurrection of Jesus and its relationship to the non-Christian world. It specified Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36; 1 Cor. 5:7; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:6–12), a reference perhaps influenced by the sacrifice of the paschal lamb. The Synoptic Gospels place the Last Supper during the initial hours of Passover when the seder occurred (Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 22), whereas John situates Jesus' crucifixion during the time of the paschal lamb's sacrifice in the hours just before the onset of Passover (John 19). While on the cross Jesus was given wine on a hyssop branch (John 19); hyssop was used in Exodus 12 to smear the lamb's blood on the doorposts (for more discussion of these references see the appropriate sections in Nolland 1993; Beasley-Murray 1987; R. E. Brown 1970; and *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 1967: "pascha"). Having understood the death and resurrection of Jesus in terms of the exodus, the church began working out the implications of this concept. 1 Pet. 2:9–10 bases the church's status as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation on God's having called it from darkness into light. 1 Peter uses two terms found in the Septuagint's description of Israel in Exod. 19:6, *basileion hierateuma* (royal priesthood) and *ethnos hagion* (holy nation), to reflect Israel's status as a priestly nation. They also appear in YHWH's assertion that he had delivered Israel from the Egyptians and that he possessed the whole earth (Exod. 19:4–5). While the exodus had made Israel into a priest to the nations (see Philo's interpretation), the early church used this same framework to assert its position as priest to the nations.

Passover and Unleavened Bread also encouraged certain behavior. The writer of Hebrews considers Moses' observance of Passover to exemplify faith (11:28), while the feast of Unleavened Bread encourages substituting sincerity and truth for malice and evil (1 Cor. 5:6–8). One modern scholar has argued that at least a significant portion of the Christian Bible uses the exodus as an

organizing and unifying principle of both testaments (Clifford 2002). The exodus even takes on apocalyptic connotations as the author of 2 Esdras 15 asserts that God will ultimately save the righteous from the persecutions of unbelievers by bringing them out of Egypt and striking the latter with plagues. The exodus thus exercised significant influence in the church's earliest expressions of its faith by serving largely as a rhetorical tool for conveying theological and ethical assertions. Soon, however, it became ritualized.

As the early church developed, it continued to use the exodus and Passover and Unleavened Bread to express its faith, but it also found them helpful for drawing boundaries between itself and Judaism. As the church developed its identity and liturgical calendar and rites, the exodus came to represent the exodus of the church from Judaism. Disputes, however, soon arose over these matters and strained the early church's unity. According to Eusebius, dissensions over the observance of the paschal season occurred as early as the second century CE (*Ecclesiastical History* 4.14; 5.23–5). The Eastern churches followed a tradition based on the Jewish practice of fasting before the Passover meal on the fourteenth of the month of Nisan (Exod. 12:6). Accordingly, Eastern Christians fasted prior to the celebration of Jesus' death and resurrection and ended their fast on the fourteenth, regardless of what day in the week it fell. The Western churches, however, preferred to end their fast on Sunday, the day of Jesus' resurrection. Debate over this issue continued throughout the second century until church leaders finally decided to end the fast on Sunday. But the Eastern churches under the leadership of Polycrates decided to continue their observance on the fourteenth of the month. They became known as Quartodecimans. The bishop of Rome, Victor, wanted to sever relations with the Eastern churches, but others prevented him from doing so. Many have interpreted this paschal controversy as being the first time a pope acted as supreme head of the church, while others have understood it as Victor's efforts to force Quartodecimans living in Rome to conform to Roman practice (Zernov 1933). At the very least, the paschal controversy, including the interpretations and influences of Exodus 12 and the Passover, reflected the growing rift between Eastern and Western Christianity. The Council of Nicea reaffirmed the Western practice in 325, but disagreement continued. By 341 the Synod of Antioch in Syria declared that any lay person acting contrary to the decree of Nicea would be excommunicated, while anyone presiding in the church or continuing to communicate with these individuals would be deposed from the ministry (Percival 1988: 53–6, 108).

Sometime around the middle of the century, Melito of Sardis, a Quartodeciman, composed a work entitled *On Pascha* (*Peri Pascha*). Scholars have generally considered it to be a homily, but others have argued that it represented a Christian Passover haggadah. Alistair Stewart-Sykes contends that it actually

“is the liturgical text of the seder.” According to him, the Quartodecimans in Sardis fasted and kept vigil on the evening of the fourteenth of Nisan. The Exodus 12 account was probably read during the vigil (Stewart-Sykes 1998: 55–66, 112–13, 142, 172–6). In keeping with typical Christian readings, Melito understands the exodus and Passover as types of the death and resurrection of Jesus. After recounting Exodus 12, he then explicates the mystery of Pascha by linking details of the Israelite exodus with those of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Melito explains that everything is spoken or made with an analogy, sketch, or type. Therefore a particular thing can be understood through its prototype, but once this is done, then the type loses its value. He concludes that Jesus’ death and resurrection renders the Israelite exodus irrelevant because it has served its purpose, which was to point to the coming of the Christ (2001: *On Pascha* 35–46). Exodus 12 thus became a vehicle for expressing Christian faith.

Melito went on to use the events of the exodus and the wilderness wanderings to condemn Jews for killing Jesus. He admits that Jesus had to suffer, but not at the hands of the Jews (p. 75). Jews had been chosen by God, protected while in Egypt, delivered from slavery, and brought to the Promised Land only to treat these actions with disdain by failing to recognize their fulfillment in Jesus (pp. 83–102). Melito takes the central event in Judaism and uses it to condemn Jews and assert Christian superiority. The passages that chronicled Israelite liberation from Egypt contributed to Jewish condemnation at the hands of Christians. In its liturgical context this use of Exodus could be a powerful tool. Susan Gillingham’s observation concerning the liturgical use and reshaping of the exodus tradition by certain groups within ancient Israel resonates well within the early Christian context. According to her, “A tradition which originated as a story about God’s defence of the victims of power becomes transformed into a tradition in defence of the *status quo*. A religious tradition, even (or perhaps especially) when transmitted through liturgy can become a means of social control. When using the Exodus tradition, liturgy and ideology are closely linked” (1999: 45). Christians began using the exodus tradition not merely to draw distinctions between Judaism and Christianity, but to condemn Jews, even transmitting such contempt to the laity through the liturgy.

Origen’s homily “On the Departure of the Children of Israel” further illustrates how early Christians reappropriated the exodus tradition (1982: 275–80). He contends that Paul feared that the Gentile church, being unfamiliar with the Law, would be unable to interpret it correctly. So Paul illustrated proper interpretation in order to keep Gentile Christians from following Judaism, which had mistakenly read the text literally and, therefore, rejected Jesus. (In *Treatise on the Passover*, he argues that the Passover prefigured Christ himself, not merely his sufferings.) Origen points to 1 Cor. 10:1–4 as evidence that the

Law ought to be interpreted spiritually, demonstrating that the exodus referred to Jesus and not simply the literal event; the church should follow the same interpretive method. His evaluation of Jewish understandings of the exodus, however, was not entirely accurate. Jewish tradition did not understand the exodus only in a literal fashion. Philo, for instance, read it both as a literal event and as the soul's journey from physical passions to wisdom.

Of more significance, though, are Origen's conclusions regarding Jews. Had he simply critiqued the different readings of Jews and Christians, this would represent only an attempt to strengthen Christian identity in the minds of his readers. But he goes further when he comments, "It seems to me that if I differ from Paul in these matters I aid the enemies of Christ" (1992: 276). (Hippolytus of Rome made similar arguments regarding the typology of Exodus 12, but without becoming anti-Jewish; see his homily "The Spiritual Pasch," in Hamman 1969: 68–9.) Origen thus expresses hostility toward Jews, especially when he equates them with the Egyptians, subtly implying that they should suffer a similar fate. He also associates the church with the departing Israelites, and Jews and Judaism with pharaoh and Egypt. This juxtaposition appears at the beginning of the homily, where Origen contrasts the correct reading of Paul and the church with the incorrect reading of Jews and Judaism. The correct reading led to belief in Jesus as the Christ, while the incorrect one resulted in his rejection. Moreover, discussing pharaoh's assertion in Exod. 14:3 that the Israelites were going astray, Origen notes that, according to pharaoh, anyone who followed God went astray, and declares, "For when you confess one God and in the same confession assert the one God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, how winding, how difficult, how inextricable this appears to be to the unbelievers!" (1992: 280). The unbelievers, represented by pharaoh, certainly include Jews. When he takes up the crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus 15, he cites the Egyptians' destruction as representing the destruction of the rulers of this world and of spiritual evils. This essentially equates pharaoh with Satan and transforms Jews from Israelites into Egyptians who deserve destruction. Origen apparently does not advocate a genocidal type of destruction, but to him the Jewish belief system clearly needs to be blotted out.

The Christianizing of the exodus story thus contributed not only to Christian claims of superiority, but also to Christian hostility toward Jews and Judaism. Its continued growth is reflected in the Emperor Constantine's comments to those not attending the Council of Nicea, that "It was declared to be particularly unworthy for this, the holiest of all festivals (i.e., Easter), to follow the custom of the Jews (i.e., Passover), who had soiled their hands with the most fearful of crimes, and whose minds were blinded." He encourages Christians "not to have anything in common with the Jews," asserting that the adoption of the Western practice reflected the desire "to separate ourselves



from the detestable company of the Jews, for it is truly shameful for us to hear them boast that without their direction we could not keep this feast.” He also concludes that “it is our duty not to have anything in common with the murderers of our Lord” (Percival 1988: 54–5).

Athanasius’s Easter letter of 333 further reflects the effort to forge a strong identity in the Church by using Exodus 12 and the Passover against Jews and heretics, including Quartodecimans. As the bishop of Alexandria, Athanasius encourages his readers not to be like “the heathen, or the ignorant Jews, or as the heretics and schismatics.” The heathen consider the Easter feast, the “blessed Passover,” merely to be a time of eating rather than a time of fasting. Alluding to the Jewish custom of eating a Passover meal, as opposed to the Christian custom of fasting, Athanasius equates Jews with heathens because they fail to see the typology of Christ in the Passover. Schismatics, characterized in terms similar to Quartodecimans, divide the Church by keeping Pascha “in separate places and with vain imaginations.” He exhorts his readers to demonstrate their superiority by “not rending the coat of Christ, but in one house, even in the Catholic Church, let us eat the Passover of the Lord” (1952–7: “Letters of Athanasius,” 518–19; see also his Easter letters for 339, 340, and 347, in 1952–7: 534–6, 538, and 544–8).

Christian readings of Exodus 12 and the Passover did not always result in attacks on Jews and heretics. Gregory of Nazianzus, in an Easter oration, equates the exodus with leaving “sullen persecuting sin,” and the removal of leaven with excising “the old and sour wickedness,” all made possible by Jesus’ death and resurrection (1952–7: 428). Ephrem deduces that Jesus was conceived on the tenth of Nisan by combining the instructions in Exod. 12:3 to take a lamb for the Passover on the tenth of the month with the references in Luke 1:26, 36, regarding the pregnancies of Elizabeth and Mary. Jesus was also crucified on the fourteenth, when the paschal lamb was slaughtered (Salvesen 1995: *Exodus Commentary* 12.2–3). Gregory of Nyssa finds in the application of the blood to the lintel and doorposts a key to understanding the soul and its journey toward virtue. The two doorposts represent the spirit and the appetite, while the lintel reflects the soul’s intellect or reason. (Philo had equated the heart with the lintel, desire with the house, and reason with the doorposts in explaining the soul’s quest for virtue [1937b: *Questions and Answers* 1.12].) As long as these parts work in concert in their correct places, the soul is protected. The blood of Jesus keeps the “destroyer” away from the soul unless the spirit and appetite displace the rational. Not even the blood of Jesus could keep out the “destroyer” when this situation occurs, because “faith in Christ does not ally itself with those of such a disposition.” Thus the Israelites, or the virtuous, are kept safe when the rational maintains control of the spiritual and physical faculties (1978: *Life of Moses* 2.89–101). The Church also commonly



understood the Eucharist in terms of the Passover. So, for example, Thomas Aquinas teaches that the killing of the paschal lamb prefigures Jesus' suffering and foreshadows the Eucharist, as does eating the paschal lamb with unleavened bread (1955: 6–8).

### *Medieval judaism*

Jews, like Christians, also used the exodus and Passover to demarcate the boundaries between themselves and others. This in part grew out of the statement in Exod. 12:43 that no foreigner (*ben nepar*) was allowed to eat the Passover meal. The targums render the phrase variously, reflecting three opinions regarding who may eat it. While *Targum Neofiti I* translates *ben nepar* as "Gentile," *Targum Onqelos* interprets it as "no Israelite who becomes apostatized." *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* reflects both readings by rendering the phrase as "no Gentile, and no Israelite who has apostatized and has not repented." These appear to be roughly equivalent to the Christian categories of Jew (i.e., one who has never been a part of the group) and heretic (i.e., one who was a part of the group, but is no longer considered a member by the group itself). Exod. 12:44–8 furthers these distinctions by allowing a circumcised slave to eat the Passover, as well as any "alien" (*ger*) residing with the Israelites who first circumcised all males in his household. No uncircumcised person (*'arel*), however, could eat the Passover. The targums use the passage to continue clarifying the boundaries between Israelites and others. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* indicates that before a proselyte (the *ger* of the Masoretic Text) could celebrate the Passover, all males in his family had to be circumcised, while no uncircumcised Israelite (the *'arel* of the Masoretic Text) could participate (12:48). *Targum Neofiti I* asserts that no Gentile could eat of the Passover (12:48), while *Targum Onqelos* prohibits any uncircumcised person. The targums, therefore, clarify the boundaries of participation by invoking the categories of non-Jew, proselyte, and uncircumcised Jew, categories also used by the rabbis when discussing who qualified as a participant in the meal (*b. Yevamot* 70a–71b; *b. Pesachim* 96a).

*Exodus Rabbah* creates distinctions by explaining Exod. 12:43 in light of the maxim in Prov. 14:10 that the heart knows its own bitterness and no stranger can intermingle with its joy. When the Israelites departed from Egypt, God instructed them to celebrate Passover. The Egyptians, however, attempted to eat it with them, causing God to command that no "alien" could eat it (19.1). The Passover, therefore, was a uniquely Israelite experience. By associating this command with the Israelite worship of the golden calf (19.3), *Exodus Rabbah* further restricts participation by disqualifying any apostate. One might then

surmise that an apostate was a Jewish idolater. In another instance, the midrash identifies the “alien” of Exod. 12:44 as an uncircumcised Israelite, by telling the story of a king who invited his friends to a banquet, but required them to show the royal seal on their invitations before being admitted. In like manner God invited Israel to the Passover banquet, but required them to be circumcised before participating (19.5). The midrash thus thought in terms of non-Jews and idolatrous and uncircumcised Jews. Rashi, citing *b. Zevachim* 22b, teaches that the command prohibits “one whose actions are estranged from his Heavenly Father.” This includes both the Gentile (*goy*) and the “apostate Israelite,” who Rashi regards as a Jew who refused to be circumcised. He explains that the prohibition in verse 48 against uncircumcised people eating the Passover includes those Jews who might be uncircumcised for legitimate reasons (i.e., one whose brother may have died from circumcision in which case the parents were not obligated to perform the rite on subsequent children). This person is considered an apostate, and thus prohibited from eating the Passover (1934: 62). Rashbam agrees (1997: 124).

The Passover seder liturgically distinguishes Jews from Gentiles. From the moment it begins, with the recitation of the Kiddush (the prayer said over a cup of wine consecrating the sabbath or a festival), the theme of Israel’s distinction traverses the ritual. When saying the Kiddush, participants are repeatedly reminded that in the exodus God “chose us from all peoples, and exalted us above all tongues, and sanctified us by your commandments.” They bless God, who distinguishes “sacred from profane, light from darkness, Israel from the nations, and the seventh day from the six workdays,” and are reminded that this night differs from all other nights.

### **11:1–3; 12:33–6 The Plundering of the Egyptians**

Jews and Christians found another element of the exodus useful for transmitting their respective ideas. After the last plague the Egyptians urged the Israelites to leave the country. Acting in accordance with Moses’ instructions (Exod. 3:22), the Israelites requested that the Egyptians give them various valuables, essentially plundering their former masters (Exod. 12:33–6). On the basis of comments of Jewish interpreters, it appears that this incident fueled anti-Jewish sentiments and, for Jews living in the Hellenistic world, had to be explained. Philo, for example, attempts to remove any appearance of greed by indicating that while the Jews received reparation for their bondage, it did not begin to compensate them (1935: *Life of Moses* 1.35). The Talmud records a similar explanation regarding an incident during the reign of Alexander the

Great. Some Egyptians contended that during the exodus their ancestors had only lent the Israelites their valuables, and therefore that they deserved to be repaid. When a representative of the Jews argued that the Egyptians actually owed them payment for the toil of 600,000 of their kinsmen over a period of 430 years, the Egyptians dropped their complaint (*b. Sanhedrin* 91a). Others, by contrast, did not consider the valuables as something owed to the Israelites. Josephus explains that the Egyptians gave gifts to the Israelites (1974b: *Antiquities* 2.14), while the *Mekilta of Rabbi Ishmael*, a tannaitic midrash, portrays the Egyptians as willingly supplying the Israelites because they had proved their trustworthiness by not plundering them during the plague of darkness (*Piska* 13; see also *Exodus Rabbah* 14.3).

Although Jewish interpreters attempted to exonerate their people from negative attributions, their efforts often proved unsuccessful. The passage was used to express anti-Jewish feelings during the medieval period, causing Jewish interpreters to stress their people's integrity (especially toward non-Jews) and the divine favor they had received. Rashi softens the negative image portrayed by the Israelites' request for valuables by arguing that the Egyptians gave the Israelites things they had not requested (1934: 60). Rashbam contends that the "true plain meaning" of the qal form of the verb *sha'al* in Exod. 3:22 indicates that the Israelites had requested permanent gifts rather than borrowed items. For him this explanation is "an appropriate rebuttal for the heretics." The hifil (causative) form of the verb in 12:36 demonstrates that the Egyptians fulfilled the Israelites' request (1997: 39–40, 117–18). Some medieval haggadot, in keeping with the interpretation given in the *Mekilta of Rabbi Ishmael* and *Exodus Rabbah*, illustrate this episode in conjunction with a depiction of the plague of darkness (for example, the *Golden Haggadah* [Narkiss 1997: fol. 13r, d] and *Sister Haggadah* [Narkiss 1982: 1.1.74 and 2. plate 183]), effectively emphasizing the Israelites' integrity by showing that they did not plunder the Egyptians. Other haggadot, however, couple the spoiling of the Egyptians with pharaoh's request for the Israelites to leave (for example, the *Rylands Haggadah* [1988: fol. 18r] and *Brother Haggadah* [Narkiss 1982: 1.1.96 and 2. plate 292]), highlighting the divine favor bestowed on the Israelites as they departed in possession of their masters' valuables.

Christians continued to read the passage in ways that solidified Christian identity and asserted the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. Tertullian argues against Marcion's efforts to devalue the Old Testament by distinguishing between the covenant of law and the gospel of grace. Seeking to show that the same God who acted in the Old Testament also acted in the New, Tertullian connects the sending out of the seventy (Luke 10:1–20) with the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. In the former instance Christ instructed the seventy to take nothing with them, whereas in the latter the Israelites plundered the

Egyptians. The discrepancy did not arise from different deities, but from different purposes. The disciples were sent into cities and therefore needed nothing, whereas the Israelites were sent into the wilderness and needed to carry provisions. Furthermore, Christ exonerated the Israelites when he declared that a laborer is worthy of his hire. The Israelites despoiled the Egyptians simply to recover the compensation due them (1972: *Adversus Marcionem* 4.24). Tertullian's refutation of Marcion reflects Christian efforts to exercise authority over the Old Testament by correcting what was deemed misinterpretations and misuses. The church did not wish to break with it, but to incorporate it within Christian teaching by reading it in light of the New Testament.

Augustine attempted to justify the Israelite plundering of the Egyptians by distinguishing between levels of morality. He identified six moral stages akin to a man growing from boyhood to old age: infancy, boyhood, adolescence, youth, maturity, and old age. One should judge the Israelites' actions, therefore, in light of their particular stage. The period from Abraham to David reflected humanity's adolescence, but since the coming of Jesus, the world had moved into the last and most mature state ("On John the Baptist," in 1982: 105–7). Deceiving no one reflects the highest level of virtue, while deceiving everyone reflects the lowest. In between these two stages one is permitted to deceive enemies, but not friends. Augustine argues, therefore, that the Egyptians deserved to be deceived by the Israelites, because they were living in a period when it was not considered unworthy to deceive one's enemies. He admits that God allowed the Israelites to ask the Egyptians for their valuables because they, "as seekers of a kingdom as yet earthly," longed to have them; and he also allowed them to take these things under the intentionally false impression that they would be returned. Yet God was not guilty of deception, because he had justly given "a reward adapted to the level of such souls." In exonerating the Israelites, Augustine also asserts the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. According to him, the Israelites (and all those up to the advent of Christianity) could understand only the dictum, "Love your neighbor, and hate your enemy." They could not understand the greater idea of "Love your enemies." Christianity, however, had superseded Judaism with a better way ("On the Gold and Silver Taken by the Israelites from the Egyptians," in 1982: 90–5).

Augustine uses this passage in addition to articulate the relationship of Christians to secular knowledge. He cautions those seeking knowledge from secular institutions, but also acknowledges that the latter could contain some useful information. The Egyptian valuables included idols, as well as silver, gold, and clothing. The Israelites took the latter, but shunned the idols. So Christians should take from secular knowledge the valuable information while discarding the useless. Furthermore, essential human institutions, represented by the Egyptian clothing, must be converted to Christian purposes. Above all,

one should remember that in spite of leaving Egypt with many valuable provisions, one should first observe Passover. That is to say, Christian conversion is necessary regardless of the amount of one's secular knowledge. All secular knowledge, therefore, had to be understood under the aegis of Scripture ("On Christian Doctrine," 1956b: 2.40–3). In a similar fashion, Gregory of Nyssa urges that Christians need to possess secular knowledge (i.e., the treasures of Egypt), such as moral and natural philosophy, geometry, astronomy, and dialectic, while pursuing virtue. As the Israelites used the spoils of Egypt to construct the tabernacle and its implements (Exodus 25, 35), so should Christians use the world's valuables in the service of the Church (1978: *Life of Moses* 2.112–16).

The plundering of the Egyptians had proved useful to Christians in defining the boundaries between themselves and non-Christians, and showing how to traverse them. These readings, however, reflect an uneasy coexistence between Christian, Jewish, and secular entities. Christians continually attempted to demonstrate their superiority to Jews whether by blatant anti-Semitism or by supersessionism. Christians nevertheless distinguished the secular realm from Judaism. They did not have to exist within a Jewish society, but they did have to live within the secular, and they needed secular institutions and knowledge to survive. The exodus stories helped them articulate and live out their Christian identity in this environment, as well as live in hope. Christians hoped and believed that one day all of society would be Christianized. The exodus from Egypt fed this hope as a symbol of Christian victory. Jews also found hope in these stories, by reading them as illustrations of divine favor. Confronting hostility from both Christian and secular societies, they again looked for God's victory over their enemies by turning to these stories to combat calumny and to strengthen Jewish cohesion.

## 11:1–10; 12:29–32 The Death of the Firstborn

Medieval Christians often dramatized the exodus as, for instance, in the Corpus Christi cycles of plays. Performed in England from the late fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries, this cycle presents biblical history through a series of plays or pageants staged during the Feast of Corpus Christi. Four complete or nearly complete cycles are known. Scholars have debated the meaning and significance of the cycles overall, as well as individual plays contained within the cycles. The Wakefield Cycle's play *Pharaoh* portrays the Egyptian king as the first great tyrant, who also anticipated tyrants such as Herod, Caesar, Pontius Pilate, and even Satan. The play also depicts Moses as a type of Christ,

showing how God delivered Moses and Israel in the face of overwhelming evil (Bevington 1975: 227, 322). Not surprisingly, the plays present the exodus in the light of Jesus, yet they do not communicate doctrine exclusively. In the York Cycle's *Moses and Pharaoh*, the death of the firstborn is referred to as a "grete pestilence," the phrase commonly used by late medieval England to refer to the Black Death of 1348–9. The play, likely composed not long after the Black Death, cast the Egyptian suffering in terms easily understood by its audience (Beadle 1994: 85–6). Given that audiences were usually guided to identify with the Israelites, perhaps the play's author intended to interpret the Black Death as a great punishment from God. If so, for that brief moment, the audience become the Egyptians, and the biblical text helps them understand their suffering's significance. Yet this association soon recedes, and the audience resume their journey as Israelites. Repeatedly invoking the idea of a literal and figurative pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the plays of the York Cycle vicariously convey the audience along in the movement toward Christ's advent and the future coming of the heavenly Jerusalem. In this vein *Moses and Pharaoh* prefigures and demonstrates the movement from sin to salvation as Moses led the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land (Harbin 1999: 84–9, 93). Some have emphasized, in addition to the play's theological and religious overtones, its theatrical nature. In simple terms, the exodus story provided good drama and entertainment apart from its Christological connotations (Meredith 1997).

The death of the firstborn and its commemoration in Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread had provided Jews and Christians with effective tools for articulating their faith and developing strong senses of identity, which at times fueled the fires of aggression against outsiders. Somewhat ironically, it also served as a means for describing and making sense of catastrophic disasters, as well as providing entertainment in the theater. Modern interpreters have continued to use Exod. 11:1–13:16 in the same way. For instance, Martin Luther distinguished between the Old Testament's role of teaching laws and revealing sin and the New Testament's communication of grace and peace. He criticizes Jews for holding so strictly to certain Mosaic laws and thereby failing to understand the true intention of them. In his effort to make humans aware of their sinfulness, Moses not only gave laws like the Ten Commandments that revealed true sin, but also made some things sinful that were not by nature sinful. This latter category included the eating of leavened bread at Passover (1960: 236–43). Luther thus took an essential aspect of the Jewish observance and understanding of the exodus event and made it, in the light of Christianity, something unnecessary.

Modern uses of the death of the firstborn have continued to follow earlier appropriations. The agent of the firstborns' death had long been associated with an angel of death, or death angel, in spite of the absence of any reference

to an angel in the Exodus passage (see, for instance, its presence in the Passover scene depicted in the sixth-century Ashburnham Pentateuch [Sörries 1993: 11; fol. 65r]). The concept of a death angel was ancient, thus making its association with the Passover an easy transition. Modern readers continued this tradition, as illustrated in a series of letters exchanged between Charles C. Jones, a prominent southern Presbyterian minister, his wife Mary, and his son, Charles C. Jones, Jr. After a devastating hurricane struck the Georgia coast in September 1854, the parents wrote to their son about the event. Mary Jones remarks that “The Angel of Death has visited and swept every class.” Her son responds, “The appearance of the city must have been terrible during the hurricane. Truly the Angel of Death was very near, hovering over its devoted precincts, from his sable wings shaking dire contagion.” Neither of these descriptions conjures up explicit associations with the Passover event, although Mary’s reference to the far-reaching sweep of the angel may allude to Exod. 12:30. When Charles Jr. wrote the next month, he made a direct connection. He compares the widespread mourning caused by a severe yellow fever epidemic occurring throughout Georgia to that caused by the slaying of the infants by Herod and by the work of the “Death Angel” during the first Passover (Myers 1972: 85–91, 93–4, 103–4). A mere reference to the death angel, therefore, could conjure up explicit or implicit connections with the widespread devastation described in Exodus 12, which itself served as a metaphor for extreme suffering.

During the modern period different understandings of the Passover night have proliferated. This is particularly evident in reflections on the death of the firstborn. William Blake’s watercolor *Pestilence: Death of the Firstborn* was part of the Thomas Butts Collection, and completed probably around 1805 (see plate 9). It is currently housed in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Before considering it, however, it is helpful to understand the more common manner of depicting this episode. It has typically been portrayed with an angel bearing a sword either killing or having killed the firstborn. This is the manner in which the Ashburnham Pentateuch and many others have illustrated the event. Included in this style would be the work by Gustave Doré. Although living a generation later than Blake, Doré’s depiction reflects a standard rendering of the event. In 1866 he published an illustrated Bible in French, but the pictures rapidly became popular and were reproduced elsewhere in Europe and North America. The English journal *The Quiver* exclaimed that “all the world is talking” about him and praised the realistic representations in his illustrations (1866: 449). In his image four sets of mothers appear with their children. Three children have died, and the mothers express various forms of grief or shock as they are positioned in or near a bloodless doorway. The fourth mother hovers protectively over her child as it apparently is spared. Calmly departing the scene and walking down the building’s steps, a winged angel carries a sword (Doré





Plate 9 William Blake, *Pestilence: Death of the First Born*, about 1805. Pen and watercolor over graphite pencil on paper 30.4 × 34.2 cm (11 15/16 × 13 7/16 in.) Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Gift by subscription, 90.106. Photograph © 2004 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

1974: 35). In some form or another, this basic portrayal commonly appears throughout the ages. It is a straightforward depiction of the biblical account emphasizing the suffering of the Egyptians at the powerful hand of YHWH's death angel.

William Blake uses portions of this traditional structure, but also adds elements that recast the episode. In his depiction, a large human-like figure dominates the scene, towering above all people and buildings. It has a human body, but is covered in scales and with what appear to be flames coming from the body. Its face vaguely resembles a serpent's, conjuring up associations with Satan, as it strides through the city with outstretched arms. In front of it three parents with their dead children express grief and shock, while a fourth set is spared. Between the legs of the Satan-figure a winged angel calmly stands in a



doorway. The doorway does not appear to have blood on it, but one assumes that the angel is either protecting this house or supervising the activities of the Satan-figure, or both. The interposing of two supernatural figures, however, changes the emphasis of the more traditional renderings. In the latter the line between good and evil is clear, but in Blake's rendering it is blurred. Evil, represented by the Satan-figure, dominates the scene, while God's representative, the winged angel, appears passive. Given that in Exodus YHWH strikes down the firstborn, one assumes that the winged angel, acting as YHWH's agent, has engaged Satan to bring death to the Egyptians. If so, then good and evil, God and Satan, are not merely antagonists, but have some sort of relationship. The puzzled viewer wonders how the death of the firstborn can be purely good. Does it not also have evil overtones? Blake's depiction confronts his audience with the Passover as both life-giving and life-taking, and as liberation procured by the same means used by the Egyptians to enforce Israelite slavery. Blake thus, portrays the boundary between good and evil as tenuous.

Readers since Blake (and probably before) have struggled with similar issues. As seen in previous chapters, some modern readers have wondered about the use of violence and suffering, in particular when brought on innocent people, to remedy violence and suffering. Others have held in tandem the tension between the life and death brought by the Passover. Poet Susan Hahn contemplates the irony of Adolf Hitler's birthday (April 20), Passover, and Easter all having occurred on the same day. Her poem "Passover, Easter, Hitler's Birthday," highlights the tension in Passover by playing off the convergence of these three days against the poet's own experience. On this day of hope, she phones to check on someone who has been significant in her life but is now nearing death from heart disease. The poet had often dreamed of the individual reviving and coming to her door, only to be fooled in the same way as Hitler's mother had been the first time she held her new baby boy. The reader is reminded that Hitler too once embodied the hope associated with newborn life, but instead brought about unspeakable horror. So too had the unidentified individual. The poet remembers that whenever she let this person in, the individual used her "as an experiment to see if you were still potent." She wonders when the death angel will enter this person's room and end the life that once possessed such promise, but instead brought such pain. The poem fixes the promise of birth against both the horror that sometimes arises from birth and the relief and hope brought by death (Hahn 1994; also published in Hahn 1997). Hahn has touched on the contradictory nature of the Passover story by suggesting that it is simultaneously filled with birth and death, hope and despair, relief and oppression, justice and injustice. American playwright and author David Mamet also brings out the violence of the Passover in his novella entitled *Passover*. As a child assists in preparing the seder meal by chopping

apples, raisins, and walnuts, she learns of her great-great-great-grandmother's actions saving her family during a pogrom in a Polish shtetl. She asks her grandmother if the knife she is using was also used by her great-great-great-grandmother. The child and the grandmother then hear a key turning in the door, and the grandmother embraces the child. The reader is left to wonder whether or not the death angel passed over this household (Gidmark 1998: 190–1; Mamet 1995). The *New York Times* also drew attention to the ability of the Passover (as well as Easter) to evoke conflicting feelings when it pointed to the disparity between the season's hope and the reality confronted by people. In a story dated April 20, 2003, some express dismay over the lack of renewal felt when facing a possible war in Iraq and dismal economic news. One individual identifies more with the seder's affirmation of the Egyptians' humanity when it encouraged Jews to stop cheering the destruction of the Egyptian army. This highlights both the exuberant joy and the deep sorrow created by the exodus.

In spite of these mixed reactions provoked by Passover, it still celebrates freedom and heralds hope. Diverse groups and individuals continue to find the story helpful in articulating their struggles. The Apostolic Faith Church took Exod. 12:12–13 as its theme for the year 1999. In Zambia members of the church pointed to conversions, divine healing, receiving the Holy Spirit, and installing improved water pumping equipment at a church camp as divine protection and blessing reminiscent of that experienced by the Israelites (*Times of Zambia* 1999). Many groups within Judaism have produced a variety of haggadot addressing issues such as feminist, secular, vegetarian, anti-war, and environmental concerns. By expanding Jewish tradition, these groups encourage reflection on the meaning of bondage and freedom in a modern context (Bycel 1993: 55–8). Feminist haggadot, for example, have added "Miriam's Cup" to the Passover liturgy, in order to honor women's roles in Jewish tradition and history. Each year Miriam's Cup is dedicated to a Jewish woman who has assisted others in attaining equality and freedom ("Miriam's Cup"). Some secular Jews also use the Passover to strengthen Jewish identity, culture, and sense of history. Used in this manner, the exodus story is read more as a saga of universal human struggle and liberation rather than something produced by divine action (Levitan, Rosenfeld, and Katz 1975).

The celebration so central to Passover surfaces not only in the variety of groups who use it, but also in the family traditions and memories generated by the ritual. At the heart of these traditions has been the cuisine enjoyed by families, and an entire industry related to Passover cooking has arisen. Families provide distinctive nuances to traditional foods such as matzo balls, gefilte fish, haroset, and stuffed chicken. Recipes abound. One company even markets a cracker called "Bible Bread," modeled on the unleavened bread of Exodus and

designed to be eaten all year round (“Passover Dinner” 1994; Beranbaum 1994; Sigal 2000; Dornblaser 1998: 13). The Passover story has gone far beyond conveying religious and theological ideas, provoking calls for freedom outside the bounds of religion, transmitting ethnic identity, generating family traditions, and contributing to economic markets.

# Exodus

## 13:17–15:21

Exodus contains twin peaks, the exodus itself and the giving of the Law, with the first occurring in Exod. 13:17–15:21. This characterization in no way minimizes the other chapters, but acknowledges the centrality of these two events. Not surprisingly, the exodus and the Law constitute major themes in the book's reception history.

### **13:17–14:31    The Exodus**

#### *Early Judaism and Christianity*

This section describes the Israelites' departure from Egypt, something the Hebrew Bible usually combines with Passover in subsequent references. There-

fore, many of these later passages are the same as those related in the preceding chapter. But two important emphases stand out. Frequently the exodus emphasizes Israel's violation of the covenant (Judg. 2:1–2, 12; Jer. 7:21–6; 11:4–8; 32:20–3; Hos. 11:1–2, 5, 11; 12:9–14; 13:4–6; Amos 3:1). Jeroboam I even refers to the golden calves placed at Dan and Bethel as the gods that brought Israel out of Egypt (1 Kings 12:28). At the same time it also serves as a source of hope. After the psalmist laments the apparent unresponsiveness of YHWH to his suffering, he resolves to meditate on the exodus as YHWH's greatest act of salvation (Psalm 77). The psalm concludes by framing YHWH's triumph over the primeval waters with his triumph in the exodus (77:15–20; Kraus 1989: 115–17). Thus the victory at the Red Sea is understood as a cosmological victory over evil, further reassuring the psalmist. It also signals YHWH's willingness to deliver Israel from subsequent oppressors (Isa. 10:24–7; 11:11; 63:7–14; Jer. 16:14–15; 23:7–8; 31:31–3; Mic. 7:14–17). For the communities of the biblical period it had become a tool for reorientation, correction, and direction in the service of God. The exodus called both individuals and the nation to more devoted service, as well as reassuring them of their continued relationship with God.

By Hellenistic times Jewish interpreters had begun to use the Red Sea crossing to address non-Jewish groups. The shift in audience created new goals in using this passage, which, in turn, highlighted different aspects of the event. This is particularly evident in the portrayal of Moses. In short, rabbinic texts downplay Moses' role, while Greco-Jewish writers emphasize it. As the latter interacted with the non-Jewish world, they shaped the event in a manner that their audiences would understand, recognize, and perhaps even empathize with. This necessitated downplaying those elements highlighting Israel's deity acting on its behalf, because non-Jews would find little significance in this. Hellenistic-Jewish authors, therefore, recast the story in terms of a great national hero, stressing Moses' role at the crossing (H. Jacobson 1983: 143–4), rather than the divine actions recorded in Exodus 14. Artapanus, for example, mentions only a divine voice instructing Moses to strike the Sea with his rod. He also omits the Israelite complaints against Moses, thereby producing a completely positive depiction of him (*Moses* 3.27.34–7, in Charlesworth 1985: vol. 2). The story of the exodus becomes the story of Moses. Ezekiel the tragedian's *Exagoge* retells the story from the perspective of an Egyptian eyewitness, making the assertions of divine activity by a non-Jew appear more objective. Upon seeing the approaching Egyptians, the Israelites cry out to their God, whereupon Moses takes the staff of God, strikes the Sea, and divides it. The Egyptian then remarks that God appeared to be helping the Israelites.

Writing to non-Jewish audiences did not mean that the divine role had to be erased, though. Writers refashioned Moses' relation and response to God in

order to focus on his leadership traits. Philo follows the biblical account closely, but he also produces a heroic picture of Moses working in tandem with the divine. Moses, not God, decides to lead the Israelites to Canaan by an indirect route, so that they will not want to return to Egypt if they encounter opposition. Philo also includes and elaborates on the Israelite complaints against Moses, but he uses them to heighten Moses' status as a great leader. So he appears poised in the face of charging Egyptians and panicked Israelites, forgiving the Israelites and praying for God's salvation while encouraging trust in God. Rather than including God's apparent upbraiding of him (Exod. 14:15–18), Philo has Moses prophesy the Egyptians' destruction. At God's command, he then strikes and parts the Sea (1935: *Life of Moses* 1.29–32).

Josephus paints a similar picture, although he makes the divine role more prominent. Moses acts out of his great faith in God, which contrasts with the biblical depiction showing him as a man obediently following divine instruction. When confronted with the onrushing Egyptians, according to the biblical writer, Moses encourages the Israelites to stand firm and see God's deliverance (Exod. 14:13–14). Josephus, however, constructs a lengthy speech by Moses, emphasizing faith in God. Leading the people to the seashore, Moses prays to God and expresses his faith that they may escape the Egyptians by flying through the air if God so desires; he then parts the Sea with his rod. In the biblical account, by contrast, God upbraids Moses, instructing him to move the Israelites forward, whereupon Moses stretches out his hand, parting the Sea. Josephus further emphasizes Moses' role by reminding his readers that the Pamphylian Sea parted for Alexander the Great when his forces were hemmed in. The historian attributes this to God's will that the Persians be destroyed (1974b: *Antiquities* 2.15–16). This anecdote makes God's involvement with the Israelites and Moses' response to him appear in a more universal context. It is not a uniquely Israelite event demonstrating the power of their God, but one demonstrating Moses' great leadership, which includes interacting with the divine as Alexander the Great did.

To Jewish audiences the exodus remained an illustration of their God's greatness, calling them to faithfulness and instilling them with hope. The writer of *Jubilees* considers the crossing of the Sea to reflect the defeat of Mastema by "the LORD our God" (48:9–19), while the book of Judith de-emphasizes Moses' role by not even mentioning him (5:11–14). The Wisdom of Solomon sees the exodus as resulting from wisdom's work (10:15–21), as well as demonstrating God's power on behalf of his people (v. 19). The writer of 3 Maccabees records the prayer of the priest Eleazar during the persecutions wrought on Egyptian Jews by Ptolemy IV Philopator (221–203 BCE). He invokes the drowning of the Egyptians as exemplifying God's mercy to Israel in the face of an arrogant

and powerful opponent (6:1–4). According to 1 Maccabees, Judas encouraged his men to fight during the Maccabean Revolt by appealing to Israel's deliverance as characteristic of God's efforts to save his people (4:6–11). Other writers highlight the severe consequences of disobedience to God by contrasting them with God's salvation at the Red Sea (Bar. 1:20; 2:11–12; 2 Esd. 1:4–14; *b. Arachin* 15a). By at least the time of the Second Temple, Jews recited the Shema twice daily; this comprised Deut. 6:4–9, 11:13–21, and Num. 15:37–41. The latter passage reminded them that God brought Israel out of Egypt so that he might be their God and they might worship and obey him.

At the same time the exodus still provided a platform for glorifying Moses. The third-century CE synagogue at Dura-Europos contains the oldest preserved depiction of the exodus (Wessel 1971: 2.1). In it Moses dominates the scene. Dressed as a statesman, he appears three times with disproportionately large dimensions, leading the Israelites out of Egypt and superintending them safely across the Sea (Sed-Rajna 1985: 72–5). When combined with other scenes chosen from the book (the finding of Moses, the burning bush, the receiving and reading of the Law, and the consecration of the tabernacle), Exodus becomes the story of Moses. As Israel's divinely appointed leader, he provides the nation (and later, Judaism) with deliverance, the Law, and the sacrificial system.

The early church drew upon the exodus as a tool for explaining the Christian life and exhorting its members to faithfulness. The story of Jesus walking on the water, recorded in Mark 6:45–52, may have been modeled on Exodus 14, to which it refers by key words, phrases, emotions, and structural parallels, so encouraging Jewish Christians that the same God was working through Jesus (Stegner 1994). According to the author of Hebrews, faith made the Red Sea crossing possible (11:29). While the Israelites crossed safely in faith, the writer implies that the Egyptians drowned from lack of faith. 1 Cor. 10:1–2 refers to the Israelites passing through the Sea and being baptized in the cloud and the Sea. In light of their subsequent rebellion and punishment in the wilderness, these events encouraged Christians to avoid making the same mistake by being disobedient. Christian salvation and baptism were thus viewed as entryways into the Christian life, just as the passage through the Red Sea had ushered Israel into a new life. The emphasis in 1 Corinthians 10, however, falls on the new life rather than on the entrance into it. In Old Testament terms, life in the wilderness, rather than the passage through the Sea, receives the focus.

Subsequent Christian writers, on the other hand, gave great emphasis to the Red Sea crossing as foreshadowing Christian baptism and as a means of explaining the Christian life. Origen, in keeping with 1 Corinthians 10, understands it as an image of the believer coming through the baptismal waters,

having his or her sins washed away and previous spiritual evils drowned. He also reads this passage as instructing the Christian who has doubts regarding the faith. The Sea, representing the hindering effects of ignorance and contradictions, must be struck with Scripture just as Moses struck it with his rod. Scripture will remove doubts and lead the individual in the way of faith (1982: 283–4). Similarly, Gregory of Nyssa finds the Egyptian pursuit and the Israelite complaints indicative of those who, having recently taken up the virtuous life, find themselves assaulted and pursued by temptations. It shows the necessity of putting to death in the baptismal waters the forces of evil assaulting the believer. He indicates that as long as some continue to possess remnants of their sinful life even after experiencing baptism, they have not been genuinely touched by it. So, for instance, one who has become rich through robbery or injustice cannot continue to enjoy these things after baptism and be truly freed from sin (1978: *Life of Moses* 2.125–9).

The exodus from Egypt soon found its way into Christian liturgy. Prudentius (348–c.410), described as “the greatest of the Latin Christian poets,” features the exodus prominently in “A Hymn for the Lighting of the Lamp” (1962: p. ix). The entire hymn praises Christ as the source of light and traces in detail his presence in the burning bush and the pillar of fire, guiding the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness. Prudentius moves from Christ’s deliverance of Israel to his deliverance of the faithful from the world. The exodus thus symbolizes moving from temporal life to eternal life in heaven. The hymn closes with a description of one of the vigils from the Church’s feasts (probably the Easter Vigil), extolling Christ as the light linking together all ages. The exodus has become thoroughly Christianized in Prudentius’ hymn, illustrating the continuity of Christ and, by implication, Christianity throughout time.

The use of the exodus during the Easter Vigil is particularly evident in the Ashburnham Pentateuch, a late sixth-century illuminated manuscript. Early medieval liturgical cycles used the crossing of the Red Sea as the primary Old Testament narrative during Lent. When catechumens were baptized at the Easter Vigil, events from Exodus were recited to communicate the significance of the new believers’ experience, and the paschal candle was lit and blessed. The Ashburnham Pentateuch illustrates this experience with the Red Sea crossing (fol. 68r) (see plate 10). As the Egyptians drown in the Sea, Moses, Aaron, and the Israelites stand on the shore and follow the pillar of cloud, shown as a lighted candle coming from a cloud and held by two hands. This scene reflects the part of the Easter Vigil when the bishop, assisted by a deacon carrying the paschal candle, led baptismal candidates to the font. The passage through the Red Sea thus symbolized the movement from the death of sin to the life brought about by Christ (Verkerk 1995: 94–9 and 2004: 85–9).





Plate 10 The Crossing of the Red Sea. Ashburnham Pentateuch, fol. 68r. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Christians, however, did not appropriate the exodus only as an aid to describe the baptismal experience. Rome's fourth-century Via Latina catacombs depict the exodus (along with many other Old Testament scenes), probably to emphasize the theme of deliverance (Grabar 1980: 138). This rendering was divided somewhat evenly between the Egyptians' destruction on one side and the Israelites on the other. Near the center of the painting, and next to the Israelites, Moses stands much larger than any other figure with his rod touching the edge of the jumbled mass of Egyptians, and his cloak bearing a small cross near its bottom corner. The confused pile of Egyptians contrasts with the Israelites' orderly arrangement. Given the painting's placement in a catacomb, one wonders whether it was meant to convey the Christian's passing from death to life, from the chaos of the current world to the peace of the next. The small cross on Moses' garment also christianizes the scene, taking it out of the realm of the purely historical.

The fifth-century mosaic at Rome's Santa Maria Maggiore renders the scene differently (Karpp 1966: plate 97). The Egyptians' destruction dominates this depiction, taking up approximately three-quarters of the scene. On the right side the heavily armed Egyptians pour out of a city, while in the middle of the painting, they drown in the Sea. On the bottom left side Moses strikes the Sea. Two figures, presumably Aaron and Miriam, stand next to him, while only the heads of the Israelites appear in the background. Moses' stature does not differ from that of the others, but he is distinguished by a lighter-colored robe. In contrast to the almost faceless Egyptians, the Israelites' faces are quite pronounced, particularly their eyes. Some look on with uncertainty, while others

look away. Through the Israelites' eyes, the artist captures the amazement and fear of the moment (something that Avitus, bishop of Vienne, also sought to do through dialogue in his slightly later rendering of the crossing [Roberts 1983: 33]) and helps emphasize the astounding nature of the Egyptian destruction. The Israelites stand virtually defenseless against the mighty Egyptians; they have only Moses' rod. Yet the Egyptian military flounders and dies in the Sea. Rather than highlight the greatness of Moses or the purely Christian overtones of the event, the Santa Maria Maggiore mosaic magnifies the amazing destruction of the powerful Egyptians. The mosaic's location within a church undoubtedly conjured up Christian allegorizations of the event. But its focus on the destruction of the heavily armed Egyptians while unarmed and frightened Israelites look on emphasizes the powerful threat faced by God's people. It also illustrates their amazing and even unexpected deliverance, thus encouraging the exercise of faith in this life.

### *Medieval uses*

The exodus story has proven quite flexible in the hands of its readers. Its varied uses included providing an example of God's faithfulness, a tool to expose his people's unfaithfulness and encourage their faith, a device to engage the outside world and establish ethnic and religious credibility, and a means of explaining spiritual transformation in this life and the next. As more and more audiences contemplated the story in different contexts, its uses continued to expand. One such expansion occurred in the late tenth- or early eleventh-century Old English (Anglo-Saxon) poem "Exodus." For the most part it recounts the Israelite crossing of the Red Sea, but in militaristic and nautical terms, with Moses portrayed as a bold military commander. The writer depicts the Israelites as seafarers, guided by a great sail (the pillar of a cloud), and characterizes the Egyptians as wolves thirsting for battle as they approach the Israelites. In preparation for crossing the Sea, the Israelites put on their battle gear and muster near the shore. Moses then addresses the troops, encouraging them not to be afraid, but to worship the God of Abraham as he performs a miracle in the Sea. The Israelite army then advances into the Sea with shields and standards raised, knowing that just as God had guided and protected Noah and Abraham, so too he would bring Israel to Canaan. Once the Israelites pass through the Sea, the Egyptians are destroyed as they attempt to retreat. The poet concludes, "God's adversary quickly found, when he sank into the abyss, that the Guardian Lord of the ocean was the greater in might. Wrathful and terrible, he had meant to determine the battle by the power of the sword . . . He

who possessed the power voided the boast of those men. They had been contending against God” (Bradley 1982: 63; see also Tolkien 1981: 30–1). The poem ends with assurances that God will bring Israel to Canaan, and also indicates that these events allude to life’s journey from earth to heaven.

Scholars have long recognized the spiritual overtones of the poem. J. R. R. Tolkien (1981: 33) described it as both a historical poem about the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham and an allegory of the soul or of the Church as it moves through this life on its way to heaven. Medieval thought often conceived of life as an ocean voyage to heaven, with the exodus symbolizing that journey (Viljoen 1988: 1–2; Lucas 1976: 201). Others have suggested that the poem represents the common Christian typology of baptism in which sin is destroyed and salvation gained (Vickrey 1972: 122–3). While not denying these understandings of the Old English “Exodus,” Nicholas Howe argues that “the Anglo-Saxons had themselves envisioned their migration from continent to island as a reenactment of the biblical exodus” (1989: 2). The crossing of the Red Sea provides a model for “reconciling the remembered pagan past of the Anglo-Saxons with their enduring Christian present.” Rather than reading the exodus story purely as allegory, the poet also considers it historically. The Israelite crossing of the Red Sea provides the poet with the wherewithal to see Anglo-Saxon migration across the North Sea in terms of the biblical exodus. This “stunningly direct” match of the Anglo-Saxon and Israelite experiences – that is, the crossing of a sea while journeying to a homeland – makes the biblical text speak on a literal level. The fact that the poem is written in Old English (rather than Latin) and that the Israelites are recast as warriors in the tradition of heroic Germanic figures (rather than as religious figures of salvation) further indicates that the poet also intends a historical understanding. In addition, the introduction of a sail into the Israelite voyage across the desert does not merely represent the allegorical journey to heaven, but also the effort to tie the Anglo-Saxon migration to the biblical story. While fully acknowledging the allegorical nature of the poem, Howe nevertheless asserts that this reading has inhibited “our recognition of the ancestral history in *Exodus* . . . Moreover, too much of the poem’s local genius – its richness and density of expression; its historical concreteness – evokes another migration for us to ignore it. As I shall suggest, the allegorical and the ancestral levels of meaning are both necessary and reconcilable.” The Anglo-Saxons thus used “Exodus” to align their history with the Bible. Their migration to Britain – their exodus – made possible their conversion to Christianity. Just as Bede considered the migration a necessary prerequisite for Pope Gregory sending missionaries to convert the Anglo-Saxons, so too did the “Exodus” poet. This understanding gives significance to their pre-Christian history by making the Anglo-Saxon migration the event

that began their journey to the promised land of Christianity (Howe 1989: 5, 72, 74, 78–80, 87–8, 98, 101–2, 107).

Howe's interpretation of the Old English "Exodus" illustrates the wide range of uses to which readers have put the Red Sea crossing. In this instance it provides a template for assessing the significance of national events while still retaining a Christian meaning. After all, the promised land of the Old English "Exodus" poet was the nation's conversion to Christianity in a new land. Yet the crossing had become something more than a metaphor for a spiritual journey, instead reflecting the physical journey of an entire people. The reference points in the Old English "Exodus" are Noah and Abraham, not Jesus, further tying it to a national journey rather than an individual or religious one. Corresponding elements of the story could be appropriated literally, in order to correlate Israel's exodus with their own. Geoffrey of Monmouth (1100–54) carries out a similar appropriation when seeking to construct an identity for the Normans by portraying the Britons as God's chosen people. Addressing a Norman audience and attempting to develop Anglo-Norman patronage, Geoffrey composed his *Historia Regum Britanniae* (*History of the Kings of Britain*). In it he makes several allusions to events in Exodus as he describes the settling of Britain by Brutus, a Trojan leader. For instance, the Trojans were enslaved, rebelled, and fought under the leadership of Brutus to gain their freedom. During the fight they pursued their enemies toward a powerful river, slaughtering them in and near it. With their freedom in hand, they then had to wander for some time before settling in Britain (Geoffrey 1966: 1.3–16). The parallels are not overt and exact, but through these and other references, Exodus provides Geoffrey's work with "epic stature and structure" (Tolhurst 1998: 69–72).

Christians increasingly expanded their understanding of the exodus journey motif beyond that of a strictly spiritual or religious metaphor. When Pope Urban II proclaimed the First Crusade on November 27, 1095, at the Council of Clermont, he reportedly referred to the exodus. According to Baldric, archbishop of Dol, Pope Urban exhorted the knights embarking on the First Crusade to retake the Holy Land from Muslim invaders and to save oppressed Christians in that region. He proclaims, "The children of Israel, who were led out of Egypt, and who prefigured you in the crossing of the Red Sea, have taken that land by their arms, with Jesus as leader; they have driven out the Jebusites and other inhabitants and have themselves inhabited earthly Jerusalem, the image of celestial Jerusalem" (Krey 1958: 35). Whether Urban actually made this statement or Baldric invented it is uncertain, but it reflects a deviation from the typical use of the exodus. Rather than being invoked by those fleeing oppression, it takes on an aggressive quality, giving credence for the intervention of an outside force (Western Christians) on behalf of others (Eastern

Christians). Urban actually interprets the exodus in light of the Israelite conquest. Rather than constituting the closing act in the effort to gain freedom, it becomes the opening movement in the invasion of the land. Urban's use of the exodus, however, was not unique. An early eleventh-century benediction compares a Christian army departing for battle with the Israelites leaving Egypt. Other writers also employed the exodus to interpret the First Crusade by drawing parallels with the Israelite exodus and relating the two as type and antitype (Green 1966: 217, 258–72). The early twelfth-century *Millstätter Exodus* (also known as the *Altdeutsche Exodus*), a Middle High German epic recounting of the exodus, has been understood by some scholars as a work written in support of the First Crusade (Green 1966). But some have doubted this interpretation (Schröder 1969), while others have suggested that the epic is connected to Christian baptism or the Easter Vigil liturgy (Green 1966: 8–24). While the intent of the *Millstätter Exodus* is debatable, by the twelfth century the biblical exodus had become a call to attack, as well as a cry for help. The fearful slaves of the biblical account who were fleeing their masters had become a bold medieval army.

The militaristic influence appears in an early thirteenth-century version of the *Bible moralisée* (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Codex Vindobonensis 2554) or moralized Bible, reflecting a somewhat unusual interpretation of the Red Sea crossing. This Bible consists primarily of illustrations of biblical events paired with representations of their contemporary meaning and brief explanatory commentaries. Codex 2554 was probably produced in Paris for a member of the Capetian royal family by scholars from the newly founded University of Paris. If so, Codex 2554 represents advice given to secular rulers regarding a variety of contemporary issues. This Bible portrays a world in conflict, with the Church being threatened by sin, the world, Jews, and heretics. The crossing of the Red Sea illustrates this conflict by interpreting the drowning of the Egyptians as signifying “that Jesus Christ will turn on Judgment Day to the miscreants and to His enemies, and He will strike them with the rod of justice and He will drown them all and He will push them all into the jaws of Hell” (Guest 1995: 1–4, 20–1, 26–7, 76, fol. 21vC).

Christians had traditionally read the drowning of the Egyptians as representing sin's death, the passage from earthly life to heaven, or the Church's journey through the world. These traditional readings are present in the preceding roundels. The departure from Egypt signifies the movement of the redeemed into the Church (Guest 1995: 75, fol. 21rA–B), while the pursuit of the Egyptians represents the pursuit of the devils and wicked people (p. 76, fol. 21rC–D). Moses' striking the Sea reflects the protection of good church leaders (p. 76, fol. 21vA), and his leading the people across the Sea signifies Jesus' leading the apostles through the world (p. 76, fol. 21vB). Codex 2554, however,

has carried this identification a step further (p. 76, fol. 21vC). The roundel represents Jesus banishing people into the open mouth of a sea creature while his followers stand behind him. The *Bible moralisée* now portrays the passage as the final destruction of people, a more personal and human representation than the abstract destruction of sin. This is not a mere personification of sin, but an illustration of the ultimate fate of people, shifting the emphasis from the salvation of the Israelites and the Church to the destruction of the Egyptians and those outside the Church. This perhaps represents theologians' efforts to encourage secular rulers to uproot the Church's enemies by giving assurance of Jesus' ultimate victory.

These more militaristic readings of the exodus did not supplant traditional interpretations, though. Dante used the exodus as a harbinger of peace when, in 1310, he wrote a letter to the people of Italy encouraging them to accept the German king, Henry VII, as Holy Roman Emperor. Dante believed that Henry would bring peace to the warring Italian cities and, like Moses, would "deliver his people from the oppression of the Egyptians, and . . . lead them to a land flowing with milk and honey" (Toynbee 1966: 59). Explaining how to read his *Divine Comedy* in a letter written some time later to Can Grande Della Scalla (who had protected Dante during his exile), he indicates that the exodus could be understood in numerous ways. It refers literally to the Israelite exodus during Moses' time, but it also signifies redemption through Christ (allegory), conversion of the soul from sin to grace (moral), and the soul's journey from this world to heaven (anagogical) (Toynbee 1966: 199). He evokes it in canto 2 of *Purgatory*, the second major section of the work, when, after having journeyed through Hell, he and his guide, Virgil, come to the Mountain of Purgatory. At sunrise on Easter Sunday they meet the angel of God coming across the sea with a boat filled with souls singing "In Exitu Israel de Egypto" ("When Israel came out of Egypt"; Psalm 114). Some have found the influence of the exodus so prevalent that one scholar concludes, "When we come to read the *Comedy* we find that the Exodus theme itself, supporting each one of its three allegorical meanings, is clearly figured in it" (Benge 1978: 14; see also Armour 1981 and Singleton 2000). These traditional renderings of the exodus thereby help the *Divine Comedy* reflect more than Dante's personal journey.

Yet Dante's traditional appropriations of the exodus take on a non-traditional aspect by criticizing church leadership. The late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries were tumultuous years for the Church. As the papacy increasingly dominated religious and civil life since the eleventh century, some called for reform. Boniface VIII (1235–1303), described by Hans Küng (2001: 111) as suffering from "something like papal megalomania," particularly provoked opposition as he attempted to increase papal power. This broader

situation serves as the backdrop to the *Divine Comedy*. Written during Dante's exile from Florence after his political party lost power, it represents a "passionate, uncompromising, and bitter" attack on papal corruption (Benge 1978: 27). Believing that the Church needed to be freed from such tyranny, Dante invoked the exodus as a pattern for this salvation.

The embedding of the exodus theme or pattern throughout the *Divine Comedy* suggests that the Church too is on a journey or exodus, or at least in need of one. While Dante's journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven reflects redemption through Christ and the soul's conversion and pilgrimage to Heaven (Demaray 1974: 116–19), enmeshed in these traditional renderings is the Church's journey to freedom from papal tyranny and clerical abuse. While moving through Hell, he encounters several popes and other church officials who have been condemned for various abuses of power (see, for instance, canto 19 of *Hell*). But Dante does not advocate the overthrow of Roman Catholicism; many important church figures appear in Heaven, such as Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Benedict (cantos 18, 27, and 29 of *Paradise*). Yet he does champion reform of church leadership, as seen in the invectives against papal and clerical abuse – invectives indicating that the Church has not yet accomplished its exodus, because it still suffers from papal tyranny. Hell represents the Church's bondage, and Heaven the Church's freedom, while Purgatory reflects the way to freedom. As Dante climbs the Mountain of Purgatory, he finds souls being cleansed from the sins of pride, envy, anger, indifference, avarice, and sexual immorality, but discovers that human sinfulness often does not result from a corrupt nature, but from the mixture of spiritual and secular power. When the two entities mix (as in Dante's time), they become even more sinful (canto 16). He is then told:

The Church of Rome,  
Mixing two governments that ill assort,  
Hath miss'd her footing, fallen into the mire,  
And there herself and burden much defiled.

As he comes to the mountain's summit, he encounters a stream, which cannot be crossed without first repenting. He then crosses it and finds himself on the brink of Heaven (cantos 28–31 of *Purgatory*). To be sure, while the Church's exodus is not overt, it is present, being built on the pattern of the biblical exodus (as are the traditional readings of this event within the poem).

The followers of Girolamo Savonarola (1452–98), known as the Piagnoni, appropriated the exodus, but they also included Dante and his call for reform in their struggle for freedom. Savonarola had been an ardent critic of the



Church, the pope, and Medici rule of Florence (Weinstein 1970: 282–8). One of his supporters, Simone Cinozzi, refers to Savonarola as another Moses who would lead his people out of Egyptian bondage. In late fifteenth-century Florence this meant freedom from the corruption of the Medici and the Church (Polizzotto 1994: 174–5). Such blatant language carried great risk, especially after Savonarola was executed in 1498, which likely compelled Girolamo Benivieni, who produced an edition of Dante's *Divine Comedy* in 1506, to cloak his criticisms by invoking the widely respected Dante. Attaching a proem to his edition entitled "Canticle in Praise of Dante," he sets forth a new civic vision for Florence inspired by Savonarola, but articulated as a prophecy by the spirit of Dante (Roush 2002: 49–50, 68–9). Rather than openly assert that current religious and political rulers would experience a fate similar to that of the Egyptians at the Red Sea, Benivieni implies this through the connections with Dante and Savonarola, who themselves had used the exodus to criticize sacred and secular leaders.

### *Early modern uses*

The Protestant Reformers also used the exodus in critiquing the Church. In 1521 the Diet of Worms declared Martin Luther and his followers to be outlaws. At first this edict was not enforced, but German Emperor Charles V signaled his intention of enforcing it at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, when he essentially accepted the Roman Catholic rebuttal of the Protestant Augsburg Confession (Junghans 1996). Martin Luther then criticized those involved in the Diet as being hardened and blinded by God due to their blasphemy, shameful living, and persecution of innocent people. Luther reasoned that since God had not answered his and others' prayers for a successful outcome of the Diet, then he must be allowing the Diet to sin, as he did with pharaoh, until no hope for repentance remained. Luther counseled the German people to cease praying on their behalf and wait to see "how God will baptize the hardened Pharaoh in the Red Sea." According to Luther, "They [the Egyptians] were probably as obstinate and secure as the papists are." Such arrogance and defiance would bring about an experience similar to pharaoh's drowning in the Red Sea (Luther 1971: 11–13, 18). John Knox used the exodus to bolster commitment to Protestantism in Scotland. He contended that God would not allow any of those involved in the divine work of bringing about Protestantism to perish. Simply stated, God would not allow those doing his work to be harmed, and Knox points to the crossing of the Red Sea as proof. None of the Israelites, even in the midst of great danger, perished in the Sea. God protected them, but drowned the Egyptians, and so had he protected and freed the Protestants,



while drowning “no Pharaohs then one.” Knox explains Protestant persecution as divine punishment for straying from the purity of God’s word and following the world (Knox 1966: 2.264–5).

Luther and Knox interpreted their experiences in light of the biblical story, but came to somewhat different conclusions. Both equated Protestants with the Israelites and Roman Catholics with the Egyptians. Luther assures the Reformers of God’s future action on their behalf by explaining their persecution as emanating from evil people who would, like the Egyptians, be destroyed by God. Knox, by contrast, asserts that persecution came ultimately from God as punishment for wavering from God’s truth, i.e., Protestantism. The divine protection experienced at the Red Sea assured Protestants of the rightness of their cause, and therefore made any doubt intolerable. While the contemporary antagonists and protagonists were clear to Luther, Knox, and their readers, the significance of their experiences needed elucidation. By emphasizing different aspects of the story – Luther, the divine judgment, and Knox, the divine protection – they identified the crossing’s significance for them.

People continued to use the Red Sea crossing as a sign of divine protection. John Smith quotes William Box regarding the provisions brought to the English settlement at Jamestown, Virginia, just after the winter of 1609–10. Known as the “starving time,” most of the settlers died. By early summer the survivors had decided to abandon the fort, but just then the colony’s new governor, Lord De La Ware, arrived with supplies. To Box, this and other well-timed events demonstrated God’s intervention on behalf of his people. He explains, “This was the arme of the Lord of Hosts, who would have his people passe the red Sea and Wildernesse, and then to possess the land of Canaan” (J. Smith 1986: 235). The biblical context recedes, and the crossing’s significance as the last, climactic event in God’s freeing the Israelites from Egyptian oppression is of little account to Box. Instead, it signals the miraculous salvation of a desperate people being guided by God toward a better future. The hopelessness of the Israelites parallels the hopelessness of the Jamestown colonists, as does their divine deliverance via the sea.

Box’s reference to God’s direction reflects a common European idea that possession of the New World was part of God’s plan. During the age of European exploration and conquest, nations often felt that the Bible, and in particular Exodus, gave them divine authorization to conquer foreign territories, impose European law and Christianity, and destroy those who resisted (Avalos 1996: 70–2). Debate emerged, especially in Spain, over the human nature of the indigenous population of the Americas, the right of Europeans to enslave them, based on Aristotle’s teaching that some races were destined to serve others, and the right to wage war to force conversion (Hanke 1974). Moses’ role as liberator and lawgiver led one sixteenth-century writer to herald

Hernando Cortés, the Spanish conquistador who took Mexico on behalf of Spain, as another Moses. Gerónimo de Mendieta (1524–1604), a Franciscan who spent about fifty years in Mexico, contends that God had elected Cortés to introduce the Gospel to the New World. Frequently employing the language of conquest and divine providence, Mendieta considers Cortés' conquest and the subsequent conversion of the indigenous population as divine compensation to the Catholic Church for the damage caused by Luther and the Protestant Reformation. Making the comparisons with Moses explicit, Mendieta explains the sacrifice of 80,400 people to the idols of Mexico City in 1485, the year Cortés was born, as indicating that the people needed deliverance from evil. God therefore sent Cortés, just as he had sent Moses. And just as Moses needed Aaron to speak for him, so Cortés needed an interpreter. Cortés' courage to go forth "in a land inhabited by innumerable heathens" also recalls Moses' courage before pharaoh (Mendieta 1973: 1. book 3.1; 1997: 53–8).

This reading essentially transforms the exodus into a conquest narrative, buttressing the Spanish taking of the land from the indigenous populations. While sharing many affinities with the Crusader use of the exodus, it differs somewhat. The Crusaders believed they were coming to the aid of their fellow Christians, taking back land that rightfully belonged to Christians. The conquistador reading, by contrast, justifies taking land and peoples in which Christians had no prior claim. The land's conquest is inseparable from delivering the people from evil. But other Spanish Christians, such as Bartolomé de las Casas (1484–1566), contested this reading, in part by appealing to Exodus. Las Casas, a Dominican friar with extensive experience in the New World, became one of the most ardent advocates on behalf of the Americas' native populations. Believing that the Spanish had become tyrants, not liberators, he argued in 1549 that the conquistadors and their supporters had subjected the Indians to an enslavement worse than pharaoh's (Hanke 1959: 34–5).

Although the exodus was increasingly used to justify aggression, those feeling victimized continued to appeal to it, especially when trying to gain or regain power. After the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658 and the restoration of the Stuart line in 1660, Charles, son of Charles I, returned from exile and was crowned Charles II. During and after his coronation writers portrayed his exile as an Egyptian bondage, likening him to Moses, the redeemer (Reedy 1972: 24–5). Ironically, Cromwell had earlier appealed to similar images to describe the successful struggle of Parliament against Charles I during the English Civil War (1642–8). He saw divine providence working to bring about the Commonwealth's success and found only one other parallel to such divine involvement – Israel's exodus from Egypt and journey toward the Promised Land (Carlyle 1900: 2.307). The image appears again in the Glorious Revolu-

tion (1688–9) after James II had been deposed in favor of his estranged daughter, Mary II, and her husband, William III. Supporters of James II and his descendants, known as Jacobites, appropriated the exodus to articulate their hopes for a restoration of the Stuart line. Later, several Scottish Gaelic poems of the eighteenth century expressed their Jacobite sympathies by hoping that the Hanoverian king, George II, would be drowned just as pharaoh was (MacKenzie 2001: 46–8).

### *Modern American use*

Americans also invoked the exodus tradition to articulate their various struggles for independence. In the words of historian Albert J. Raboteau:

From the earliest days of colonization, white Christians had represented their journey across the Atlantic to America as the exodus of a New Israel from the bondage of Egypt into the Promised Land of milk and honey. For black Christians, the imagery was reversed: the Middle Passage had brought them to Egypt land, where they suffered bondage under a new Pharaoh. White Christians saw themselves as the New Israel; slaves identified themselves as the Old. (Raboteau 1994: 9)

Since their discovery by Europeans, the Americas had become a locus for playing out various exodus readings. Often these readings conflicted with each other, with some groups appropriating multiple and even contradictory uses over time. Many white Americans during the last half of the eighteenth century interpreted their efforts to gain independence from Great Britain as an exodus-like experience. Thomas Paine, hoping to rally popular support for American independence in 1776, referred to Britain's King George III as "the hardened, sullen-tempered Pharaoh of England" (1993: *Common Sense*, 25). Just a few generations before, however, European colonists had read the exodus from the perspective of conquerors, finding in it validation for taking the land from indigenous peoples. Yet, by the eighteenth century, they found the exodus useful in supporting their status as an oppressed, but rebellious people. The effort involved in creating a seal for the newly established American nation illustrates this use of Exodus.

Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams were appointed by the fledgling American government during the summer of 1776 to design a national seal (see plate 11). They reported their decision to the Continental Congress on August 20, 1776. One side of the seal was to contain the following image: "Pharaoh sitting in an open Chariot, a Crown on his head and a Sword



Plate 11 Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson's proposal for the Great Seal of the United States. Drawing by Benson J. Lossing, for *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, July 1856. General Collections of the Library of Congress.

in his hand passing through the divided Waters of the Red Sea in pursuit of the Israelites: Rays from a Pillow [*sic*] of Fire in the Cloud, expressive of the divine Presence and Command, beaming on Moses who stands on the Shore, and extending his hand over the Sea causes it to overwhelm Pharaoh." The accompanying motto reads: "Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God" (*Journals of the Continental Congress* 1906: 5.690). The basic design seems to have come from Franklin, although, according to John Adams in a letter written to his wife, Jefferson had also proposed an exodus image. Jefferson's proposal included an image of the children of Israel being led in the wilderness by the cloud and pillar on one side, with Hengist and Horsa, two legendary leaders of the early Anglo-Saxons in Britain, on the opposite side (*Letters of Delegates to Congress* 1976: 4.679–80). Although Congress tabled the report and ultimately did not choose either exodus design, this initial suggestion illustrates

its appeal in expressing the American struggle for independence. The motto accompanying the design is particularly instructive. The biblical account portrays the exodus as a divinely initiated process in which the Israelites were somewhat passive and even resistant. In many respects they appear as passengers on a journey. The seal's motto, by contrast, emphasizes the exodus as a rebellion, rather than a journey, casting the American exodus as an aggressive act on the part of the oppressed, rather than a deliverance.

Ironically, while white Americans were employing the exodus to articulate their rebellion against British tyranny, African-American slaves were using it against their masters. Historian Sylvia Frey has chronicled the unrest among slaves in the American South, concluding: "Used by Christian slaveholders to rationalize the brutality of slavery, the exodus motif was appropriated by Christian slaves to justify their own struggles for freedom. The theme continued to resonate through the church-associated revolts of the postrevolutionary age." She highlights a sermon given in 1775 in Savannah, Georgia, by a slave named David, who told a racially mixed audience that God would deliver the "Negroes" from their masters just as he had freed the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. Slave-owners wanted to hang him, but one individual smuggled him out of the area and sought to mitigate David's rhetoric, making it more acceptable to the white owners, by arguing that he had intended spiritual deliverance rather than physical (Frey 1991: 62–3). By limiting African-American use of the exodus to the realm of the spiritual, the argument implies that using exodus in the physical realm was restricted to whites and reflects an emerging conflict between blacks and whites over its control.

African-American spirituals often intertwined the spiritual and the physical, perhaps making their hopes for freedom from slavery less brazen to whites while still maintaining the physical implications for slaves. The spiritual "Oh Mary, Don't You Weep, Don't You Moan," reflects characteristics of traditional lyrics, but also voices the desire for freedom on a variety of levels. As with all spirituals, "the poets of the spirituals stole freedom wherever they could." The five stanzas articulate hope for freedom both on earth and in heaven (Ramey 2002: 356–61). This articulation does not blatantly call for overthrowing the slave system in the South, but comes closest in the third stanza as the singer hopes to stand on the rock where Moses stood. Yet this stanza is surrounded by less threatening images, culminating in the singer going to heaven after this life. The refrain ties physical and temporal hopes together by invoking the drowning of the pharaoh in the Sea. African-American slaves employed both the spiritual and the physical possibilities of the exodus in order to sustain themselves and challenge the institution holding them in bondage. Their use of the exodus essentially parallels that of their masters, inasmuch as they, like their masters, called for physical freedom. Their position as literal slaves,

however, forced them to exploit more fully the potential of the exodus theme by engaging the various kinds of freedoms contained within it. Later, as their physical status changed from enslaved to freed, so too could their use of it.

The exodus theme, though, did help fuel slave rebellions. When a former slave named Denmark Vesey in 1822 planned a rebellion involving large numbers of free and enslaved blacks, he envisioned himself as an African Moses and the rebellion in terms of the Israelite exodus. Vesey organized many of the African Americans living in and around Charleston and plotted to murder whites before sailing for Haiti, but the plot was foiled before it could be enacted, and Vesey and others were hanged. He had been influenced, along with other biblical texts, by the exodus, reading it to other African Americans as a way of introducing and gaining support for his rebellion. He even justified his plan to kill whites by appealing to the deaths of the Egyptian firstborn (Higginson 1861: 731; Egerton 1999: 126–7, 145–6). A later rebellion coupled Vesey and Moses together in hopes of justifying it. Not long after John Brown's unsuccessful attempt to lead a slave rebellion in 1859 at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, one of the participants, Osborne P. Anderson, characterized Brown as another Moses, seeing an "unbroken chain of sentiment and purpose from Moses of the Jews to John Brown of America." He includes in that unbroken chain leaders of slave rebellions such as Gabriel, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner, as well as "Southern American" leaders such as George Washington and James Madison (Anderson 1861: 5–7).

Nevertheless, the exodus theme did not motivate all slave rebellions, although it seems to be such a natural fit that some historians have mistakenly attributed its influence to the Virginia slave conspiracy of 1800 led by a slave named Gabriel (Egerton 1993: 181). Yet slave rebellions ironically provoked the use of the exodus to oppose emancipation. After the Nat Turner rebellion in 1831, the Virginia legislature debated emancipation. The following year, Thomas Roderick Dew, a future president of the College of William and Mary, wrote against freeing slaves and the prospect of colonizing them in Africa, cautioning against such schemes by appealing to the exodus. "We read in holy writ of one great emigration from the land of Egypt, and the concomitant circumstances should bid us well beware of an imitation, unless assisted by the constant presence of Jehovah." Chronicling the various problems encountered by the Israelites, he asserts that colonization schemes would confront similar difficulties, but without hope of divine intervention (Dew 1981: 48–9). To Dew, the Israelite experience was rare – unique even – and therefore should not be used as a model for, but rather as a caution against, current plans for emancipation and colonization. Remarkably, Dew had turned the biblical story into an argument against emancipation.

While abolitionists obviously did not read the exodus like Dew, they certainly appealed to it for encouragement in their fight for emancipation. Angelina Grimké Weld compares the efficacy of modern efforts to abolish slavery to those used by Moses. His initial efforts on behalf of the Israelites increased their burden and appeared to have failed. Yet his tactics ultimately proved successful. Weld urges abolitionists likewise to stay the course and not be deterred by negative reactions to their efforts (Ceplair 1989: 177–9). Writing to a fellow abolitionist in 1839, one individual opined that just as the Israelites were in desperate circumstances on the shore of the Red Sea before God suddenly intervened, so God might choose to act for the cause of abolition, coming to their aid in a moment of desperation (J. A. Thome to Theodore Dwight Weld, November 22, 1839, in Barnes and Dumond 1970: 2.814–15). A few days after Confederates bombarded and took Fort Sumter, South Carolina, on April 12, 1861, Henry Ward Beecher preached a sermon on Exod. 14:15 (Beecher 1998). Beecher, pastor of the Congregationalist Plymouth Church of Brooklyn, New York, briefly recounted the exodus story before launching into a lengthy argument aimed at arousing support for war against the newly formed Confederacy. He places his northern audience in the position of the Israelites caught between the onrushing Egyptian army and the Red Sea, exhorting that “safety and honor come by holding fast to one’s principles; by pressing them with courage.” He then makes the application even more explicit (p. 172):

And now our turn has come. Right before us lies the Red Sea of war. It is red indeed. There is blood in it. We have come to the very edge of it, and the Word of God to us today is, “Speak unto this people that they go forward!” It is not of our procuring. It is not of our wishing. It is not of our hand that has struck the first stroke, nor drawn the first blood. We have prayed against it. We have struggled against it. Ten thousand times we have cried, “Let this cup pass from us!” It has been overruled. We have yielded everything but manhood, and principle, and truth, and honor, and we have heard the voice of God saying, “Yield these never!” And these not being yielded, war has been let loose upon this land.

Among other things, his rich rhetoric makes the crossing of the Red Sea into a difficult and dangerous, but necessary, event. Unlike the biblical account, this crossing would involve death for some of Beecher’s Israelites. Rather than signaling divine protection and deliverance, the crossing loomed as a divine mandate to embark on a risky journey in the certainty that many would not make it safely across. Yet the Union as a whole would make it across, while the Confederacy would be destroyed. Beecher uses the crossing as a call to violence, but in his mind the Union had no choice, its course of action being forced upon it by the slaveholding states, as well as by God. God had hemmed in



the northern states in order to force them to stand against slavery and its supporters. The only path to victory and freedom was through the Red Sea of civil war.

Southerners, on the other hand, did not allow their northern counterparts to requisition the exodus exclusively. A few months after Beecher's sermon during a Confederate national day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer, Benjamin Morgan Palmer, pastor of First Presbyterian Church in New Orleans, Louisiana, compared the Confederacy's situation to that of the fleeing Israelites (Palmer 1861: 5). He began his message by reading 2 Chron. 6:34–5, but quickly moved to the exodus.

This day is one of surpassing solemnity. In the gravest period of our history, amidst the perils which attend the dismemberment of a great nation and the reconstruction of a new government, we are confronted with another more instant and appalling. Our late Confederates, denying us the right of self-government, have appealed to the sword and threaten to extinguish this right in our blood. Eleven tribes (i.e., the eleven southern states) sought to go forth in peace from this house of political bondage: but the heart of our modern Pharaoh is hardened, that he will not let Israel go. In their distress, with the untried sea before and the chariots of Egypt behind, ten millions of people stretch forth their hands before Jehovah's throne, imploring him to "stir up his strength before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, and come and save them." It was a memorable day when the Hebrew tribes, having crossed Jordan, stood, the one-half of them upon Mount Ebal and the other half upon Mount Gerizim, and pronounced the solemn Amen to the curses and blessings of the divine law as proclaimed by the Levites. Not less grand and awful is this scene today, when an infant nation strikes its covenant with the God of Heaven.

Biblical allusions fill this opening paragraph, including Ps. 80:1–2 and Joshua 3–4, 8, as he welds together the Israelites' exodus, entrance into the Promised Land, and covenant renewal. In Palmer's mind the Confederacy was experiencing all these events simultaneously. As they made their exodus, southerners were being attacked, but were also establishing a covenant with God. The exodus signifies the Confederacy as God's people leaving the bondage of the tyrannical United States, giving voice to their hope for divine deliverance.

Yet, even after its defeat, Palmer continued to find meaning in the biblical event. When the southern states seceded, the Presbyterian Church in the South also broke ties with its northern counterparts and formed the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States (later changed to the Presbyterian Church in the United States). While the Church struggled greatly after the war (as did most in the South), discussion arose in 1869 over the need for the Church to educate those preparing for the ministry. Many recognized that this would



exacerbate the Church's economic struggles, but Palmer still spoke in favor of ministerial education, referencing the Church's bleak situation at the end of the war in exodus terms: "Our old men were dying off. We were shut off from the sympathy of the world. The children of Israel at the Red Sea, with mountains on the right and on the left, were not more isolated than our Church at the close of the war." Noting the recent large increase in those seeking to study for the ministry, Palmer concludes, "It is like God's command to Israel to go forward across the Red Sea" ("General Assembly" 1869: 399–400).

Palmer's Israelites shared the same situation as Beecher's: both found themselves in desperate circumstances. While Beecher understands the exodus as a call to advance through danger, Palmer reads it as a call for divine help in 1861, but in 1869 as a call to move forward through a precarious situation. White Americans living through the Civil War found themselves in conditions quite different from those of their European predecessors. The latter came to the New World in an exodus from the Egypt of Europe (although motivated for a variety of reasons). By the nineteenth century their promised land had turned into a tyrannous Egypt for many Americans living in both the North and the South. Whites on both sides sent out calls for an exodus-like deliverance, which ironically resembled the calls that had long been made by African-American slaves. All three groups saw themselves as God's chosen people, looking to him to bring them through the Red Sea. As each group endeavored to re-create the exodus for themselves, they often created an Egypt for someone else. To southerners, northern whites had created an Egypt, while southerners had done the same for African Americans. Reflecting on the use of the exodus from the perspective of Native Americans, Robert Allen Warrior has pointed out that it invariably brings a conquest. According to him, these stories of deliverance and conquest "provide an example of what can happen when powerless people come to power" (Warrior 1995: 282). In other words, those who appeal to the exodus to support their struggle for freedom often place others in bondage once they have achieved their objectives.

In the biblical account, the exodus solved the problem of Egyptian oppression. Modern versions, by contrast, are rarely that successful, especially when former oppressors and oppressed are forced to remain in contact geographically or socially. Once African Americans were emancipated, they still had to struggle with tyranny. A song published in 1870 with the title "Pharaoh's Army" continues to reflect the complex appropriations of the exodus theme found in African-American spirituals. The first stanza calls on Jesus "to send some valiant soldier" to defeat pharaoh's army. Although the song does not identify a specific form of tyranny, when sung by emancipated slaves it undoubtedly refers to the continued racism experienced by them in the early years after the Civil War. The next stanza recounts the biblical exodus, while the last refers to

Christian conversion in terms of defeating pharaoh (Patton 1870). For recently emancipated African Americans the exodus continued to include historical, contemporary, and spiritual dimensions. But the situation in the South remained so bad that during 1879–80 thousands of African Americans, led by Benjamin “Pap” Singleton, left for Kansas. Singleton liked to be referred to as “The Moses of the Colored Exodus,” and those who followed him were called exodusters (Fleming 1909; Strickland 1975). The determination to go to Kansas is also reflected in a song entitled “The Exodus” (Cusachs 1904), wherein the author joins the growing number of African Americans abandoning their difficult circumstances in the South. While not all chose to depart, those who remained continued to encounter the oppression of racism. Eventually the Great Migration occurred, when thousands of African Americans again left the South for northern cities during and after World War I. This too was portrayed in terms of the exodus, although it has been called an exodus without a Moses, because the movement emerged from the masses, rather than an individual (Sernett 1997: 57–64, 79–86).

While racism persisted, the subsequent Civil Rights Movement drew on the exodus to challenge and to strengthen people. One chronicler of the period, Taylor Branch, frames the entire movement with this imagery (see his three volumes, *Parting the Waters* [1989; winner of the Pulitzer Prize], *Pillar of Fire* [1998], and *At Canaan’s Edge* [forthcoming]). The most important leader of the Civil Rights Movement, Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered a sermon on Exod. 14: 30 in 1956 on the second anniversary of the Supreme Court’s decision against school segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Heralding the dead Egyptians along the shoreline as “the ultimate doom of evil in its struggle with good,” he identifies the great struggle of the twentieth century as one of “exploited masses” against “colonial powers.” Having spent years in the Egypt of segregation, with little reason to feel confident of their ultimate deliverance, African Americans finally saw the Red Sea open when the Supreme Court rendered its verdict. King caught what many have found to be the exodus’ ultimate significance when he concludes, “Evil in the form of injustice and exploitation cannot survive. There is a Red Sea in history that ultimately comes to carry the forces of goodness to victory, and that same Red Sea closes in to bring doom and destruction to the forces of evil” (King 1997: 256–62; for an expanded version, see King 1963: 76–85). Malcolm X made the exodus analogy even more poignant and specific. After drawing parallels between pharaoh and white America, he concluded:

By opposing Moses, Pharaoh was actually opposing Moses’ God; thus that same God (Jehovah) was forced to drown Pharaoh in the Red Sea, destroy his slave empire, and remove the Egyptian influence from the face of this earth.

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History is repeating itself today. America now faces the same fate at the hands of Almighty God. That same divine handwriting is now on the walls of this modern American House of Bondage. (Malcolm X 1971: 126–7)

He does not simply generalize about good and evil, or apply the story to a somewhat impersonal evil like segregation; he specifically identifies Moses with the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Nation of Islam, and pharaoh with white America. Drawing the battle lines clearly, he delineates in explicit terms the struggle's outcome, and makes the drowning of the Egyptians a real event rather than a rhetorical analogy. At the same time, white Americans participating in the Civil Rights Movement also appropriated the exodus. Abraham Heschel (1907–72), a significant Jewish religious leader and scholar, began his address to the National Conference on Religion and Race (held in 1963) with an exodus reference. Characterizing the dialogue between Moses and pharaoh as the first conference on religion and race, he notes that this original conference's outcome has still not been realized. According to him, "The exodus began, but is far from having been completed. In fact, it was easier for the children of Israel to cross the Red Sea than for a Negro to cross certain university campuses" (Heschel 1979: 55).

American Jews have found continued relevance in this story that was historically and literally their own. Living as a religious minority in a predominantly Christian country, Jews faced serious threats to their religious and ethnic identities. They responded in a variety of ways. Some, such as James K. Gutheim, rabbi of the Reform congregation Temple Sinai in New Orleans from 1872 to 1886, saw Israel's redemption as paralleling the second stage in an individual's development. According to him, after becoming conscious of the divine mission, an individual must then redeem him or her self from bondage by redeeming the mind with education, especially religious education. Reflecting talmudic ideas, Gutheim argues that the "young Israelite" must embrace Jewish identity as tenaciously as the Israelites maintained theirs while in Egypt. He proclaims, "For if an oppressed people shall not be absorbed by the multitude of its oppressors, it must keep alive within its bosom the feeling of its identity, of its moral individuality, the consciousness of its spiritual independence." The Israelites did not deny or mask their identity, and therefore, "In the night of the fatal doom God recognized the house of the Israelite because it had not forfeited its distinctive characteristics by Egyptian superstition. By the virtue of truthfulness Israel was redeemed, and it is this virtue in particular, which must be infused into the mind of the young Israelite, in order to effect his spiritual redemption" (Gutheim: undated sermon). The Israelite exodus thus serves as a guide to survival for Jews in the United States. By maintaining their distinctive identity rather than assimilating to American culture, Jews

could experience redemption (for a similar contemporary emphasis, see Dann 1996).

Not all Jews shared Gutheim's sentiments. Mary Antin contrasted her feelings toward becoming an American with those aroused by the exodus story. After emigrating as a child in 1894 from Polotzk, Russia, she began to attend school, encountering stories of the American Revolution and learning the national anthem. As she began to feel a sense of personal dignity and to embrace her American citizenship, she finally felt she belonged to a country; Polotzk had only been a place of exile for her. The Passover aspiration to reside in the upcoming year in Jerusalem had been little more than words to her. Although as a child she understood what it meant to live in exile and had felt the need for deliverance, she did not share the adults' hope and longing for Jerusalem. She described her feelings in the following passage from her 1912 autobiography:

But the story of the Exodus was not history to me in the sense that the story of the American Revolution was. It was more like a glorious myth, a belief in which had the effect of cutting me off from the actual world, by linking me with a world of phantoms. Those moments of exaltation which the contemplation of the Biblical past afforded us, allowing us to call ourselves the children of princes, served but to tinge with a more poignant sense of disinheritance the long humdrum stretches of our life. In very truth we were a people without a country. Surrounded by mocking foes and detractors, it was difficult for me to realize the persons of my people's heroes or the events in which they moved. Except in moments of abstraction from the world around me, I scarcely understood that Jerusalem was an actual spot on the earth, where once the Kings of the Bible, real people, like my neighbors in Polotzk, ruled in puissant majesty. For the conditions of our civil life did not permit us to cultivate a spirit of nationalism. (Antin 1997: 178–9)

Antin did not deny the majestic nature of the exodus, but it was so foreign to her experience that she could not connect with it on a practical level. Although some may have welcomed the exodus's ability to separate them from the realities of their everyday lives, Antin found this tale of deliverance virtually irrelevant. Rather than exciting her to endurance, hope, or rebellion, it reinforced her feelings of bondage.

Almost a hundred years later the exodus's historical nature continued to challenge Jewish (as well as non-Jewish) readers. Antin could not relate to it on a historical level, but by the close of the twentieth century many were asserting that it was not historical. Modern biblical historians and archaeologists have pointed out the dearth of evidence corroborating the biblical account and have debated its historicity (see, for example, Sarna 1986: 7–14). One prominent archaeologist concluded that after a century of archaeological investiga-

tion of Moses and the exodus, this effort had been “discarded as a fruitless pursuit,” and that the exodus–conquest stories must be set aside as “largely mythical” and “perhaps ‘historical fiction’” (Dever 2001: 99, 121). Not all agree with this assessment (Hoffmeier 1997), and some have explored physical explanations for the miraculous events at the Red Sea (Nof and Paldor 1992 and 1994). The lack of historical evidence has nonetheless increasingly challenged how readers understand the story. Rabbi David Wolpe of the Conservative congregation Sinai Temple in Los Angeles addressed the issue on the first day of Passover 2001, concluding that the exodus did not occur as depicted in the Bible. He explains, “And so I will tell you that having read the scholarship, having evaluated the contending arguments, having looked at the biblical account and the archaeological reports, it seems virtually certain, although it can never be certain, that six hundred thousand men along with attendant women and children did not after a series of ten plagues that were brought upon the land of Egypt depart through a split sea and have the sea close behind them to drown the army of the pharaoh” (Wolpe 2001). Later, in a question-and-answer session with his congregants, Rabbi Wolpe clarified that he believed that there were Israelites in Egypt who left the country, but not in the manner that the Bible recorded. Recognizing the disturbing nature of this conclusion, Wolpe reassured his listeners that while the biblical account might not be historical, it was nonetheless true. He asserts that “Pesach has been proved true in virtually every generation of the Jewish people” and that “this story has inspired people searching for freedom and liberation for thousands of years.” Jews have known slavery and redemption throughout their history. Even though the exodus’s ability to inspire was more important to Wolpe than its historicity, others strongly disagreed. One Orthodox rabbi, for instance, insisted that spiritual truth and historical fact could not be separated (*New York Times* 2001).

### *Modern liberation and oppression*

People throughout the world have used the exodus to characterize and advocate acts of deliverance, but it has been especially significant in liberation theology, which has understood it as a political act bringing liberation to oppressed peoples (Gutiérrez 2001: 86–8; see also Croatto 1981 and Pixley 1987). Instrumental in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, it assured black South Africans that “out of the despair, the evil, the darkness, the pain of slavery, God, our God, brought about the great deliverance, the Exodus” (Tutu 1996: 256; see also Tutu 2004: 15–16). Other examples illustrate its popularity among those seeking freedom. In 1984 the Israeli government secretly airlifted thousands of Ethiopian Jews to Israel in what it called

“Operation Moses.” More recently, events in Zimbabwe’s efforts to break free from British rule have been placed within the context of the exodus. One writer compared Zimbabwean independence to Passover night, and the transition from minority to majority rule to the Israelites being hemmed in by the Egyptians and the Red Sea (Munyeza 2001). A Zambian invoked the drowning of pharaoh in the Red Sea as precedent for punishing (rather than forgiving) former president Frederick Chiluba for alleged misdeeds (Mercutio 2002). When an African woman living in poverty with AIDS found out that she would receive free anti-AIDS drug treatment, she compared her good fortune to the Israelite deliverance at the parting of the Red Sea (*The Guardian* 2003b).

Its usefulness as a paradigm for political and social change, however, has increasingly been questioned. Others have made criticisms similar to Robert Allen Warrior’s critique that too often the exodus leads to oppression. Robert P. Carroll points out that the biblical exodus was bracketed by stories of annihilating Egyptians and Canaanites. Illustrating the cycle of exodus–conquest from the history of the Boer Voortrekkers of South Africa, he argues that they set about making South Africa their promised land, but in doing so enslaved the indigenous blacks. Asserting that “the Bible is an *unsafe book* from which to do politics or social engineering in a contemporary society” Carroll (2001: 198) surmises:

The basic meganarrative of the exodus legend can and will underwrite any number of quite different appropriations of the biblical story. The appropriation of a biblical narrative, story or trope often involves taking over the text and colonizing the biblical material. Such an act will not in itself guarantee the purity of a reading nor the innocence of intention of any culture or community choosing to read the Bible in such a fashion. That much must be obvious to all readers of the Bible by now from the many centuries of experience and examples available to historically minded readers of the Bible. In my personal judgment the extrapolation of a few desirable elements from a story quite full of undesirable elements is a grossly inadequate way of using Bible readings as a blueprint for social engineering in the contemporary world. The exodus from Egypt has not only been used to provoke social and political change, but has also been the object of dramatic representation. (2001: 199–200; see also Watt 1997)

J. N. K. Mugambi, an East African biblical scholar, has also recognized problems with the exodus paradigm, citing primarily the marked differences between the Israelite experience and the African colonial experience. He identifies five factors: historical distance, cultural distance, religious heritage, ideological distance, and religious plurality. Furthermore, the geographic movement of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan does not fit well with the lack of geographical relocation in the African context. He therefore suggests that the exodus model

of liberation be replaced by a new paradigm of reconstruction using Ezra and Nehemiah as the central biblical texts (Mugambi 1995: 5, 14–15).

So at the beginning of the twenty-first century the exodus theme as a model for social and political change has begun to be questioned. Yet it still remains a useful tool for challenging oppression wherever it may arise, including by the formerly oppressed. The problem seems to lie more with those using the exodus than the paradigm itself. When the oppressed do not consider the possibility of their becoming oppressors and take action to guard against this frequent development, then the exodus ceases to liberate. As has been seen, it becomes the tool of bondage and in need of an exodus from itself. This paradigm cannot create a just society; it can create only the opportunity to build such a society. The exodus journey, therefore, must be both linear and circular, moving ahead to break oppression that stands outside itself, but also looping back on itself to uproot the nascent signs of injustice within it.

### *The modern arts*

Coinciding with its social, religious, and political uses, the exodus theme has had a long and rich history of artistic representation. In the hands of poets, painters, and musicians, it has helped express a variety of human emotions and experiences. For instance, around 1634 Nicolas Poussin painted *The Crossing of the Red Sea*, a work rich in color. With Nature emerging as a significant character, the painting portrays the Israelites having just arrived on the shore after crossing through the Sea. Framing them are mountains in the background (perhaps alluding to the wilderness wanderings), the coastline, and a large black cloud; they are protectively hemmed in by Nature's elements. The scene on the shore is filled with activity and some confusion as the people, either sitting down or bending over, with two exceptions, attempt to orient themselves. On the left side a woman stands, holding a child, and pointing toward Moses, who stands opposite her on the seashore. He gestures upward toward the large black cloud filling the upper portion of the canvas's right side. Based on Exod. 14:24, one can conclude that the cloud signifies God's presence. Yet, in spite of the Israelites' activity, the viewer is directed by the woman and Moses to focus on the cloud's overwhelming appearance. The Sea, seen only in the distance as it meets the shore, recedes in importance, and the Egyptians are no longer a factor. The painting focuses on the cloud, assuring the reader that the crossing of the Red Sea was a divine activity.

Maja Lisa Engelhardt made the cloud the subject of her art exhibition *Pillar of a Cloud*, held in New York City in 2003 (see color plate 2, opposite p. 99). She calls attention to the invisible God who becomes present in the cloud while

still remaining shrouded in mystery. She accomplishes this through multiple representations of the pillar, in an array of colors and shapes. No single painting adequately expresses this invisible God, yet each one captures some aspect. In the swirls and shapes and changing colors, God remains elusive, but present, and the viewer's senses are both agitated and calmed. Engelhardt reminds the viewer that the exodus story is ultimately about God. The struggle between the Israelites and the Egyptians recedes in the presence of the divine. Those conditioned to think of God in terms of words or clearly defined doctrines may struggle with these images. Yet God is not clearly defined and cannot be easily grasped or expressed, reminding those reading Scripture that words themselves are inadequate depictions of God subject to a myriad responses.

In Engelhardt's paintings the pillar functions as a metaphor for the divine-human relationship, connecting heaven and earth, the supernatural and the natural. This connection, however, does not have a singular expression. In some instances the pillar is quite prominent and near the viewer, giving assurance of the divine presence, while its colors and shape distinguish it from the earth. In others, it is barely visible and distant, even merging with the natural elements and appearing to suck up the earth and sea within it. One is reminded that the divine resides in nature, yet transcends it. The swirling of the pillar reflects its ferocity and power, and in one depiction it rages as the colors move in different directions with some dripping down the canvas. It is a messy portrayal that, in combination with the other paintings, points toward the disruption caused by the divine presence. Yet in other moments the pillar generates a sense of serenity. As a whole, these works provoke contemplation of the stability and volatility of the divine, which in turn can make relating to it both stable and precarious. One is simultaneously at ease and uneasy when viewing the pillar. The invisible God remains elusive even when momentarily visible, defying the sufficiency of any one representation. Engelhardt destabilizes the reading of the biblical text by presenting multiple depictions and resisting the temptation to portray God in a singular manner or in familiar patterns. She challenges the viewer to consider the biblical account from various vantage points, understanding the text not simply as the bearer of knowledge about the divine, but as something inviting an experience of the divine. God is no longer conceived merely in well-ordered thoughts, but appears in twisted and jagged movements. Both individually and collectively, Engelhardt's *Pillar of a Cloud* emphasizes the motion accompanying the pillar, while testifying to its resistance to a stable understanding. God is a God of motion in the natural world, as well as in the text.

The Red Sea itself has also been the object of artistic expression. Gustave Doré makes it the main character in his illustration *The Egyptians Drowned in the Red Sea* (Doré 1974: 37). In the foreground the Egyptians are engulfed by



the Sea, while in the background the Israelites, somewhat nondescript, stand on a mountain and watch. As the Sea submerges the Egyptians, it dominates the picture, making humans appear minute. The tiny figure of Moses, barely noticeable except for his position in the middle of the background, lifts his hands heavenward, thereby intimating divine control over it. The viewer is overwhelmed by its power, yet reminded of the unseen, though clear manipulation by the divine. Elizabeth Barrett Browning uses the drowning of the Egyptians as a metaphor in her verse novel *Aurora Leigh* to describe how fog engulfed London in the evening, causing it to disappear. During this time, the main character and the novel's namesake experiences a depressing, suffocating feeling. Yet, in this numbing and desolate environment, a sense of vision suddenly seizes her, lifting her spirits in a manner she compares to Israel's singing as conquerors at the Red Sea. Her poetic vision transforms and conquers the drudgery and depression of working in solitude in a city engulfed by fog and devoid of sunlight. She finds Israel's Red Sea experience to be a fitting metaphor for her elation (*Aurora Leigh* 3.195–203). The parting of the Red Sea has even been used to characterize the literal struggle against a sea. Threatened by high tides and subsidence, Venice has become the object of an effort to save it from flooding. Dubbed the "Moses Project," Venetians intend to build underwater barriers to protect the city from the sea (*The Guardian* 2003a).

Gioacchino Rossini's opera, *Moïse, ou Les Plaies D'Egypte* (*Moses, or the Plagues of Egypt*), deals with the issue of power, while also exploring exodus themes on both a national and a personal level, and anticipating some of the ideas generated by modern discussions. Originally performed in 1818 in Italian as *Mosè in Egitto* (*Moses in Egypt*), the opera was revised and performed in 1827 in French as *Moïse et Pharaon, ou Le Passage de la mer rouge* (*Moses and Pharaoh, or The Crossing of the Red Sea*) (Conati 1980). Within the story of the Israelite exodus, Rossini implants a personal drama between Amenophis (Osiride), son of pharaoh, and Anaï (Elcia), Moses' niece. The two are in love with each other, and their personal struggle plays out within the framework of the nation's departure. Amenophis wants Anaï to stay with him, rather than accompany her people out of Egypt, but she is torn between her love for him and her duty to God. Feeling that God condemns their love, she reluctantly chooses to leave with the Israelites. Amenophis protests, asserting that God is unjust and vowing to free her "from the yoke of a severe master" and "from the tyranny of a cruel God." Anaï is not deterred, but while the Israelites rejoice at their impending freedom, she alone weeps (Rossini 1853: Act 1, scenes 5–6). Later Amenophis wonders in sorrow and anger, "What is the power which so forces obedience!" (Act 2, scene 2). Filled with rage, he urges his father to destroy the Israelites, but after a series of plagues, pharaoh concedes to Moses' demands and says, "Go into the desert and offer sacrifices to that God, who for

twenty years left you in bondage” (Act 3, scene 2). Amenophis continues to press the issue with Anaï, and both appeal to their gods for help. Anaï finally reasserts her decision to follow her God and her people, but reflects with a broken heart, “I did love him . . . and from him I flee” (Act 4, scene 2). The opera ends with Amenophis seeking vengeance against the Israelites and following his father into the Red Sea, only to be drowned.

By presenting the personal struggle of Amenophis and Anaï within Israel’s exodus, Rossini allows his audience to consider the ramifications of the exodus. Heralded as a magnificent event in the Bible, the experience of Amenophis and Anaï challenges this idea. Although Amenophis is clearly the antagonist, the God of Israel appears unjust from his perspective. Anaï finds the exodus to be a source of grief, rather than celebration, and does not eagerly embrace it, as did the Israelites. The exodus appears as a great national event, therefore, but also a personally tragic episode. Both of these viewpoints coexist uneasily throughout the opera. Emily Dickinson, in her poem “Red Sea” also expresses conflicting responses. While scholars have debated the poem’s meaning, as well as the identity of its speaker, Dickinson highlights the ambiguity arising in those who feel both exultation and woe after contemplating the event (St Armand 1985).

Artistic depictions have often helped others identify with a particular group’s exodus by confronting non-members with that group’s plight and challenging them to respond. In 1931 Isac Friedlander, who had emigrated to the United States from Latvia, produced a wood engraving entitled *Exodus*. Friedlander, a Jew, was undoubtedly familiar with the biblical story, but instead of portraying an Israelite or Jewish exodus, he depicts all the characters as African Americans. The scene consists of a single line of African Americans walking along a path through the mountains toward a bright sun. As the line moves away from the viewer, one person raises his hand, perhaps alluding to Exod. 14:8 and the Israelites leaving Egypt with a high hand. Friedlander’s depiction indicates that African Americans are journeying to a brighter future, suggesting a successful end by equating the African-American experience with that of the Israelites. As one individual in the line looks back, the viewer is challenged to either watch the journey and be left behind, or join it.

In 1946 the American artist Howard Cook produced an etching entitled *Exodus* that bears some similarity to Friedlander’s engraving, but also differs from it in important ways (Duffy and Duffy 1984: 141, plate 208). Cook’s work, like Friedlander’s, has a single line of people moving away from the viewer along a mountain path (see plate 12). In both depictions the individuals are carrying bundles, but in Cook’s the loads appear much heavier, as the bearers clearly labor under their weight. Furthermore, the trail followed by Cook’s travelers is much more dangerous. It is narrow and jagged, with one side leaving the



Plate 12 Howard Cook, *Exodus*. Smithsonian American Art Museum, gift of the artist.

people entirely unprotected from a fall into a deep valley. Friedlander's path does not appear so precarious. Another important difference is in what lies ahead of the travelers. Friedlander depicts African Americans moving towards the sun, but Cook's line extends around a corner with no indication of what awaits them. Cook's portrayal communicates a quite different exodus from that intimated by Friedlander. The scene itself was inspired by an experience Cook had while serving as an artist correspondent with American troops in New Caledonia during World War II. After driving up a road through a jungle canyon and then climbing up a trail, Cook observed a small group of free French soldiers struggling up the path. He was so impressed that he sketched it the next day. Three years later (in 1946), he re-drew it, changing only the dress and the nature of the loads carried by the individuals. He commented,

The idea came to me from the D.P.'s (displaced persons) of the world of 1946–7 who unless they are confined to their concentration camps after the war are roaming the world in search of a haven to live both physically and spiritually. Since making the print the surge of Exodus peoples over the world has increased and most recently it has received tragic crescendo in both Palestine and India,



Plate 13 Alain Foehr, *Crossing the Red Sea*. All rights reserved/Al Foehr, *Crossing the Red Sea*, 2002. Reprint with permission of Al Foehr.

even a ship of recent memory carrying unfortunate refugees called the “Exodus.”  
(Cook to Albert Reese; October 26, 1947, Reese Papers; Reese 1949: 43)

Cook’s image and description reveal several facets of the biblical exodus. Like Friedlander, he presents an outsider’s view of an exodus and encourages other outsiders to join the journey. He also produces a more pessimistic work than Friedlander. For him this exodus is arduous, full of danger, and its outcome uncertain. Rather than being a triumphant journey into a glorious future, it reflects a reluctant search for a new homeland. The biblical Israelites were displaced persons, but they were journeying to a homeland that had been divinely promised to them. Cook’s Israelites have been forced from their homes with no promise of others. The viewer is challenged to consider this modern exodus in light of the biblical one and to do something to make its outcome correspond more to the biblical one. The exodus, therefore, becomes not only the movement of a particular people, but also a call for others to aid them.

Alain Foehr’s series of computer-generated images dealing with apartheid in South Africa provide another perspective on the exodus’ ability to help outsiders identify with another people’s exodus. The image entitled *Crossing the Red Sea* (based on Exod. 14:22) depicts a single line of black individuals,

with the exception of one white man, coming toward the viewer (Foehr 2002) (see plate 13). The unarmed marchers pass between a line of military vehicles and soldiers bearing bayonet-tipped weapons. Most of the marchers carry placards stating, “I AM A MAN,” reminiscent of the signs carried during the 1968 sanitation workers strike in Memphis, Tennessee. This presentation is much more aggressive as those participating in the exodus come toward the viewer. The viewer’s position virtually places him or her with the soldiers, standing in a line traversing the entire left side of the picture and even moving into the picture’s middle. While the picture connects different groups in this particular struggle against oppression – whites with blacks and black South Africans with African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement – it also presents a challenge. The viewer is challenged either to join the march for justice, or to take a place with those bearing weapons. There is no neutrality in this exodus. The contrast between those wielding military force and those embracing the power of universal humanity makes plain the character of the modern exodus. It is a movement towards justice, crossing political, racial, and chronological boundaries.

## 15:1–21 Israel’s Celebration

### *Early and medieval Judaism and Christianity*

The biblical account of the exodus concludes with two songs retelling and celebrating the event, one sung by Moses and the Israelites and the other by Miriam. Many of the uses of this section parallel those of the previous one, reflecting the dominance of the preceding narrative depiction over the poetic. Ancient readers often mention the two songs either briefly or not at all. Judith’s song of praise seems to echo Miriam’s (compare Jth. 16:1–2 with Exod. 15:20–1), while Philo simply indicates that the Israelites divided themselves into two choirs, with Moses leading the men and Miriam the women (1935: *Life of Moses* 1.32). Josephus records that the Israelites sang all night long, noting that Moses composed a song, but not mentioning Miriam. The next day Moses gathered up the Egyptians’ weapons that had washed ashore, considering them divine provision for the Israelites (1974b: *Antiquities* 2.16.4–6). A talmudic tradition maintains that Moses and the Israelites recited Psalms 113–18 as they ascended from the Red Sea (*b. Pesachim* 117a–b). The Talmud also observes that Exod. 15:1 taught the resurrection of the dead by placing the verb “sing” in its imperfect or future tense, indicating that in the next life Israel would sing to God (*b. Sanhedrin* 91b). *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* greatly expands the two songs by further highlighting the greatness of God’s action on Israel’s behalf.

Origen uses the passage to explicate God's victory over evil both in the supernatural and the natural worlds (Origen 1982: 285–99). Subsequent Christian interpreters invoked the songs to explain the triumph of God and the Christian over various vices. Ambrose considers Miriam as prefiguring the Church's joining Christians together to sing divine songs (Lienhard 2001: 79–83).

Using the songs to convey God's greatness or as analogies of the spiritual journey of the individual or the group continued into the medieval period. The midrashim reflect at length on the chapter's opening clause, "Then sang Moses." One of the dozen explanations of the phrase found in *Exodus Rabbah* (23.2) focuses on the restoration of Israel's faith. Connecting this phrase with Ps. 106:12, the midrash traces Israel's journey from faith in God while in Egypt (Exod. 4:31) to unbelief (Ps. 106:7) to restored faith after seeing the miracle at the Red Sea. Their renewed faith then prompted the singing of the song. Moses had a similar personal experience. His complaint in Exod. 5:23 that the people's suffering had only increased since he had confronted pharaoh reflected lack of faith. His song in Exodus 15, however, signaled his repentance, because the two verses began with basically the same word – *meaz*, "since" (literally "from then") in 5:23 and *az* ("then") in 15:1 (*Exodus Rabbah* 23.3). The opening clause of 15:1 was also believed to reflect the resurrection (*Midrash Tanhuma*, Exodus 4.13); but as emphasis on the text's literal meaning gained credence, readers challenged this. Rashi acknowledges the rabbinic interpretation, but also points out that the literal meaning of the phrase indicates Moses' intention to sing this song after seeing the miracle at the Red Sea. The future tense of the verb thus refers to his immediate intention, not belief in the resurrection (1934: 74). Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1164), citing other examples of this usage in the Hebrew Bible, argues that when preceded by the Hebrew word *az* ("then"), the imperfect of the verb is a past tense (1996: 291). These interpretations illustrate how readers place the biblical text in various contexts in order to derive meaning. This re-contextualization, rather than the original context, serves as the driving force in deriving significance. In the preceding readings, other biblical texts generally function as the new context, but other readers use their current circumstances, sometimes in combination with other biblical texts, as the new arena from which to derive significance.

### *Early modern uses*

This re-contextualization is particularly evident during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as various artists took up Israel's experiences. For John Milton (1608–74) the exodus was "crucial" to the purposes of *Paradise Lost* and formed "a vital, indeed an indispensable, element in the total structure." The

exodus gives the poem a sense of historical purpose, and its imagery appears in several places, especially in relation to the defeat of the fallen angels in books I and VI (Fisch 1999: 198–205). At the same time as Milton composed his classic, the oratorio arose as a distinct musical genre, providing composers with the opportunity for a more pronounced re-contextualization of the exodus. For most of this century the oratorio in Italy “functioned as an edifying entertainment performed in an oratory (or prayer hall, the Italian term for which is *oratorio*) or in a private palace but rarely in a church.” The oratorio itself originated in the religious community called the Congregation of the Oratory, a sixteenth-century reform movement within the Roman Catholic Church founded by St Philip Neri. At first these musical performances were used to attract people to the oratory so that they could be led to salvation. As opera became increasingly popular in the Italian Baroque, however, the oratorio style conformed and eventually become a secular musical performance rather than a spiritual experience (Smither 1977: 1.4, 9–10). Illustrative of the oratorio’s sacred setting is Giovanni Paolo Colonna’s *Il Mosè, legato di Dio e liberator del popolo ebreo* (*Moses, Legate of God and Liberator of the Hebrew People*, libretto by Giovanni Battista Giardini). Performed in 1686 in the oratory of San Carlo at Modena as the third oratorio in a series on Moses’ life, it was loosely based on Exodus 8–12 and ended with the Israelites’ departure from Egypt in a chorus of praise (Smither 1977: 1.327–9).

By 1732 George Frideric Handel, generally recognized as the creator of English oratorio, had begun to compose and perform oratorios in England. His oratorio *Israel in Egypt* made its debut in 1739, and represented the first one composed by him in which the words were taken almost exclusively from the biblical text. The first part combined verses from Exodus 1–14 and Psalms 78, 105, and 106, while the second part comprised a virtual word-for-word reproduction of Exod. 15:1–21. Originally performed at King’s Theatre in London, some Londoners were offended, believing that the theater, as a venue designed for entertainment, represented an improper location for singing biblical texts. But others defended Handel’s use of Scripture in the theater (Smither 1977: 2.226–8). As audiences increasingly came to prefer English oratorios to Italian operas, oratorios became more popular and financially profitable, especially as their performance in English allowed people to understand the librettos (some of Handel’s friends, echoing the exodus, urged him to “deliver us from our Italian bondage; and demonstrate, that English is soft enough for Opera” [Brewer 1997: 373]). The people of England also readily identified with the Israelites as a people specially protected by God and led by heroic individuals (Smither 1977: 1.11). The oratorio in general, and *Israel in Egypt* in particular, thus combines sacred texts, events, and ideas in settings typically associated with secular entertainment. This produces both an entertaining and



a sacred experience in a secular environment, but also represents a subtle movement toward reading and understanding the exodus outside the Church's boundaries.

Reflecting Handel's desire to exploit the musical possibilities suggested by the biblical text, the libretto of *Israel in Egypt* has been described as "narrative, descriptive, and reflective" and as being "filled with images that lend themselves to musical description" (Smither 1977: 2.228–9). Yet Robert R. Wilson observes that the libretto of the oratorio's first part does not include any of the Bible's dialogue between Moses and pharaoh, effectively removing the human element. The exodus becomes an event entirely focused on Israel's God. The oratorio's second part reinforces this depiction by reproducing Exod. 15:1–21 (R. R. Wilson 1994: 38–9). Unlike ancient readings that center on the narrative retelling of the exodus, Handel gave precedence to the poetic version. It overwhelms its prose companion, controlling it to the extent that the exodus becomes exclusively a platform for praising God for his awesome deeds. The human struggle and participation in overthrowing Egyptian bondage are virtually non-existent. Instead, humans participate by praising God. The context of the theater thus produces both a sacred and a secular exodus, urging people to worship God, while stimulating their musical sensibilities and emotions.

Compositions like Handel's, as well as Thomas Linley's oratorio *The Song of Moses* (libretto by John Hoadly), also re-created the exodus for audiences and allowed them to experience it at some level. An individual writing to the *London Daily Post* on the day after the performance of Handel's oratorio reflected on the "Sublimity of the great Musical Poet's Imagination" when considering the combined effect of the piece's "Sense" and "Sound." He observed, "The Whole of the first Part, is entirely Devotional; and tho' the second Part be but Historical, yet as it relates the great Acts of the Power of God, the Sense and the Musick have a reciprocal Influence on each other." The music and the words had combined to create an experience he described as "a truly-spiritual Entertainment" (Deutsch 1955: 481–3). In Linley's work, first performed in 1777 at London's Drury Lane Theatre, the listener is at one point drawn into the experience of sinking in the Red Sea. Sung from the perspective of the Israelites, the music and choral enunciations produce the sensation of sinking. The chorus majestically repeats, "The wave hath closed above each warlike head," followed by a more somber, "Sunk like a lifeless stone, vanished, and dead," with emphasis on the word "sunk." This word stands apart from the others, while being accented by "vanished" and "dead." The exultation of the Israelites over the drowning of the Egyptians is thus briefly set opposite the experience of being engulfed by the Sea. Exodus 15 had become a place not only for theological reflection, but also for personal engagement. It had become an experience, rather than a text.



### Modern uses

Far from the theaters of England, American abolitionists and pro-slavery advocates took up Exod. 15:1–21 in support of their respective struggles. In 1836 the abolitionist Sarah Grimké encouraged southern Christian women to join the fight against slavery. In a lengthy appeal she confronts various excuses they might make, including the assertion that women would face persecution for abolitionist sympathies and activities. Grimké responds:

But you may say we are *women*, how can *our* hearts endure persecution? And why not? Have not *women* stood up in all the dignity and strength of moral courage to be the leaders of the people, and to bear a faithful testimony for the truth whenever the providence of God has called them to do so? Are there no *women* in that noble army of martyrs who are now singing the song of Moses and the Lamb? Who led out the women of Israel from the house of bondage, striking the timbrel, and singing the song of deliverance on the banks of the sea whose waters stood up like walls of crystal to open a passage for their escape? It was a *woman*; Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Moses and Aaron. (Ceplair 1989: 60)

Endeavoring to awaken southern women to the historical role played by women in opposing evil, she urges them to consider “that great subject which has already shaken our country,” and to be aware of “that dark cloud of vengeance which hangs over our boasting Republic.” She again turns to biblical precedents:

Can you not, my friends, understand the signs of the time; do you not see the sword of retributive justice hanging over the South, or are you still slumbering at your posts? – Are there no Shiprahs, no Puahs among you, who will dare in Christian firmness and Christian meekness, to refuse to obey the *wicked laws* which require *woman to enslave, to degrade and to brutalize woman*? Are there no Miriams, who would rejoice to lead out the captive daughters of the Southern States to liberty and light? (Ceplair 1989: 64–5)

Grimké believes that the women of the South could overthrow slavery by organizing and exerting pressure on legislative and ecclesiastical bodies, as well as on their male kinsfolk. While acknowledging that women possessed little legal and political power to effect such a change, she finds encouragement in the examples of Shiprah, Puah, and Miriam (as well as others like Huldah and Esther). Southern women also held little public power, but their resistance and leadership against evil could create change in the public sector.

Although the biblical account had given Miriam a somewhat minor and traditionally gendered role, Grimké still appealed to her example to motivate southern women. She was not involved in the public negotiations and actions of Moses and Aaron, and, in fact, is not mentioned by name until Exodus 15, where she is said to be a prophetess leading the women in praise. Even so, her song is dwarfed in comparison to the much longer song sung by Moses and the Israelites. Nonetheless, Grimké finds enough information in these brief references to make her into a southern Christian woman fighting against slavery. Even though Miriam, like Grimké's audience, lived in a patriarchal society and held little public power, she still made a vital contribution, albeit not by joining Moses and Aaron in their public efforts. Interpreting Miriam's actions in light of nineteenth-century gender roles, she casts Miriam as acting courageously within her restricted sphere of influence. Southern women, therefore, could not use the excuse that they did not possess public power or that their feminine natures could not endure persecution. By acting boldly within the sphere assigned to them in a patriarchal society, southern women could still lead the nation and bring about societal change. In this particular instance, Grimké did not advocate changing women's roles in society. Looking past the restrictions placed on women because of their gender, she focuses on their role and responsibility in confronting and destroying a societal evil.

While abolitionists invoked Miriam's song of praise to rally support against slavery, some Confederate clergy found Exod. 15:1–2 an appropriate text for celebrating the Confederate victory at Manassas, Virginia, on Sunday, July 21, 1861. In one of the first important battles of the American Civil War, the Confederate victory buoyed southern hopes, causing the Confederate Congress to appoint the following Sunday as a day of thanksgiving commemorating the victory. Stephen Elliott, bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the diocese of Georgia and rector of Christ Church in Savannah, took Exod. 15:1–2 as his sermon text. He details the appropriateness of this text for current circumstances:

No words could express more entirely our feelings upon this day of National Thanksgiving for an almost unparalleled victory, than these opening verses of the song which Moses and the children of Israel sang when God had delivered them from the cruel hands of Pharaoh. They embody all the ideas which are most appropriate to an occasion like this, and indicate all the acts which we should be glad to perform out of gratitude for so glorious a triumph. They place God in the foreground of the picture, and ascribe all the glory to him, "I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." They arrange in proper order our past and present relations to that supreme Ruler of the Universe, "The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation." They announce the willing gratitude of

hearts overflowing with thanksgiving for an unspeakable mercy, “He is my God and I will prepare him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt him;” and together they form the key-note of the song of exultation which was poured out over the discomfited Egyptians. And these words are signally the words for this occasion, because God himself, through the Spirit which guides the Church, placed them in our mouths at the very moment when our victorious hosts were driving before them their vanquished enemies. (Elliott 1861: 5–6)

Elliott, however, finds in the opening words of Exodus 15 something far more significant than appropriate expressions of praise and thanksgiving, believing them to legitimate the Confederate cause typologically and in actuality. As a type of Israel, the Confederate victory parallels the Israelite triumph over the Egyptians in a number of ways. Israel and the South had been subjected to a cruel pharaoh who in the hardness of his heart tried to restrain the nation from leaving. Both had been delivered miraculously by God, moving the nation to gratitude and praise. Yet Elliott sees more than parallels between the ancient and modern nations. At that moment God was performing a new exodus and adopting the Confederacy as his new Israel. How could Elliott know this? He finds it more than coincidental that while the battle was occurring, these very scriptures were being read as part of the liturgy in Episcopal churches throughout the South. He concludes that it was “as if God was speaking to us from the very altar of the sanctuary and cheering us on with words of prophecy . . . God was singing for us, before man knew the result, our song of triumph and of praise. It is the crowning token of his love – the most wonderful of all the manifestations of his divine presence with us.” Exodus 15 had become prophetic words from God himself predicting this new exodus, and thus transcending mere typology. With this assurance, Elliott then details God’s providential hand in the Confederate struggle up to that point. If southerners needed any further assurance that their cause was God’s, they need only consider the connection between Exodus 15 and the battle of Manassas. It was a clear signal regarding God’s will and direction.

While Elliott explained to his congregation the modern implications of Exod. 15:1–2, the Reverend George D. Armstrong, a Presbyterian pastor in Norfolk, Virginia, took up the same text on the same day. He too considered the Confederate victory at Manassas an illustration of divine providence. Referring to letters written by three Confederate soldiers who claimed to have witnessed God’s providential activity during the battle, he concludes “that the impression is wide-spread, if not universal, among our people that God, even the God of our fathers, is with us in the contest in which we are engaged.” This widely held impression, while not conclusive, reflects “strong presumptive proof that it is founded in truth.” He then spends his entire sermon demonstrating the correlation between divine providence and “certain facts in the

history of this second ‘war of independence’” (Armstrong 1861: 3–4). This correlation justifies their taking up of Moses’ song of thanksgiving.

Southerners also sang of their victory at Manassas, and in a song entitled “The Exodus,” the battle was reenacted and clearly interpreted as divine action. The song begins by calling for the “bright eyed maidens of the South” to raise their voices and timbrels in triumph and praise, “For the God who helps the righteous cause, has glorified our own, / And the horses and the riders of our foes has overthrown.” The song’s last stanza mixes the metaphors of invasion and exodus by portraying the repelled Union invasion as an exodus from tyranny and bondage. After calling upon northerners to tell how they arrogantly invaded the south and were repelled, the song concludes:

Struck down as by decree of heaven, upon the invaded sod,  
Oh! Show if there ye solace seek – your friends the Book of God!  
Read them the song that Miriam sang, that now our maidens sing,  
At the nations strange deliverance from this latter tyrant King,  
And teach them by this Exodus, how we will still o’erthrow,  
If from “*the house of bondage*,” yet, *they will not let us go*.  
(“The Exodus,” n.d.)

Confederates reconfigured the Bible’s chronology and geography as they applied it to their cause. They commonly referred to the South as “Canaan-land,” but could also talk of their battle for secession as an exodus from Egypt. Thus, even though they simultaneously inhabited Canaan and Egypt, they could not realize their Canaan completely until their exodus had been completed by repelling the northern invader (see, for example, the songs entitled “Valley Land of Canaan,” “Southern Land of Canaan,” and “The Happy Land of Canaan,” wherein northern military action is viewed as an invasion of Canaan). These biblical events helped southerners articulate their struggle as a fight to maintain their promised land in the face of an aggressor who wanted to enslave them. Northerners, on the other hand, portrayed their cause as a struggle to free an enslaved people, casting themselves as Moses-like figures, African Americans as Israelites, and southerners as Egyptians. This is amply illustrated in the song, “Our Lincoln’s Act Immortal” (Benjamin, n.d.).

Northerners and southerners alike believed that they could discern God’s movement in contemporary events. Exodus 15 helped them identify these divine actions and thereby justify their causes. Abraham Lincoln referred to the conflicting sentiments in his second presidential inaugural address in 1864. According to him, “Both [i.e., North and South] read the same Bible, and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other.” Realizing that

the prayers of both could not be answered fully, Lincoln concludes, “The Almighty has His own purposes” (A. Lincoln 1989: 687). The use of Exodus 15 by Americans before and during the Civil War reflects the clarity and confusion the biblical text brings to those seeking meaning for life’s events. In a single instance northerners and southerners were certain they were reliving the events of the exodus. Yet both groups’ invocation of this text reveals the uncertainty in using the Bible to attribute supernatural significance to certain events. The exodus seemed more effective in motivating people to embrace a cause rather than working out its significance. In the hands of white northerners, white southerners, and African Americans, the exodus took on separate meanings that motivated their respective constituents, but did little to convince those standing outside each group.

Exodus 15 held other meanings for Americans, however, beyond those rooted in sectional and racial disputes. Mormons moving west during the nineteenth century expressed their journey in terms of the exodus. One observer during the 1840s remarks, “They thank God for it [i.e., their “homes in a wilderness”] day and night, and sing a song of Miriam to congratulate themselves on having abandoned forever their pleasant homes where their industry had surrounded them with every luxury and comfort: but which their enemies had made to them a land of Egypt” (Letter from T. L. Kane to his parents, July 22, 1846, in Bigler and Bagley 2000: 62). Based on this perception, these Mormons, unlike the biblical Israelites, moved from physical comfort to physical hardship, but rejoiced in being removed from religious persecution. In 1862 Henry Timrod, known as the poet laureate of the Confederacy, referred to Miriam’s song in a poem expressing his captivation by a Jewish woman. The poem, entitled “La Belle Juive,” described the woman in distinctly gendered and racial terms, portraying her as mysterious and alluring (Timrod 1965: 105–7). In her the poet found characteristics of “the noblest women of your race” – Miriam, the daughter of Jephthah, Esther, and Ruth. Her talent in playing the piano, like Miriam’s song, enabled her to captivate and gain a crowd’s attention. This Miriam is not the powerful social and political leader fashioned by Grimké, but instead the embodiment of charm, a typical characteristic of nineteenth-century femininity. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, almost half a century later, found in this episode reason to lament the condition of women. Reflecting on the disproportionate space given in the biblical text to Moses’ song in comparison to Miriam’s, she opines, “It must always be a wonder to us, that in view of their [i.e., women’s] degradation, they ever felt like singing or dancing, for what desirable change was there in their lives – the same hard work or bondage they suffered in Egypt” (Stanton 1993: 81). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, women continue to employ Miriam’s leadership at

the Red Sea in various manners: celebrating women's contributions, vindicating a child's neglectfulness, expressing the trepidation and exhilaration of a new beginning, articulating various abuses suffered by women, and affirming women's power (Schwartz 2001: 13–15, 31–5, 55–89, 182–9; Clearfield 2000).

In spite of the myriad uses to which people have put *Exod. 15:1–21*, it remains a musical entity. The biblical writer presented the exodus not only as a narrative, but also as a song. Subsequent composers have not lost sight of this, taking advantage of music's power to enable audiences to experience the exodus. Musical renderings engulf the listener and incorporate imagination and emotions while transporting the individual into the event. Music also helps focus the audience on major ideas that sometimes get lost in the details of the textual rendering. From an earlier period oratorios and operas functioned in this way, but in the contemporary era, two works have once again taken up the exodus. The first was composed in 1981 by Wojciech Kilar, a Polish musician and composer. This choral work, entitled *Exodus*, takes the listener on an almost twenty-four-minute experience. Beginning with a "pulsating harp motion," various instruments (including a tambourine) join the building procession. Keeping the biblical story in mind, one can visualize the exodus as a movement that began quietly, but persisted and culminated in a grand and unstoppable procession. The power represented by the movement also builds from a barely audible harp to the exultation of the full orchestra and chorus. Persistence and power become major expressions of this exodus, conjuring up the often overlooked persistence of the Hebrews throughout their enslavement, as well as the efforts of Shiphrah, Puah, Moses' mother and sister, and unnamed others to stand alongside the more visible deeds of Moses and Aaron in bringing about the march through the Red Sea. This exodus becomes a people's exodus, with all individual contributions blending into one. The persistent, controlled, majestic power culminates in the chorus proclaiming "Domine Deus unus" (Lord, one God), "Ecce venit populus tuus, Domine, Alleluja!" (Behold thy people come, Lord, Alleluja!), "Hosanna homini" (Hosanna to man), "Hosanna ei qui venit hodie in nomine Domini!" (Hosanna to him who comes today in the name of the Lord!), "Hosanna!" The exodus ends with the chorus breaking into uncontrolled elation.

The work entitled *Exodus* by the Estonian composer Erkki-Sven Tüür contrasts with Kilar's composition. While it also highlights the idea of power – though in this case the term "energy" might be more appropriate – it does so in ways quite different from Kilar. The power or energy in Tüür's piece is much less contained and organized, possessing a sense of frenzy and hurriedness. The composition, described as "a wild, sometimes savage work," culminates in a passage characterized by "rock-style percussion" (Kimberley 2003: 34) that "adds an anarchic edge." From here an aimless, fragmented melody issues forth

only to evaporate “in a haze of string chords” (Clements 1999). Evoking images of struggle that does not resolve itself in triumphant praise, but in silence, the exodus occurs in the evaporation or cessation of the music. Tüür does not set out to interpret the biblical event specifically, describing the piece in terms of being tied to the body and a specific space and time, while desiring to be elsewhere in “a new and better world, new EXODUS.” He characterizes it as “a composer’s subjective sound image of a force that can defeat the undefeatable” (Tüür 1999). Yet, when the biblical exodus is read alongside Tüür’s, the audience is taken beyond the literal, making it not simply the flesh-and-blood struggle of Israel against Egypt, but also the immaterial struggle of the spirit. The biblical exodus transcends Israel and Egypt.

# Exodus

## 15:22–18:27

After the momentous and exhilarating exodus, the Israelites plunged into the wilderness and began their journey to the Promised Land. This part of the narrative anticipates the giving of the law on Mt Sinai (which makes up the remaining part of Exodus), and portrays the Israelites as testing and being tested by YHWH (15:25–6; 16:4, 27–8; 17:7). YHWH tries to discover whether or not his people will obey him, but in a series of events the people prove to be incorrigible. Toward the end of this pericope, Moses' meeting with his father-in-law Jethro produces the judicial system by which the Israelites will operate, and sets the stage for receiving the law code on Mt Sinai.



## The Testing of Israel

### *Ancient Jewish and Christian uses*

The need for food and water, the essentials for survival, brought about the struggle between Israel and YHWH, while also demonstrating YHWH's care for Israel. Bitter waters were made drinkable at Marah (15:22–7), YHWH provided quail and manna in the wilderness of Sin (ch. 16), and Moses made water come out of a rock at Rephidim (renamed Massah and Meribah). Israel, however, tested YHWH in each instance by disobeying his instructions and complaining; this became a model of undesirable behavior, contrasting with YHWH's abundant provision (Pss. 78:9–39; 95:8–9; 105:40–1; Neh. 9:15). The Deuteronomist encouraged his fellow Israelites to avoid testing YHWH as their ancestors had done at Massah (Deut. 6:16; 9:22; 33:8). Massah and Meribah thus became synonymous with testing YHWH, defined as doubting or overlooking his ability to provide and as disobeying his commandments. Perhaps as the last of the three episodes, Massah and Meribah became paradigmatic of all of them.

Later interpreters generally followed or expanded on the positive and negative features pointed out by the biblical writers. The Wisdom of Solomon's author emphasizes God's provision in sending manna (16:15–29), and Ezekiel the tragedian, in the *Exagoge*, does not include the Israelites' complaints, perhaps to avoid portraying the Jews negatively to his non-Jewish audience. Instead he turns the scene at Elim (Exod. 15:27) into a Hellenistic utopia, complete with an appearance by the phoenix. The bird's presence likely indicates the special nature of the exodus, as well as the regeneration and rebirth of Israel (H. Jacobson 1983: 153–62). By making the exodus culminate at Elim and associating it with a special utopian experience, Ezekiel affirms its magnificence. The post-exodus wanderings thereby reflect positively on the Jews as a people by highlighting the special nature of their founding event.

Philo also uses these episodes to cast the Jewish people in a positive light, but he does so by demonstrating Moses' greatness. Although Philo harshly criticizes the Israelites, he portrays Moses as forgiving them, interceding on their behalf, and being divinely inspired to take care of their needs. According to the biblical account, Israel prevailed while Moses' arms were extended upward (supported by Aaron and Hur), but when he lowered them, Amalek prevailed (Exod. 17:8–16). Philo believes that this indicated that Israel was God's chosen nation and would be victorious over its enemies. He makes no mention of Aaron and Hur, though, effectively making this a singular act of Moses. The leader's arms alternated between being light and heavy, he explains, and in turn floated either up or down, indicating God's favor to Israel (1935:

*Life of Moses* 1.33–9). This focus exalts the Jews to non-Jews, by making Moses an exemplar of Jewish greatness and divine favor.

Josephus further glorifies Moses by supplementing these accounts with details not appearing in the biblical text (1974b: *Antiquities* 3.1–4). According to Exodus, the people complained to Moses about the bitter waters of Marah. In Josephus's account, by contrast, Moses first saw the people's distress and took action. This version both removes Moses from being the object of complaint and demonstrates his ability as a leader. In Exodus, the people's encampment at the oasis of Elim (15:27) is recounted in a single verse. But Josephus tells how Elim only appeared to be an oasis and that actually the people found little water. Hence they complained bitterly against Moses, even to the point of taking up stones against him; but with an eloquent speech he pacified them – thus demonstrating another aspect of his exceptional qualities as a leader: namely, persuasive speech. As Josephus tells it, after Moses prayed that God would forgive the Israelites for wanting to stone him, God did so and provided food – quail and dew (manna), as in the biblical story. By portraying Moses as a forgiving leader with the ability to procure God's provisions, Josephus thus further enhances Moses' reputation as a leader. Moreover, even the people recognized Moses' ability: they admired how God honored him after he struck the rock at Rephidim. Moses' eloquence reappeared in the war against Amalek, when he gave a speech encouraging the people to fight against and ultimately gain victory over a superior foe. Josephus also uses the meeting with Moses' father-in-law, Raguel (Jethro), to depict him as a man of integrity. Rather than taking credit for the judicial system suggested by Raguel, Moses took pains to inform everyone that it was Raguel's idea. He thereby embodied humility and honesty. Using the events of Exod. 15:22–18:27, Josephus shows his non-Jewish audience that Moses embodied important qualities of leadership and, by extension, that the Jews are worthy of respect.

While Ezekiel, Philo, and Josephus concerned themselves with presenting Jews and Judaism positively to non-Jews, the ancient rabbis directed their attention to a Jewish audience. Their handling of Exod. 15:22–18:27 reflects their concern to strengthen Jewish identity and regulate Jewish faith and life. Following biblical precedent, they find both positive and negative elements in these episodes, linking them to the giving of various laws, as well as to God's bestowal of good gifts. Some rabbis connect the Marah event with the reception of the seven laws of the sons of Noah, the social laws, the sabbath precept, and the command to honor one's parents (*b. Sanhedrin* 56b). While others debated their exact composition, they agree in associating a legal tradition with Marah, something the targums also reflect. *Targum Neofiti I* indicates that a "word of the Law" was written on the tree Moses threw into the water (15:25), while *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* places "the great and glorious Name" on it (15:25).

Another rabbinic tradition identifies the well (water), the pillar of cloud, and the manna as divine gifts bestowed on Israel due to the good leadership of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam (*b. Ta'anith* 9a). These three items were also associated with the giving of the Torah. In discussing the meaning of the vine and the three branches in the dream told to Joseph by the chief cupbearer (Gen. 40:10), the rabbis made many suggestions, including identifying the vine as the Torah and the three branches as the well, the pillar of smoke, and the manna (*b. Chullin* 92a). The *Mekilta of Rabbi Ishmael* explains the attack of Amalek as punishment for Israel having abandoned the Torah, asserting that it was impossible for Israel to exist unless they busied themselves with the Torah (Amalek 1.6–8).

The rabbis consistently find in these events God's gift of guidance and provision, as expressed in the Torah, including one of the most central expressions of Judaism – the sabbath. Linking together the gathering of manna on the seventh day by some Israelites (Exod. 16:27) with the attack by Amalek (Exod. 17:8), the rabbis conclude that had Israel kept this first sabbath as a freed people, no nation would have exercised dominion over them (*b. Sanhedrin* 118b). The rabbis understand that the Israelites' response represented the negative side of the story, and they use it to encourage faithfulness. Some teach that these events represented six of the ten trials by which their ancestors had tested God (*b. Arachin* 15a–b; two of the remaining four trials occurred at the Red Sea, one during the golden calf incident and the other in the wilderness of Paran). For another rabbinic tradition the complaint at Meribah teaches that quarreling with one's teacher is tantamount to quarreling with the Shechinah (*b. Sanhedrin* 110a). These events thus encourage obedient behavior by Jews, as defined in the Torah and interpreted by the rabbis, who have used them in ways essentially similar to those of Ezekiel, Philo, and Josephus. The last of these hoped to convince non-Jews of the goodness of Jews, while the rabbis wanted to convince Jews of the goodness of obedience to God and his law. Although the subjects addressed by the two groups of interpreters differed, their rhetorical use of Exod. 15:22–18:27 did not.

Early Christians invoked these incidents in ways that distinguished them from Jews, often casting the latter in a negative light, and reinterpreting these events in light of their new faith. The manna and the rock from which the water came are spiritualized in 1 Corinthians 10, with the rock being explicitly identified with Christ (1 Cor. 10:3–4). The writer of John portrays Jesus as drawing a contrast between himself and the manna by arguing that God, not Moses, provided the bread from heaven (i.e., manna), and that he was the true bread of life sent from God (John 6). According to John, the Jews did not understand or accept this interpretation. New Testament scholars have also pointed out the associations of this chapter with Passover, and in particular

Jesus' walking on the sea as a symbol of Passover. The chapter's reference to manna further strengthens this connection as the haggadah associates the crossing of the Sea with the giving of the manna. Other strands of Jewish thought consider the giving of manna in the last days as signaling the beginning of a second exodus. Likewise, some believe that the Messiah will appear on Passover and restore the gift of manna (Dodd 1963: 335–7; Glasson 1963: 45–7; R. E. Brown 1966: 255, 256; Beasley-Murray 1987: 89–94). John thus portrays Jesus and, by implication, Christianity as the true heir to the exodus. The book of Revelation associates the manna with the true teaching of Christianity by promising "hidden manna" to those in the church in Pergamum who overcome false teachings (Rev. 2:17).

Christians increasingly gave Christological interpretations of Exod. 15:22–18:27, reading them not merely as complementing Jewish interpretive traditions, but as excluding Judaism. In what was apparently a second-century Christian edition of 2 Esdras, the wilderness miracles are used to demonstrate Israel's unworthiness as God's people and justify their rejection (2 Esd. 1:12–27). The *Epistle of Barnabas* (ch. 12) identifies Moses' holding up his arms during the battle with Amalek as prefiguring the cross of Christ. Origen furthered the division between Christianity and Judaism by associating the bitter water of Marah with the Law, especially as interpreted "literally" by the Jews. He argues that the wisdom of Christ sweetened the water by showing how the Law ought to be interpreted, whereas those who continue to live by the letter of the Law will die from its bitterness. Once the tree (the cross of Christ) had sweetened the waters, the recipient of the water then logically came to Elim (the New Testament) with its twelve springs (the apostles) and seventy palm trees (the seventy sent out to preach the gospel by Christ). By contrast, the Jews remained at Marah with its bitter water, and did not partake of the manna, or the Word of God. This manna is distributed in the Church, where it is "preached with complete faith and devotion" (Origen 1982: 300–2, 304–5, 308–9, 313). These kinds of interpretations became commonplace within the early church. The wood represents the cross and the mystery of the resurrection (Gregory of Nyssa 1978: *Life of Moses* 2.132; Ephrem, in Salvesen 1995: *Exodus Commentary* 16.1; Ambrose, Tertullian, and Maximus of Turin, in Lienhard 2001: 83–4). The rock struck by Moses refers to Jesus' death (Caesarius of Arles 1964: 2.110), as does the lifting up of Moses' arms during the battle with Amalek (Gregory of Nazianzus and Justin Martyr, in Lienhard 2001: 91–2; Ephrem, in Salvesen 1995: *Exodus Commentary* 17.2). Gregory of Nyssa understands the lifting up of Moses' hands to reflect contemplation of the mystery of the cross in the Law, while the lowering of his hands indicates the literal observance of the Law (1978: *Life of Moses* 2.149). Origen sees the battle as paradigmatic of the Christian's spiritual battles (Origen 1982: 355–66).

Such interpretations strengthened Christian identity and aided efforts to establish themselves, rather than Jews, as the people of God. Both groups interpreted Exod. 15:22–18:27 in light of the most central elements of their faiths, Jews associating these incidents with the Torah, Christians connected with Jesus. The writer of Exodus, however, had connected it with that middle stage between the deliverance at the Red Sea and the giving of the Law on Mt Sinai. It was a time of mutual testing by YHWH and his people. Whereas subsequent biblical writers focused on YHWH's provision and the Israelites' disobedience, Jewish and Christian religious leaders recast these ideas within their respective frameworks. YHWH's provision came in the forms of the Torah and Jesus, and the disobedient Israelites were identified either as those Jews who did not live according to the Torah or, collectively, as the people who rejected Christ. By the early centuries of the Common Era neither group invoked these events in the way that Ezekiel, Philo, and Josephus had. Josephus had employed them to create better relations with non-Jews, who typically scorned Jews and Judaism. But as the hostility between Jews and Christians increased, little communication of this type took place. This situation contributed to readings that paid little attention for establishing communication between the two groups. Instead, they upheld their respective identities in the struggle for survival and dominance.

### *Medieval Jewish and Christian uses*

During the medieval period, Exod. 15:22–18:27 continued to serve as an arena in which Jews emphasized and discussed important ideas related to Jewish identity. The midrashim in particular expand on ideas such as the Torah, the sabbath, and the relationship to non-Jews. The tree that Moses cast into the waters at Marah is linked with the Torah (the tree of life in Prov. 3:18) (*Midrash Tanhuma*, Exodus 4.18). The sabbath is exalted by pointing out that even God honored it by not sending manna on the sabbath (*Midrash Tanhuma*, Exodus 4.24). Abraham ibn Ezra uses Exod. 16:25 to solidify important details regarding sabbath observance, challenging those who asserted that the sabbath included not only the daylight hours, but also the subsequent nighttime hours. By paying attention to the plain meaning of various passages, he argues that the day began at sunrise and ended at sunset. He is not a strict literalist, however, as seen in his comments regarding Exod. 16:28. Noting that the verse uses the plural nouns “commandments” and “laws” (when only one commandment and one law were violated), ibn Ezra explains that while all commandments and laws are to be taken literally, they also possess “secret meanings” for the “enlightened” (1996: 326–30). Others found these verses useful in clarifying

further the relationship between Jews and non-Jews. *Exodus Rabbah* (25.11) points to the statement that God has given “you” (i.e., Israel) the sabbath (Exod. 16:29) as making Israel the sole possessor of it, meaning that only they had the duty to keep it. Non-Jews who keep the sabbath are likened to someone who walks between a king (i.e., God) and a queen (i.e., Israel) while they are sitting on their thrones. Such a person commits an offense. The sabbath thereby functions as a distinctive mark of Israel’s identity, leading to the conclusion that if all Israel keeps the sabbath properly for one day, then the son of David will come. The keeping of the sabbath equals all the commandments (*Exodus Rabbah* 25.12).

Israel’s distinctive place among the nations did not necessarily lead to the conclusion that Jews were better than non-Jews. Instead, it brought an assertion of Jewish responsibility that influenced the Jews’ relationship with the rest of the nations. The incidents of Exod. 15:22–18:27 provided a place for expressing and working out this understanding. Jewish teachers explained Israel’s good fortune in being selected as God’s chosen people by telling how the nations attempted to taste the manna after it melted and turned into a flooding torrent. When non-Jews drank from this river, it tasted like wormwood, although for Israel it tasted like honey. So the nations caught a deer that had drunk from the river, obtained a taste of the manna from it, and concluded that Israel indeed was blessed (*Midrash Tanhuma*, Exodus 4.22; Rashi 1934: 85). On the other hand, Israel’s blessings could have dire consequences. Its disobedience is compared to a son who rode on his father’s shoulders, telling him what he wanted and each time receiving it from his father. Once, when passing another person, the son asked this individual if he had seen his father. The father then threw the son off his shoulders, and a dog came and bit the boy. This parable illustrates that the attack by Amalek resulted from Israel doubting God’s presence in spite of his provision in the exodus, the cloud, the manna, and the quail (*Midrash Tanhuma*, Exodus 5.4; Rashi 1934: 89). It also emphasizes Israel’s obligation to remain faithful to YHWH, because of the great privileges it experiences. Another midrash underscores this duty by explaining Exod. 18:1 in light of Jer. 2:4 and Prov. 6:1. As long as one is an ordinary scholar, he bears no responsibility for the congregation. But when he accepts a position of leadership, he no longer lives for his own benefit, but commits to care for the entire congregation. So when no other nation accepted responsibility for the Torah, Israel did so (Exod. 24:7), taking upon itself the weighty obligation to keep the Torah (*Exodus Rabbah* 27.9). Although Jews might bask in the knowledge of being God’s chosen people, the events occurring between the Red Sea and Mt Sinai reminded them of their commitment to obey the Torah.

Medieval Christians, like their Jewish counterparts, followed the interpretive leads of their predecessors. They increasingly developed parallels between Jesus

and Moses, as well as the Christological implications of Exod. 15:22–18:27, expressing them in a variety of media. In the same way that the concepts of the Torah and Israel as God's people informed Jewish uses of these passages, so Jesus and the Church as God's people informed Christian readings. The fifth-century reliefs on the wooden door of Santa Sabina in Rome juxtapose Moses' miracles in the wilderness (the sweetening of the waters of Marah, the provision of the quail and manna, and the provision of water from the rock) with Jesus' miracles (the healing of the blind man, the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, and the turning of water into wine at Cana). In Christian circles any Old Testament episode containing water represented a type of baptism, and those with a meal pointed to the sacrament of communion (Grabar 1980: 142–4). The door at Santa Sabina thus informs anyone passing through it not only of the Christian overtones of Moses' wilderness miracles, but of the appropriate manner for expressing one's faith by partaking of the sacraments. The Church circumscribed faith, using the manna episode to encourage obedience to God by participating in Church life. Pope Gregory the Great, for example, defines the boundaries between the Church and the world by identifying the manna with the "food of grace" and the fleshpots of Egypt as "worldly efforts." He also encourages his listeners to forsake the ways of the world and embrace "the pleasantness of holy tranquility" (Gildea 1991: 132). As the food of grace, this manna could only be had within the bounds of the Church. So Christians knew where to focus their actions and loyalties. The *Biblia Pauperum*, a book particularly popular in the fifteenth century, but with antecedents dating to the twelfth century, conveys and illustrates typological understandings of biblical events, connecting manna with communion and the water coming forth from the rock with the piercing of Christ's side (Bevington 1967: fols 18 and 26; xxx; Henry 1987: 81–3, 97–9; the Internet *Biblia Pauperum*). Dieric Bouts the Elder's fifteenth-century altarpiece of the *Holy Sacrament* expresses similar ideas. Commissioned as a triptych for the collegiate church of Saint Peter in Leuven, the side panels portray Old Testament antitypes for the main panel's depiction of the Last Supper. The gathering of the manna is depicted in conjunction with the meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek, the Passover, and Elijah's experience in the desert (*Dictionary of Art* 1996: "Bouts: (1) Dieric Bouts I").

In addition to using these incidents to express basic beliefs, Christians also used them to draw distinctions between themselves and Jews and to give instruction regarding proper attitudes and actions. The *Vorau Books of Moses*, a twelfth-century Middle High German poetic rendering of events from Genesis and Exodus, employed various passages in dealing with clerical concerns. According to one scholar, "Allegorical exegesis (in the poem) applies primarily to the morally concrete behavior of the priesthood, and the narration



of biblical fact becomes wholly secondary to the application of those facts to the audience. The exegesis is commonplace, that which would be available to the lay clergy" (E. M. Jacobson 1981: 7–8). The poem's author leaves out certain events and adds material to the biblical account. For instance, he supplements the Exodus story of the manna with the similar incident in Numbers 11, changing its function from a test to an illustration of God's care. By commenting that some accepted the manna gratefully, while others did not, the author explores the various responses made to God and classifies people according to their responses; this process continues throughout his treatment of the material extending through Exodus 18. Typical Christian ideas abound. The tree at Marah points to the cross of Jesus, the manna stands for communion, the rock is Christ, and the water coming from the rock signifies baptism. The Israelites' identity proves flexible in the poet's hands as he associates them alternately with Jews and Christians. After recounting the Israelite complaints about water at Rephidim (Exodus 17), he concludes "that everything they [i.e., Jews] do turns to adversity." The Israelite responses throughout all the episodes demonstrate that the Jews had succumbed to sin. He then puts Christians in the Israelites' place, encouraging them to resist temptation while on their journey as exiles from heaven. All worldly things should be avoided, stubbornness (symbolized by the Israelites' thirst) resisted, and focus placed on heavenly matters. "Pure tears and God's teaching will purify our body and soul" (E. M. Jacobson 1981: 43–53).

The effort either to draw distinctions between Jews and Christians or to instruct Christians in the Church's ways helps the author shape the text for the contemporary environment. The *Bible moralisée* does the same thing when it equates the bitter water of Marah with the "Old Law," the complaining Israelites with the "clerics and the prelates and the good Christians," and Moses with Jesus. The complaining represents dissatisfaction with the Law rather than disobedience to God, and cannot be remedied until the cross of Christ turns the bitter water into the "sweet fountain of divinity." In other words, Christianity has replaced Judaism. The complaint of the Israelites in Exodus 17 now represents "good Christians" dying of thirst to hear the Word of God, while the prelates do not know what to give them. God then instructs the prelates to strike "the right stone," which is Jesus (Guest 1995: 77–8, fol. 22). The water of the Gospel exposes perceived deficiencies in both Judaism and Christianity.

### *Modern uses*

Martin Luther found these wilderness events helpful tools for explicating Christianity's distinctive ideas and virtues. His commentary on Psalm 78 maintains traditional Christian renderings. The rock struck by Moses represents the



Law that obscures the Gospel until it is struck by the cross of Christ. Likewise, the manna represents the Gospel (Luther 1976: 53–8). Yet he also denounces what he thinks is a misuse of Scripture. Thomas Müntzer had preached a sermon in July 1524 urging princes to destroy all those deemed as godless. Luther believes that Müntzer has mistakenly assumed that all Scripture applies to all peoples at all times. Describing the effects of this type of preaching, Luther says, “Our dear prophets have chattered thus into the minds of the people, ‘Dear people, God has ordered his people to beat Amalek to death.’ Misery and tribulation have come out of this sort of thing.” He argues that although the Gospel applies to everyone, the Old Testament Law applies only to the Jews, and then concludes, “Therefore tell this to Moses: Leave Moses and his people together; they have had their day and do not pertain to me. I listen to that word which applies to me. We have the gospel.” He does not advocate a total neglect of the Law, admitting that it contains excellent examples of laws, as well as divine promises that sustain Christian faith (Luther 1960: 169–73). He does, however, express how Christians should relate to the Old Testament. Previous Christian tradition maintained the relevance of all Scripture by resorting to the *quadriga*, an interpretive method emphasizing four meanings of Scripture. But Luther distances himself from this method. As seen in his treatment of the events recounted in Psalm 78, he does not advocate a strict literalism. Nonetheless, his growing respect for literal interpretation moves him toward considering some parts of the Old Testament irrelevant.

John Calvin manifested an even greater propensity for literal interpretation. This led him to emphasize different aspects of Exod. 15:22–18:27 from those typically found in previous Christian exposition. Rather than identifying Christological attributes, he makes applications based on literal understandings, and argues that the tree thrown by Moses into Marah’s bitter waters likely possessed some concealed “natural power” that was miraculously enhanced, changing the water’s taste. Believing that the passage teaches that a good life is characterized by obedience to God, he makes the Israelites, who complained about their hunger rather than prayed, emblematic of all wicked people who neglect prayer and reject God’s aid. Even though he acknowledges Paul’s spiritualization of the manna in 1 Cor. 10:3, he nonetheless brushes it aside, commenting, “The Prophet, however, made no allusion to that mystery, but alleges in this circumstance an accusation against the people, because they not only despised the food which springs from the earth, but also were disgusted with that bread, for which they saw the heavens in a manner opened” (1950: 264–71). The passage thus addresses ingratitude and arrogance, responses unbecoming to a Christian.

Nicolas Poussin also dealt with various responses to God in the incidents associated with the bitter waters, the giving of the manna, and the striking of the rock. Although common in medieval art (except for the changing of the

bitter waters), seventeenth-century artists rarely depicted these episodes. But they were commonly addressed in written sources (Blunt 1995: 179–81). In each of his three works Poussin pays great attention to the Israelites' responses. In the first, *Moses Sweetening the Bitter Waters of Marah*, the Israelites are gathered around Moses as he touches the water with a rod. Most look on intently, while one man draws back in astonishment, and another lifts his hands toward heaven. One woman serenely turns her head to the side and clasps her hands together. Two women behind her lean forward to see what is happening, while another woman behind them stands, holding a water jug in her arms, with her head turned indifferently in the same direction as the first. Poussin has captured a variety of responses to God's provision, including praise, astonishment, interest/curiosity, and indifference. These same responses also appear in his *The Israelites Gathering the Manna*. Moses and Aaron stand in the middle of the picture, but the emphasis is not solely on them. Moses points toward heaven, and Aaron looks upward with his hands clasped, while the Israelites, though scattered throughout the painting, surround them. In the foreground Poussin highlights several groups of Israelites by placing them in sunlight, whereas Moses, Aaron, and the remaining people appear in the shadows. Through the Israelites' actions Poussin constructs a sympathetic picture of them. Rather than portraying them as grumbling misfits, he depicts a people in a desperate situation. Some lie on the ground, apparently too weak to gather the manna. One group in the foreground consists of a woman offering her breast to an older, weaker woman while simultaneously looking compassionately at her child. To their left, in the shadows, a man looks on apparently in admiration of such a caring act (Marin 1982: 13–17). As most Israelites busily pick up the manna, some lift their hands in praise, and others encourage the weak.

Again, in *Moses Striking the Rock*, a scene painted three times by Poussin, similar responses appear. In the image housed in the State Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, several Israelites rush forward to the water, while others, too weak to get up, lie on the ground. Two who have reached the water look back and motion to the others. One person kneels and lifts his hands toward heaven. Rather than generalizing the Israelites' responses to the divine as a single reaction (as Marc Chagall did by presenting an orderly and serene collective response; see Chagall 1956: plate 36), Poussin emphasizes a range of behavior, demonstrating the struggle between the physical and the spiritual. Most are focused on the relief of their individual needs. A few seem more concerned with the needs of others; even fewer give praise to God. By depicting the reactions in the moment of the miracle – something the biblical text does not address – Poussin challenges the viewer/reader to contemplate various ways of responding to the work of the divine, all of which seem legitimate. Those

rushing to get water or food, seemingly without thought for societal or spiritual needs, have responded to the miracle's most immediate aim – to provide life-preserving nourishment. Those directing their attention to God or to others have expressed a piety that moves beyond the immediate.

These incidents continued to present meaningful metaphors for a variety of emotions and actions, as well as for expressions of faith. The southern abolitionist Angelina Grimké Weld uses Marah's bitter waters to describe the bitter experiences of slavery (Barnes and Dumond 1970: 2.788). Phrases such as "manna" and "flesh pots of Egypt" passed from the biblical contexts into the vernacular, with the latter phrase first arising in 1535 in the Coverdale Bible as a translation of the Hebrew phrase *sir habasar* ("pots of meat"). It came to represent a desire for something more, especially luxuries and self-indulgence. Vincent Van Gogh employed the phrase to describe the desire for "the bigger salaries and the higher worldly esteem" that other professions had by comparison with those of the clergy (Van Gogh 2000: 61, "Van Gogh to Theo, July 5, 1876"). "Manna" has, since biblical days, been referred to as "angel's food" (Ps. 78:25) and "bread of heaven" (Ps. 105:40) (Jeffrey 1992: "Flesh Pots of Egypt" and "Manna"). It usually stands for spiritual sustenance, but its meaning grew to include any special nourishment, as well as to describe nature's elements. In his poem "The Primrose" John Donne depicts a drop of rain on a primrose with this word (Otten 1976). Protestant hymn-writers employed the concept of manna to express a variety of ideas, including encouragement to trust in God's daily provision (John Newton's "Manna"), the necessity of nourishment by divine truth rather than by human truth (John Newton's "Manna Hoarded"), and hope in the heavenly banquet, where "sweet manna" will be served (George Atkins's "Brethren, We Have Met To Worship"). American Methodists living in the mid-nineteenth century thought of camp meetings as manna that gave sustenance in the wilderness of the modern world (Cooley 1996). But the term's spiritual associations have not limited its use to the religious realm.

Individuals and groups have invoked the nourishing image of manna in numerous environments. These have included identifying it with a specific species (Pegler 2002), using it as a synonym for physical food (as when southerners fleeing from Union troops in Louisiana in 1863 found the "Manna of the Louisiana wilderness" to be lacking; *Galveston Weekly News* 1863), and making it a metaphor for monetary grants given to museums and visual arts organizations (Raczka 2000). References to manna, as well as other images in Exod. 15:22–18:27, have also proved useful in a wide variety of causes. Vegetarians invoke the Israelites eating manna, but desiring the fleshpots of Egypt, as indicative of the strong urge among humans to eat meat. Benjamin Franklin observed during his experiment with vegetarianism that one of his

friends, who had also adopted this life-style, one day “long’d for the fleshpots of Egypt” and ordered a roast pig (Franklin 1997: 600). For some vegetarians, eating manna represents the divine ideal of a vegetarian diet, while the Israelites’ gluttonous consumption of quail (Numbers 11) reflects the realities of a world affected by sin; God allows eating meat, but humans give in to their sinful desires and gorge themselves (Stahl 1998; Webb, n.d.; Young 2000: 98–9). The Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America used the entire exodus experience, and especially Exod. 15:20–21:26, to develop the idea of “way-making women.” This organization, composed of “women of color” and “women of European descent,” points to God’s use of women in accomplishing his plan for Israel, while also calling “way-making” women to listen carefully (Exod. 15:26) and effect unity and healing among Christians (Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America 2002). Those supporting or defending certain political causes have employed the power of these images to cast their critics in negative terms. Zambian President Frederick Chiluba combated criticism of himself and his policies by pointing out that the Israelites also murmured against Moses. He also reminded his constituents that Israel passed through many crises while journeying to the Promised Land (*Times of Zambia* 2000; *The Post* 2000 and 2001a). After recounting the exodus story and the Israelites’ murmuring against Moses, a supporter of Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo compared Nigerians’ love of murmuring with that of “the Jews of Moses’ time” (*The Daily Champion* 2002).

Two particularly poignant uses of the battle with Amalek alternately stress resolve and uncertainty when confronted with battles against modern Amaleks. In Jewish tradition Amalek has represented the ultimate evil and designated those who oppose Jews. Sociologists have long recognized this process of “othering,” whereby a society delineates its cultural boundaries by identifying a group that symbolizes difference (Cromer 2001). Arthur Szyk, a Polish-born Jewish artist, often used Amalek to represent the “other” standing in opposition to Jews, yet with a slightly different nuance. He first portrayed this scene in a haggadah he illustrated just after the Nazis came to power in Germany. Szyk depicts Moses, flanked by Aaron and Hur, as muscular and determined. Although he vowed in 1934 that he would place a swastika on every Egyptian in his Haggadah, his printers in Czechoslovakia and England forced him to remove them due to the political ramifications. Nonetheless, his depiction of this trio represents resistance to Nazi rule. During World War II, while living in the United States, he produced a different rendition of Aaron and Hur holding up Moses’ arms by portraying Moses in traditional biblical fashion, while picturing Aaron as a Jewish soldier wearing a tallit and Hur as a ghetto resistance fighter. Entitled *Modern Moses*, the image indicates that the battle against Amalek is not confined to biblical history, but is ongoing.

A few years later he incorporated this motif in several projects, including a representation of the new state of Israel in his *United Nations Series* (1948), a lithograph entitled *The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel* (1948), and a postage stamp for the new nation of Israel (1949). Each work bears the image of Moses, Aaron, and Hur in traditional biblical garments, with Aaron appearing in high-priestly clothing and Hur in military garb. The image symbolizes the joining of Israeli religious and secular forces to confront and defeat modern Amaleks (Ungar 1999: 86, plates 25 and 26; Luckert 2002: 6, 23–8, 31, 34–6, 86, 121–5). Szyk assumes the idea of Amalek as other, and does not represent the Amalekites or the battle, focusing instead on Jewish resolve against their foes. By re-contextualizing the biblical scene within modern events, he appropriates the authority and assurance of religious tradition, and makes certain modern struggles into religious ones. The battle with the Amalekites, therefore, could be a metaphor for contemporary struggles, as well as an expression of religious faith at work in the contemporary world.

The American artist John Dubrow, who had previously painted numerous images of the New York skyline from the World Trade Center, invokes the same incident against the backdrop of the attacks of September 11, 2001. The image, entitled *Rephidim*, portrays an elderly Moses (in contrast to Szyk's muscular Moses) sitting on a stone with palms opened upward while Aaron and Hur seemingly struggle to hold up his arms (without knowing the story one might think they are attempting to restrain an old man). The figures are set against a brilliant blue sky (much like that on September 11), and are the only figures in the landscape. It is "a starkly forceful exploration of strength and weakness, cruelty and tenderness" (Kunitz 2003: 7). One critic reflected upon the struggle between certainty and uncertainty communicated by the painting:

There is no doubt about the evil of Amalek and the terrorists. What is unclear is what we can expect as G–d's response and how do we request His salvation. Pray, or fight or both? Have we squandered the bounty that G–d has given to us? Are we worthy to triumph over this enemy who would annihilate us? The impressive scale and size of the painting . . . places the furious battle in the unseen foreground of the canvas. The battle is in the space between the painting and us. The outcome even after the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq is still uncertain. (McBee 2003; see also Mullarkey 2003)

Considered in tandem, Szyk's and Dubrow's images demonstrate responses that do not immediately surface when considering the biblical text, but are not necessarily mutually exclusive. While Szyk's work encourages resolve in the midst of threat, Dubrow's painting expresses uncertainty. Dubrow's audience finds some comfort in the poise of Moses' intercession, but at the same time is disturbed by the struggle of Aaron and Hur with his arms. The viewer is

prodded to move beyond a simple affirmation of divine help in times of threat and to struggle with the realities of if and how this divine help can be accessed. Read in light of the American struggle with terrorism, Dubrow's depiction unsettles the viewer. The biblical account no longer generates an attitude of passive (perhaps even pious) certainty, but now with the outcome in doubt, the participation of the reader/viewer in the struggle is necessary. Dubrow's version of the battle with Amalek indicates that merely categorizing the struggle against terrorism in terms of good versus evil is insufficient and no guarantee of victory.

# Exodus 19–31

The last half of Exodus organizes itself around two major events occurring while Israel camped at Mt Sinai. Exodus 19–31 recounts the giving of the Law, while Exodus 32–40 describes the Israelites' worship of the golden calf and the subsequent crisis, which made a second giving of the Law necessary. It is hard to overestimate the social, religious, artistic, and historical impact of Exodus 19–31 because of its association with the Law, and especially the Ten Commandments. Due to the latter's prominence in this section's reception history, it will be the focus of this chapter.

## Chapters 19–24 The Ten Commandments and Other Laws

Exodus 19 begins a literarily complex section depicting Moses ascending and descending Sinai on numerous occasions. The relationship between the trips is difficult to sort out, as well as the historical relationship of the Law, the covenant, and the exodus (for a summary of the issues raised by critical scholarship see Childs 1974: 337–64). However, the Law's importance to Israel is indisputable, circumscribing virtually all aspects of Israelite life during a long period of development. Within the Hebrew Bible its prominence, and especially that of the Ten Commandments, is demonstrated by the consistent judging of Israel on the basis of its adherence to the Law. One biblical scholar, David Noel Freedman (2000), has argued that the story told from Exodus through 2 Kings tries to demonstrate that Israel violated the covenant by breaking each of the Ten Commandments. Prophets like Hosea (4:1–2) and Jeremiah (7:8–9) also castigate Israel for having broken the Decalogue, as does the psalmist (Psalms 50 and 81). Furthermore, the importance of the Ten Commandments is reflected in its being singled out from other laws found in the Hebrew Bible. It alone is given the special designation of the “Ten Words,” a title that does not appear in Exodus 20, but does so in Exod. 34:28 and Deut. 4:13, 10:4 (Childs 1974: 397).

### *Ancient Judaism*

Although ancient Jewish writers often used the Law to delineate their peoples' shortcomings, they nonetheless viewed it as something good. The Law is known variously as the law of life and knowledge (Sir. 45:5), a light to the world and the tree of life (from which a portion was cut and thrown into the bitter waters of Marah) (Pseudo-Philo 11.1, 15), and is eventually equated with Wisdom itself (Sir. 24:23; Bar. 4:1). The writer of 2 Esdras admits that despite Israel being given the Law on Sinai, the nation's heart remained evil. Israel had indeed sinned greatly, yet in comparison to other nations it still surpassed them all in adhering to the Law (3:12–36). Others demonstrate the Law's significance by associating subsequent traditions and interpretations with Moses' reception of it on Mt Sinai, thereby lending credibility and authority to these later works. The production of the *Book of Jubilees*, for example, is set on Mt Sinai during the same time as Moses received the Law. An angel revealed to Moses what had happened prior to his life (following the basic account in Genesis and Exodus) and what would happen in the future. Moses learns that while the Israelites would not keep the covenant for most of their history, they



would eventually serve God faithfully, with God even dwelling among them (1:1–18). *Jubilees* considers the forty years in the wilderness to be time spent learning God's commands (50:4–5). 2 Esdras indicates that while on Sinai Moses received the Law as well as information related to the end of time (14:1–6).

Not only did Israelite and Jewish interpreters revere the Law as a whole, they also held the Ten Commandments in high esteem, variously explaining their simplicity and conciseness. Within the Hebrew Bible this process had already begun with the Deuteronomist giving a different rationale for keeping the sabbath (Deut. 5:12–15) than that preserved in Exodus (20:8–11). Pseudo-Philo also supplements some of the Ten Commandments by clarifying the basis of each. God's name is not to be taken in vain because it would make his ways empty (11.7). All work on the sabbath is condemned with the exception of praising and glorifying God in the assembly (11.8). Loving one's parents results in their being honored and the child experiencing good harvests and having children (11.9). Adultery is prohibited because Israel's enemies had not committed adultery against them (11.10). Similarly, the command forbidding killing is based on Israel's having seen its enemies die even though they held the power to kill Israel (11.11–12). Bearing false witness, as well as coveting, is forbidden because the same act might be done to an Israelite (11.13). These explanations base the commands' observance either on the good this would bring the individual or in response to similar behavior exemplified by others. Later, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount extends the standard of obedience beyond the literal violation of the commandments (Matthew 5).

Some interpreters expand on individual commandments while giving instruction regarding proper life-styles. The commandments provide interpreters with a framework whereby to express and explore certain values. Sirach, for example, elaborates on the benefits of keeping the fifth commandment. Accordingly, one who honors his or her parents atones for sins, lays up treasures in heaven, finds joy in his own children, has his prayers heard, attains long life, and obeys the Lord. He identifies caring for parents in their old age (as well as any elderly person), especially if their mental capacities decline, as a manifestation of obedience to this commandment (Sir. 3:1–16). Paul uses this commandment to demonstrate how devotion to Jesus influences family relations, encouraging children's obedience by interpreting it in light of a principle of mutual submission (Eph. 5:21, 6:1–2). Invoking Hellenistic philosophy, the writer of 4 Maccabees refers to the commandment forbidding covetousness in his effort to demonstrate the superior ability of reason to control the emotions (2:1–6). Other laws, such as those regarding lending money (Exod. 22:25–7, addressed in Sirach 29 and 4 Macc. 2:8) and Philo's allegorical explanations of various laws in Exodus 20–8 (1937b: *Questions and*

*Answers*, book 2), also receive expanded treatment. Ultimately, the commandments' general nature allowed constant explication as their meanings remained unsettled and in constant need of reinterpretation amid changing circumstances.

Philo expended a good deal of effort exploring the meaning of the Ten Commandments as well as other laws, treating them extensively in two treatises, *On The Decalogue* and *On The Special Laws*, and discussing Moses' role as lawgiver in book 2 of *On the Life of Moses*. A few examples will illustrate how he relates them to the larger world in which he lives. "Moses himself was the best of all lawgivers in all countries," he argues, "better in fact than any that have ever arisen among either the Greeks or the barbarians, and that his laws are most excellent and truly come from God, since they omit nothing that is needful." As evidence, he points out that they have remained unchanged and respected since their unveiling, arguing that "almost every other people, particularly those which take more account of virtue" have valued these laws (1935: *Life of Moses* 2.3–4). Additionally, they "seek to attain to the harmony of the universe and are in agreement with the principles of eternal nature." Those who oppose them find themselves to be "enemies of the whole heaven and universe" (1935: *Life of Moses* 2.10). In keeping with his efforts to convince his readers of Moses' greatness, Philo interprets the law code as reflecting the very essence of the universe, holding the key to attaining harmony with basic nature. The universal appeal, divine origin, and ability of the commandments to bring one into harmony with the created order challenges his readers to elevate their opinions of Jews and Judaism.

Philo also critiqued the values of Hellenistic society and expressed certain theological tenets by appealing to specific laws. Dividing the commandments into two groups of five, he considers the first group to express love for God and the second, love of humanity; the command to honor one's parents relates to loving God, because parents stand on the border between the divine and human. To be truly virtuous, one must fulfill the duties to God and humans expressed in both halves of the commandments (1937a: *On the Decalogue* 22). The first commandment calls one to "let the idea that gods are many never even reach the ears of the man whose rule of life is to seek for truth in purity and guilelessness." Philo considers violating the second commandment an even greater folly, because it not only transgresses the first, but also results in worshipping objects created by humans. This is tantamount to "bestowing on servants what belonged to their master." With Hellenistic polytheism in view, Philo uses the first two commandments to set forth the idea that God is "the Uncreated and Eternal, the invisible Charioteer who guides in safety the whole universe." He also attacks the perception that an invisible God could not exist because "there is no invisible and conceptual cause outside what the senses

perceive” (1937a: *On the Decalogue* 12–13). These commandments, therefore, provide Philo with an avenue whereby to challenge certain religious ideas, even though one might be hard pressed to find such critiques within the commandments’ original meaning. Indeed, the rationale given by the biblical author for the second commandment is simply that God is a jealous God; nothing is said about his uncreated, eternal, or invisible nature. These ideas entered the commandment’s semantic arena from Philo’s Hellenized context.

### *Early Christianity*

Whereas Philo used the Mosaic Law to critically assess his society, Christians used it to criticize Judaism. Christians affirmed themselves as the priestly kingdom and holy nation of Exod. 19:6 (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6), associated Jesus’ blood with the blood of the covenant (Exod. 24:6–8 referred to in Matt. 26:28 and Heb. 9:18–22), and asserted that God had established a new and better covenant with them (Heb. 8:7–13; 10:15–17; 12:18–29; Gal. 4:21–31). However, they were not entirely hostile to the Law. Jesus identified love of God and people as the greatest commandments (Matt. 19:16–20; Mark 10:17–20; Luke 18:18–21), which some scholars have explained as reflecting a Jewish tradition that summarized the Decalogue with these two commandments (Allison 1994). Paul indicates that the one who loves people fulfills the Law, and that the commandments can be summarized in the single command to love one’s neighbor as one’s self (Rom. 13:8–10). James echoes the same point, adding that someone who breaks one commandment is guilty of violating the whole Law (James 2:1–13). Clearly the Ten Commandments played an important role in the early church as Christians constructed a dual relationship to the Law. On the one hand, they asserted the inferiority of the covenant with the Jews, thereby pointing to the need for a new one. On the other, the commandments were useful for delineating Christian behavior, albeit in terms quite similar to those found in Judaism (the early church used the Ten Commandments to instruct catechumens; see Augustine, quoted in Lienhard 2001: 101–2).

This dual emphasis within early Christianity soon developed into an affirmation of the Law as an important, but ultimately inadequate, part of God’s salvific actions. While Jews celebrated the giving of the Law at the feast of Shavuot (Weeks) (*m. Tamid* 5.1), Christians believed that by itself the Law was insufficient. When followed within the context of Christianity, however, it could have positive benefits. Origen thus speaks of the Decalogue as being the product of freedom, given to spiritual Israel (i.e., Christians) by Jesus. From this standpoint, its spiritual context (Jesus) took precedence over the physical one (the Israelite exodus from Egypt). Origen uses the opening verses of

Exodus 20 to encourage faithfulness to God, which essentially means faithfulness to Christianity (1982: 316–20). Gregory of Nyssa demonstrates salvation history in the events of Exodus 19. Seeing Mt Sinai as symbolizing the knowledge of God, he observes that only a few can climb it, due to the great effort required in doing so. As Moses advanced up the mountain, a trumpet blared, reflecting the preaching of the divine nature (while the Law and the Prophets trumpeted the mysteries of the Incarnation). Initially the Jews could not hear these sounds because of their spiritual deafness, but the Gospels proclaimed the Incarnation so loud that they heard it. God had overcome their deafness to give them the truth, but they still rejected it. Condemning the Jews, Gregory uses the dual understanding of the Law to immediately shift the application of the passage to the Church, by changing the identity of the people standing at Sinai's base from Jews to Christians. He accepts that Moses received divine truth, but the Law's meaning and significance depend on who is standing at the foot of Sinai. If Jews, then the Christian truth received by Moses condemns them. If Christians, then this episode establishes a hierarchy for receiving and disseminating divine truth. That Moses first gained the divine knowledge and then shared it with the people shows that not all in the Church are able to grasp the divine mysteries. Those who can do so communicate them to the masses who trustingly accept them (1978: *Life of Moses* 2.158–61). Gregory uses the giving of the Law to delineate how people come to know God, concluding that the two tablets of the Ten Commandments represent the two parts of religious virtue: knowledge of the divine nature and of right conduct (1978: *Life of Moses* 2.166).

The use of Scripture to explain and regulate the Christian life is particularly evident in Origen's exposition of Exod. 21:22–4. The passage proscribes applying the *lex talionis* when two men injure a pregnant woman while fighting, causing her to miscarry. While the rabbis debated various implications (see, for example, the Talmudic discussion in *b. Baba Kama* 48b–49b), Origen re-configured it from the social realm to that of the Church. Concerned with the passage's literal implications, he confronts Celsus's contention that the God of the Old and New Testaments was not the same, and tries to reconcile Exodus's demands with Jesus' words of non-retaliation (Lienhard 2001: 112–13). Yet he sees a deeper meaning. He begins by identifying the pregnant woman as a soul that has conceived the Word of God, or a catechumen, and the two men who argued as those who discuss questions related to the Law. If quarreling over Scripture causes the catechumen to discard the Word and leave the Church, then the offending individuals should also be cut off from the Church. He concludes, "The Apostle also, therefore, when he describes the teacher of the Church, among other things, admonishes that he be 'no striker,' lest striking pregnant women, that is beginning souls, he surrender 'a life for a life, an eye

for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” (1982: 349–54). Recognizing the dissension that often arose over scriptural meaning, Origen used this passage to regulate these debates.

### *Medieval law*

By the medieval period the influence of Exodus 19–24 extended beyond the realm of religion, manifesting itself in secular society (although the secular and religious were intimately connected). Secular rulers sometimes incorporated the Decalogue into their law codes. The Laws of the Bavarians, a code compiled during the sixth to eighth centuries, partially follows the Ten Commandments at one point. Some of the Exodus laws appear in an eighth-century Irish work known as *Liber ex lege Moysi*. Charlemagne loosely reproduces the Decalogue in his *Admonitio Generalis*. During the late ninth century the Anglo-Saxon king Alfred issued a law code with a prologue containing numerous laws from Exodus (followed by Acts 15:23–9) (Exod. 20:1–3, 7–17, 23; 21:1–36; 22:1–11, 16–29, 31; 23:1–2, 4, 6–9, 13). While most of the biblical laws in Alfred’s code are translated quite precisely, some are paraphrased, summarized, and/or amplified. The amplifications usually reflect efforts to make the law relevant to Anglo-Saxon life. Alfred’s incorporation of certain Exodus laws, however, does not reflect a simple effort to replicate the Mosaic judicial system. Rather, he recognizes the value of scriptural authority and appropriates it in order to strengthen his own authority, as well as project an image of England as the successor to Israel in the divine plan (Liebermann 1908–10: 23–24; Wormald 1977: 132, 136; Marsden 1995: 401–2; 1996: 33).

### *Medieval Judaism*

Secular uses of Exodus 19–24, however, paled in comparison with its influence within medieval religion. The giving of the Law provoked discussion over Jewish identity, particularly as it related to non-Jews, giving Jews a sense of uniqueness. The *Mekilta of Rabbi Ishmael* elaborates on Israel’s distinctive status as detailed in Exod. 19:1–6, commenting initially that the Torah was open to all who would accept it because it had been given in the wilderness rather than in Israel (Bahodesh 1.80–5; 5.98–101). The other nations, however, had been unwilling to accept it (Bahodesh 1.100–7; 5.48–98). *Exodus Rabbah* records a tradition expressing this idea in terms of a king who owned an orchard that he alone tended. When his children came of age, he turned over its care to them. In the same way God had created the Torah before the world,

and gave it to Israel, rather than the “heathen,” as soon as Israel pledged to obey it (Exod. 24:7) (*Exodus Rabbah* 30.9). This special status implies that as God’s people they, unlike other nations, are supremely occupied with the Torah. As his treasured possession, Israel remains separate from other nations by having none but God rule over them. The Law reveals the manner in which this separation manifests itself (Bahodesh 2.43–82). Rashi asserts that the statement in Exod. 21:1 regarding the laws being set before “them” indicates that Jews were not to bring disputes before the “heathen.” The Law has been given to Jews, not “heathens,” and bringing such matters before the latter defames God’s name (1934: 108). A distinctiveness manifesting itself in separation inevitably led to misunderstandings, especially by non-Jews. Christians often denigrated Judaism as legalistic, primitive, and harsh. Rashbam counters such ideas by explaining the prohibition against boiling a kid in its mother’s milk (Exod. 23:19) as an effort to teach “civilized” behavior and demonstrate compassion (Rashbam 1997: 288; see especially n. 47).

In spite of Christian accusations about the Law’s harshness, Jews viewed it in a more positive light. Parent–child and also marital metaphors were used to explain its significance. The *Mekilta of Rabbi Ishmael* notes that when Moses brought the people out to meet God and receive the Law (Exod. 19:17), it was like a bridegroom (God) coming forth to meet his bride (Bahodesh 3.115–19). Rabbinic tradition does not view the Law as a burden, but as something that marks Jews’ unique relationship with God, guiding and reminding them of the responsibilities arising by virtue of their unique status. The Ten Commandments also reflect the intertwining of their relationships with God and to humanity. One expression of this connection configures the Commandments as two corresponding sets of five. The first and the sixth commandments correspond, because murdering a person diminishes the divine image. The second and seventh indicate that worshipping idols is tantamount to committing adultery. The third and eighth commandments demonstrate that the one who steals will also swear falsely. The fourth and ninth show profaning the sabbath as equivalent to testifying that God did not create the world in six days, or rest on the seventh. The last pair of commandments reveal that the one coveting will have a son who will curse him while honoring another who is not his father (Bahodesh 8.69–102). The honoring of parents is considered equivalent to honoring God (Bahodesh 8.13–28). These understandings of the Commandments expressed the idea that Israel honored God through its social relationships.

While the Ten Commandments helped shape Jewish identity, Abraham ibn Ezra emphasized their universality, with reason providing the key to their universal appeal. In Europe, beginning in the last half of the eleventh century and especially during the twelfth, a renewed emphasis on reason and

Aristotelian philosophy arose (Simon 2000; Cantor 1993: 333–7). Among Jewish scholars, Rashi led this shift in attention. Ibn Ezra followed his lead, explaining that every one of God's commandments (laws) fell into one of two categories. Either they are rational laws, placed by God in "the minds of all intelligent human beings," or they are "'hidden commandments,' that is, commandments for which the Torah does not reveal any reason." Throughout his discussion, ibn Ezra emphasizes reason's role. At one point he remarks, "God gave the Torah only to rational human beings. He who is without reason has no Torah." A few sentences later he declares: "Far be it, far be it for one to even think that any of these commandments contradict reason . . . If we find that one of the commandments contradicts reason, then we should not take it at face value but must search for its meaning in the books of our wise men, of blessed memory, to find out whether it is a parable." By "the books of our wise men" ibn Ezra means the Oral Law (see, for example, his comments on Exod. 22:24 and 23:19; 1996: 476, 507). If this fails, then one must "investigate and try to understand it with all of our strength." If still unsuccessful, one must admit that he or she does not know its meaning. He ultimately concludes: "Hence every intelligent human being whose eyes have been opened by God can learn from the Torah the secret of all the commandments" (1996: 407–9).

Ibn Ezra clarifies the differences between Jews and non-Jews, as well as the intelligent and those of lesser faith, by applying reason to the opening line of Exod. 20:2. Responding to a question once posed to him by Rabbi Judah ha-Levi regarding why God had not described himself in this verse as the one who made heaven and earth and created humanity, he explains that people can be distinguished by their different levels of faith. Some simply believe what they have heard, while others believe what they have read in the Torah. The intelligent, however, know God "by learning the ways of God," meaning that studying nature leads to knowing him. He concludes: "Now the statement *I am the Lord* is sufficient for the intelligent of any nation." God, however, had intervened on Israel's behalf and performed signs and wonders in Egypt, something which both the "learned and unlearned" could understand. He points out:

Now it is for the intelligent that God said, *I am the Lord*. He added, *who brought thee out of the land of Egypt* (v. 2) so that the intelligent and the non-intelligent would understand. God added, *thy God*, meaning, you are obligated to serve me, that is, to be My servant and to be My people, and I will be your God because *I . . . brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage*. (1996: 411–14)

Thus ibn Ezra sketches the relationship of Jews and other nations to God: Jews do not hold or distribute the knowledge of God exclusively; it is open to anyone

who uses reason. Those who do not (the unintelligent) can still know God by observing his historical activity in the exodus. Since this action was taken on behalf of Israel, it obligates Israel more than any other nation to carry out the commandments. Rather than focusing on the privilege Israel possesses by having the laws, ibn Ezra emphasizes the special duty placed on Jews.

In discussing the various commands in Exodus 20–4, interpreters detailed specific aspects of Jewish duty to God and others. Extensive deliberation took place over the relationship between the Ten Commandments and the other ordinances. All God's laws were considered ultimately to be expressions of the Ten Commandments, and violating these subsequent laws was placed on the same level as abrogating the Decalogue (*Exodus Rabbah* 30.21). Commenting on Exod. 21:1, *Exodus Rabbah* compares this relationship to a distinguished lady (the Torah) surrounded by an armed bodyguard (the remaining laws), concluding that the preceding and succeeding laws protect the Decalogue (*Exodus Rabbah* 30.3). But these laws are not attributed secondary status. One who charges a fellow Jew interest on a loan (in violation of Exod. 22:24) transgresses all the laws, while one who loans without interest keeps them all (*Exodus Rabbah* 31.14). They are also valued as expressions of God's greatness. The instructions regarding the quarreling men who injure a pregnant woman (Exod. 21:22–3) reflect God's attention to detail. He has instructed Israel regarding everything, and each commandment is more beloved to God than the angels, giving Israel all the more reason to obey them (*Exodus Rabbah* 30.6). Rabbinic opinion ultimately connects all the Hebrew Bible and Talmud to the revelation at Sinai. By identifying the various phrases of Exod. 24:12 with the Ten Commandments, the Pentateuch, the Prophets, the Writings, the Mishnah, and the Gemara, the rabbis assert that Moses received all of these while on Sinai (*b. Berachot* 5a). Others, such as Saadiah Gaon and Rashi, indicate that all 613 commandments are contained in the Decalogue (Dana 1996: 327; Rashi 1934: 130), while Ramban (Nachmanides) considers the two tablets as representing the Written and Oral Laws (1973: 322–3). Such a connection reflects and strengthens Talmudic authority. Recognizing that fearing both God and sin is necessary, one tradition explains Exod. 21:1 in light of Ps. 19:10 and concludes "that a man who studies *Midrash*, *Halachah*, and *Haggadah*, but who has no fear of sin, is left with nothing in his hand" (*Exodus Rabbah* 30.14).

Jewish interpreters expressed the importance of obedience in different ways. Some understood the Torah in terms of two paths, one flanked with briars and thorns, representing the punishments associated with violating the various laws, and the other adorned with spices, representing the rewards related to keeping them. The individual who disobeys the Torah's laws walks down the path filled with thorns, while the obedient person traverses the spice-filled path (*Exodus Rabbah* 30.20). Others encourage obedience even in light of hostility



from non-Jews by illustrating the attendant rewards. Reading Exod. 21:1 in light of Isa. 56:1 and Ps. 119:21, one interpreter constructs a conversation between Israel and God. When Israel expresses its desire to keep the commandments, as well as ambivalence due to fear of the “heathen,” he relates a parable. As a merchant prepared for a trip, he heard that he would likely encounter robbers along the way. So he sold his merchandise for various jewels and set off on his journey. Robbers attacked him, but he told them he had only a few inexpensive “glass nicknacks.” Reasoning that the “nicknacks” were not worth their effort, they let him go unharmed. When the merchant later came to a city and began to sell his jewels, the robbers confronted him again and asked the price of his merchandise. He replied that the jewels were very expensive, and attributed his previous characterization of them as “glass nicknacks” to his life having been in danger. Now, however, the robbers could not have them without paying a high price. The midrash concludes, “So it is with Israel in this world; he who obeys the commandments knows not their reward, but when they see the reward of the commandments in the World to Come, they will be amazed, for the whole world will not be able to contain the reward” (*Exodus Rabbah* 30.24). As a parable, the story’s main point, if not all the details, is clear: it proclaims the great value of keeping the Torah. Although it may be of little worth to the nations in this world, and may even tempt Jews to devalue it, its great value in the next world will be readily apparent. The one who obeys the Torah in this world will have great profit in the next.

Ibn Ezra used Exod. 23:20–6 to demonstrate the benefits of Torah observance, explaining the passage historically and linguistically until verse 25, where he details service to God and the accompanying inner struggle. Simply stated, “Serving God is defined as doing all that the Lord has commanded, namely, to love the Lord, to cleave unto Him, to swear by His name, to pray to Him, to sacrifice the daily and the additional offerings unto Him and to honor Him by giving tithes.” The one who does these things will be abundantly blessed. He then elucidates these blessings in terms of one’s body and soul, criticizing those who neglect the sciences and only study the Written and Oral Laws when addressing such things. A person’s soul (*neshamah*) is connected to the body and influenced by two things, the spirit (*ru’ach*) and the life force or desire (*nefesh*). One’s soul represents the rational dimension and resides in the brain, while the spirit lives in the heart and is the source of anger. The *nefesh* is found in the liver and is the source creating desires for food and sexual intercourse. Present in each individual, with varying degrees of power, these three elements may be combined in twenty-seven possible ways, such as all three elements being strong or one being weak or two being strong. Ibn Ezra concludes: “God gave the Torah to strengthen, to intensify, and to increase” one’s *neshamah* over the body. When, however, the Torah is neglected, the body

overpowers the *neshamah*. Affirming the connection between the Torah and one's reason, he explains:

God the exalted, in his kindness, chose Israel and taught them His Torah. If Israel observes the Torah they become wise. Their wisdom guides them in a straight path to all things that will not harm them. The general rule is: the body must be subservient to the dictates of the soul (*neshamah*) rather than the soul being subservient to the dictates of the body. When the soul (*neshamah*) is strong, then the heavenly power known as nature, which preserves the body, grows in might.

The benefits of Torah observance are manifold, including removing fear of bodily diseases and any need for a physician. Reflecting the belief that planetary alignment determined one's fate, ibn Ezra proclaims that when the Torah is obeyed, an individual "will not receive evil from the heavenly bodies" (1996: 514–18). Thus, from a passage offering a simple correlation between national destiny and religious response, he demonstrates how Torah and reason combined to bring about the blessings of obedience.

As medieval Jews and Christians contemplated the Law within their respective traditions, it often acted more as a barrier than a bridge between them. Since the inception of Christianity, this had been the case, although some early Christians appear to have sought a compromise (Acts 15). Both groups, therefore, used the Law to strengthen their respective identities and faith claims while excluding those of the other, often furthering adversarial relationships. For medieval Christians, the Law's significance resided largely in its ability to point to something greater – the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. As such, it continued to be understood as one part of God's salvific actions rather than their crowning point. The sixth-century mosaics at San Vitale in Ravenna place the giving of the Law at the beginning of God's salvific acts, which eventually culminate in Jesus' eternal reign (Grabar 1980: 144–5). Marking the inauguration of the first covenant, it retains an important, but diminished, status. Jews, by contrast, saw the giving of the Law as a culminating point. Although it spawned many other laws and ideas, they all ultimately expressed the Ten Commandments.

### *Medieval Christianity*

Medieval Christians often used Exodus 19–24 to express Christian identity, particularly by resorting to typological analyses. The Ashburnham Pentateuch portrays the covenant commitment ceremony of Exod. 24:4–8 in decidedly

Christian terms. Rather than replicating the scene in Exodus by depicting twelve pillars, the sacrifice of bulls, and the sprinkling of blood, the artist replaces them with items related to the Eucharist and the Easter Vigil (Verkerk 2004: 89–95). Christians were taught, therefore, to think of the Mosaic (Jewish) covenant as heralding the coming of a greater Christian covenant. Various passages in Exodus purportedly showed that the Church would administer the covenant. One eleventh-century English biblical manuscript illustrates Exodus 19–24 with scenes emphasizing the Law and the altar, two highly symbolic concepts within Christianity. Moses is shown receiving the Law (Exodus 20–3) and in turn giving it to the people and then writing it down (Exod. 24:3). He is portrayed next as setting up an altar (Exod. 24:4), sending young men to make sacrifice (Exod. 24:5), and sprinkling the people with the blood of the covenant (Exod. 24:6–8) (Clemoes 1974: fols 99v, 100r, 100v). The illustrator depicts obedience to the Law in liturgical and hierarchical terms, with the people at all times responding to God through the instructions of Moses, the human authority figure.

This conceptualization of the divine–human relationship reflects that embodied in the Church. For instance, Hugh of Saint Victor (1096–1141) answers criticism surrounding the practice of confessing one’s sins to priests by appealing to Exod. 22:28. Translating *elohim* as gods, rather than God, he identifies the term with the priests, and explains that God delegates divine power to forgive sins through the priests (1951: 418). Hildebert of Lavardin (c.1056–1133), archbishop of Tours, demonstrates multiple connections between the giving of the Mosaic Law and the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–2). Among other things he finds significance in both laws being given in high places:

Each law was given in a high place: one on a mountain, the other in an upper room. As Moses and Aaron were on the mountain and the people below, kept back from the mountain, so the teacher in the Church draws near to lofty mysteries, but the people are unable to penetrate what is of a higher plane. Even if, through our own fault, we do not understand all these things, my dear brothers, drawn as they are from both Old and New Testaments, yet they ought to mean something in our ministry. We are priests gathered in an upper room, placed on a mountain in that we have been raised to a high office, so that, as watchmen of the flock of God, we may protect them against the craftiness of a wily enemy. We sit in the upper room of God’s house because we are teachers and judges in God’s house. (1973: 185–6)

The only connection between the two biblical events is the “high place.” Having made this association, Hildebert then uses various elements in the Exodus account to draw out applications for the Church. In essence the biblical account

becomes the shell which Hildebert fills with Christian ideas, which then make it meaningful.

The coupling of the giving of the Law with the giving of the Spirit was also made in the Verdun Altar of Klosterneuberg (near Vienna). Originally crafted in 1181, the altar contains seventeen sets of three panels, each depicting one New Testament episode cast in light of two Old Testament antecedents. In column 15 of the altar the craftsman joins together the dove's return to Noah with an olive branch, the tongues of fire falling on the disciples in the upper room, and Moses receiving the Law on Sinai. Moses receives from God a scroll that reads, "Your God is one God" (Deut. 6:4), while flames burn upward from the mountain (Röhrig 1955: 81–3; Buschhausen 1980: 76–9). The associations of the Holy Spirit with the dove and fire connect all three scenes and signify that the Old Testament events find their ultimate meaning and fulfillment in the New Testament.

The use of the Ten Commandments to express Christianity's superiority over Judaism eventually manifested itself in Christians persecuting Jews. Efforts to separate Jews from Christians accelerated when the Fourth Lateran Council decreed in 1215 that Jews must wear badges clearly identifying them as such. European countries devised various badges, with England's Henry III in the early thirteenth century and later Edward I proclaiming that the "Jew-badge" must be shaped like the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. Although in "The Statutes of Jewry" Edward placed Jews under his protection, he also significantly circumscribed their lives. Among other restrictions, they were forbidden to loan money at interest and required to live in "the King's own Cities and Boroughs"; and Christians were forbidden to live among Jews. All Jews aged seven and older had to wear a badge "in the Form of Two Tables joined, of yellow Felt, of the Length of Six Inches, and of the Breadth of Three Inches." In Christian iconography the two tables had long been associated with the figure of Synagoga, an allegorical female representing Judaism. Occasionally the two tables are shown upside down or slipping from her hands in order to indicate the passing of the old covenant. Christians, therefore, made the tables of the Law into a symbol of Judaism (the tables do not appear among Jews as a symbol of Judaism until the fifteenth century) (Mellinkoff 1970: 128–33; Sarfatti 1990: 402–4; *Statutes of the Realm* 1963: 221–2). Now, as a sign used to indicate Christianity's superiority, the Ten Commandments had been transformed into an instrument of indignity and oppression.

The Law in general, and the Ten Commandments in particular, continued to play an important role in explicating Christian life. While the *Bible moralisée* connects the giving of the Law (Exod. 19:1–6) with Pentecost, it also makes the connection with the Church even more explicit by explaining Moses' recep-

tion of the Law in Exod. 24:12–14, 31:18, as signifying Saint Peter's being given the New Law "to govern and inform his people" (Guest 1995: 79–80, fol. 23vA). The Church had used the giving of the Law not only to espouse Christianity's superiority over Judaism, but also to demonstrate its authority over its parishioners. Lay people were taught to relate to God through the Church, and they depended on its leadership to educate them in his mysteries. The *Bible moralisée* graphically portrays this relationship. In roundel C of folio 23vA, the illustrator shows God standing on Sinai flanked by Moses and Aaron, with the people at the foot of the mountain. When the artist depicts the contemporary situation, Moses, Aaron, and the people are replaced by the apostles (Church officials) in the upper room, who receive grace, wisdom, and understanding. In roundel D of folio 23vA, God gives the Law to Moses while the people stand at Sinai's base. The contemporary portrayal substitutes St Peter for Moses. Both illustrations convey that the Church mediates between God and the people.

The Ten Commandments themselves served as the loci for expressing important Christian values. Since the time of Augustine, they were used to instruct catechumens in Christian doctrine and life-style. Numerous medieval theologians, including Isidore of Seville, Bede, Alcuin, Hrabanus Maurus, Hugh of St Victor, Peter Lombard, William of Auvergne, Jean de la Rochelle, and Alexander of Hales, discussed them at length. Hugh of St Victor, for example, explains the two tables' functions, teaching that the first contains the higher laws because they pertain to the love of God and encourage faith, while the second contains the lower laws because they relate to the love of neighbor and instruct "unto good operation." Furthermore, the three precepts of the first table relate to the Trinity, while the seven of the second correspond to the seven days of the week in which one lives out the duties to humanity. Taken together, they form a perfect whole "since right faith and good operation make perfect" (Hugh of St Victor 1951: 191–2). Robert Grosseteste (1170–1253), bishop of Lincoln, expounded on the Commandments in order to provide proper doctrine for the clergy under his leadership, a common practice among medieval Christians. He reads the Decalogue from a decidedly Trinitarian and Christological viewpoint, while making applications pertinent to a feudal society (Kleist 2002: 234–5; McEvoy 1991: 182–4, 193, 196, 199–203).

During the late thirteenth century the Franciscan Bonaventure (1221–74) delivered a series of collations or sermons on the Decalogue, which have been called a "summa of the christian life" (Bonaventure 1995: 2–3). He views the Christian life as manifesting itself in one of two realms: one aimed toward God and the other toward humans. This view, by no means unique, is reflected in his organization of the commandments. Rather than dividing them into two sets of five (as had been done in Jewish tradition since at least the time of Philo

and Josephus), he follows the traditional division used by the Church since the time of Augustine (and in the Jewish system of lower cantillation), and classifies the first three as duties related to God (reflecting the Trinity) and the last seven as duties related to humans (Kleist 2002: 232). The first three commandments consist of the prohibition against “strange gods” (including the injunction against graven images), the prohibition against taking God’s name in vain, and the decree to keep the sabbath; the prohibitions against coveting the wife of one’s neighbor and his possessions comprise the ninth and tenth commandments. Identifying their observance as “the road to heaven,” Bonaventure teaches that the Ten Commandments as a whole form the basis of all other divine laws, while the first provides a foundation for the remaining nine (Bonaventure 1995: Collations 1.20, 22–3; 2.6; 3.1).

Subsuming the Christian life into the Ten Commandments helped Bonaventure identify those who fell outside these boundaries. Not surprisingly, Jews were categorized as outsiders. Commenting on the first commandment, Bonaventure remarks, “I say that we as Christians should see more than the Jewish people, to whom these commandments were given. For a truth has been revealed to us” (Collation 2.21). The second commandment provided him with the opportunity to respond to Jewish criticism that Christians worshipped three gods, as well as images and objects of the material world (the eucharistic bread as the Body of Christ). Addressing Christians rather than Jews, Bonaventure explains Church doctrine, portraying Jews as not having “the most elevated thoughts” (Collation 3.8–13). He also contests Jewish claims that Christians do not properly keep the sabbath, once again pointing out the limited Jewish understanding of the commandments (Collation 4.5–10).

The commandments, he finds, are also useful in discrediting false philosophies (such as those expressed by the Latin Averroists) and “heretics” (such as the Arians, Sabellians, Donatists, Pelagians, and Manicheans). Graven images mean “all false and superstitious fabrication of error” – error that results when the mind obscures reason and makes something seem to exist that really does not. Graven images then manifest themselves as “misdirected philosophical investigations,” “incorrect understandings of the Sacred Scriptures,” and “disordered appetites of our carnal human nature.” Epicureans, Nicolaitans, and Muslims represent the last category (Collation 2.24–8). He even uses honoring of parents to identify non-Christian actions. Should parents command children to do “anything that is contrary to our salvation,” then they are not to be obeyed, since spiritual concerns and relationships take precedence over physical ones. He extends this principle to the spiritual meaning of the fourth commandment. After identifying a father as anyone presiding over public, political, ecclesiastical, or monastic affairs, and then commending obedience to such an individual, he then associates a father with anyone who might be aged or feeble.

Urging care for the aged and feeble and friendliness to all, he reasons that “every person is lovable and should be loved, and every person is bound to honor the other.” The commandment does not require expressing equal love to all, however, because family and friends warrant greater love than strangers and enemies. Furthermore, although the principle of “likeness” requires love for all humans, that same principle creates gradations based on religion. Bonaventure explains, “Also according to a likeness because of agreement in faith, we should love Christians more than Moslems. Likewise, because of profession in a community, a religious is bound to love a brother of his order more, and one canon is bound to love another canon more” (Collation 5.10–17).

The Ten Commandments, therefore, help draw boundaries around the true faith and establish and regulate relationships based on this faith. Bonaventure addressed differences with Jews and “heretics” during his discussion of the first three commandments (i.e., the first table), suggesting that the boundaries he drew were more theological than ethical (the first table dealt exclusively with duties toward God). Any possible ethical similarities were not explored. Instead, he used the theological differences to set forth a hierarchy of relationships in which the commandments’ ethics were to be lived out.

During the period in which Bonaventure preached on the Decalogue, Thomas Aquinas lectured on the same topic, but with a different emphasis. He begins by setting the Commandments within the context of salvation: “In order to save his soul a man needs a threefold knowledge: he needs to know what to believe, what to desire, and what to do. The first he learns in the Creed, the second in the Lord’s prayer, the third in the Law.” The Law thus functions completely within a Christian context. He explains that God has placed in humans the knowledge of what should and should not be done, but that sin has destroyed this knowledge. The Law, therefore, brings humans back to the “works of virtue,” while love of God and others (Matt. 22:37–40) induces humans to do these works. With love forming the Decalogue’s foundation, he proclaims: “Man’s perfection consists in the love of God and our neighbor” (Aquinas 1937: 1–2, 27, 49). Rather than explaining the Ten Commandments as the source of all laws, Aquinas implants them within Jesus’ teachings as expressions of Christianity. They are not simply rules to be obeyed, but rather the product or outflow of Christian love.

Unlike Aquinas, John Duns Scotus (1265–1308) considered the commandments of the second table to be contingent, suggesting that certain situations might arise in which a particular commandment may not be binding. He points out that God seems to have given Abraham special dispensation from the injunction against killing, as well as the Israelites from stealing when fleeing Egypt, and Hosea from committing adultery when he married the harlot Gomer. He concludes that these commandments do not arise strictly from the

law of nature, which is immutable. God himself cannot do away with natural law, made available to all through reason, because doing so would imply some contradiction in his nature. Aquinas, on the other hand, argues that the second table does proceed from natural law and is therefore eternally binding. But the second table's contingency does not lead Scotus to view it with contempt. On the contrary, he affirms it as holy, of divine origin, and in keeping with the ultimate aim of natural law to bring humanity into union with God. Nonetheless, the biblical examples in which God suspended observance of certain commandments indicate that they are not timeless and universal principles, but applications of natural law in a particular setting. One scholar explains Scotus's understanding as, "They [i.e., the exceptions] are given to men in order that they may help themselves and stay faithful to God in exceedingly complicated and critical circumstances. They are interpreted as the intervention of God into human history so as to correct the compass that guides man to his ultimate end." Indeed, the second table leads humans to God; but there may be exceptional instances in which God, acting out of his absolute liberty, may issue another command that will better conform to this end (Prentice 1967: 260–2, 273–8, 285, 290–2; see also Ragland 1998).

Scotus addressed a question with which Christians in subsequent generations continue to struggle. How binding are the commandments, particularly those dealing with human relations? He also dealt with another question pondered by interpreters both before and after him. What do the commandments mean? The answers have depended in large part on the circumstances and ideological mind-set of the one responding. In spite of these questions, medieval Christians continually used the Ten Commandments to instruct in the faith and prepare for confession and communion. The Corpus Christi plays, for example, incorporate them in their efforts to educate in matters of faith (Cawley 1975: 129, 132). The ascent of Sinai to receive the Law symbolizes the purification attained in purgatory as the soul journeys from sin to eternal glory (see, for example, Dante's *Divine Comedy*). The same allegory is used to portray Catherine of Siena, a fourteenth-century mystic, as a new Moses who undertook her own exodus during the mystical death she experienced in one of her visions (Costello 1987). In France, at the abbey of Flavigny, in Lorraine, worshippers were reminded of the seriousness of the Ten Commandments' claim on their lives. A sixteenth-century stained glass window shows Moses holding the Ten Commandments in one hand and pointing toward them with the other (see plate 14). It is a solemn portrayal, with those surrounding Moses appearing sad and forlorn, perhaps because they are reminded of their sins. The scene communicates more than the subject matter of the Decalogue. It portrays the response to them as they expose human sinfulness.





Plate 14 Valentin Bousch, *Moses and the Law*. Abbey of Flavigny, Lorraine, France. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1917. (17.40.1a-o).

*Reformation and early modern Christianity*

John Calvin also understood the Decalogue in the context of human sinfulness and the knowledge of God, acknowledging that the internal or natural law placed by God within humans dictates the very ideas contained in the commandments. Sin, however, has so marred and blinded people that they are no longer able to determine what constitutes acceptable worship. God gave the written Law, therefore, to make clear these natural precepts and expose the utter inability of humans to fulfill them. Explaining the Commandments' first table as forming the foundation of the second, Calvin asserts that loving God is essential to loving one's neighbor. According to Calvin,

The first foundation of righteousness undoubtedly is the worship of God. When it is subverted, all the other parts of righteousness, like a building rent asunder, and in ruins, are racked and scattered. What kind of righteousness do you call it, not to commit theft and rapine, if you, in the mean time, with impious sacrilege, rob God of his glory? Or not to defile your body with fornication, if you profane his holy name with blasphemy? Or not to take away the life of man, if you strive to cut off and destroy the remembrance of God? It is vain, therefore, to talk of righteousness apart from religion . . . Without the fear of God, men do not even observe justice and charity among themselves. We say, then, that the worship of God is the beginning and foundation of righteousness, and that wherever it is wanting, any degree of equity, or continence, or temperance, existing among men themselves, is empty and frivolous in the sight of God. (Calvin 1964: 2.8.1–3, 10–11)

By elevating the first table to supreme importance, Calvin articulates a spirituality that focuses on right attitudes and actions toward God. He assumes that if one possesses these attitudes and actions, then right treatment of humans will follow. The reverse, however, is not true. Treating humans rightly does not equate with revering God properly, but rather constitutes a secondary spirituality.

Martin Luther reflected the Christian ambivalence toward the Ten Commandments when he both heralded and denigrated them in his attempt to advance his understanding of Christianity. Consistent with medieval usage, Luther employs the Decalogue to teach Christian beliefs, spirituality, and superiority, while also adhering to their traditional Christian division. He proclaims in the introduction to his *Large Catechism* that whoever knows the Ten Commandments perfectly knows all Scripture. Noting that the book of Psalms constitutes a meditation on the first commandment, he proceeds to give a lengthy explanation of each precept (Luther 1959: 5). As universal principles to which all people must adhere, Luther proclaims, "He is the universal God

of all the nations, who gives the universal Ten Commandments – which prior to this [i.e., the giving of the Law on Mt Sinai] had been implanted at creation in the hearts of all men – to this particular people [i.e., Jews] orally as well. In his day Moses fitted them nicely into his laws in a more orderly and excellent manner than could have been done by anyone else.” Yet in his effort to discredit Judaism, Luther does not consider all the words and phrases found in the Decalogue to be universally binding. He distinguishes between elements he considers natural law, binding on all, and parts unique to Moses and the Israelites. These “peculiar laws of their country” do not pertain to other nations. Regarding the first commandment, he argues that Gentiles had “no use” for the phrase referring to the exodus from Egypt because it related only to the Israelites. If he approached God with this phrase, then “I would be like a sow entering a synagogue, for God never performed such a work for me. God would punish me as a liar; I would be making an imaginary God out of him.” Likewise, observing sabbath on Saturday reflects “a temporal adaptation” by Moses. He reasons, “We find nothing written about this [i.e., observance on the seventh day] previously, either by Abraham or at the time of the old fathers. This is a temporary addendum and adaptation intended solely for this people which was brought out of Egypt.” The coming of the Messiah, interpreted in light of Isa. 66:23 and Jer. 23:5, abrogated Moses’ law, including Saturday sabbath observance. The portion of the commandment stemming from natural law – the demand for the day’s universal sanctification, or “the teaching and preaching of God’s word” – remains in effect. One therefore must “rest, celebrate, and keep the Sabbath on whatever day or at whatever hour God’s word is preached” (Luther 1971: 89–95; see also Luther 1960: 164–6).

By appealing to the Decalogue’s universal and particular characteristics, Luther shears from it any Jewish associations, removing it from the jurisdiction of Judaism, and re-situating it within the Christian realm. This gave Christians authority to determine its meaning and application not only for themselves, but for Jews as well. Refuting the charge that Christians do not adhere to the Ten Commandments, Luther casts Jewish observances of the Decalogue as outmoded attempts to apply time-bound principles in a universal manner. He dismisses the particular commandments given to Israel as “dead and gone,” asserting that “They neither urge nor compel me,” and concludes that the Mosaic Law is not to be followed except where it agrees with natural law. “Moses is a teacher and doctor of the Jews. We have our own master, Christ, and he has set before us what we are to know, observe, do, and leave undone.” Luther recognizes that Moses gave some examples worthy of imitation (such as punishing the godless and elevating the righteous), as well as signs pointing to Jesus (Luther 1960: 166–74), but beyond these things, Moses and his Law held nothing for Christians and were to be disdained.

Christians found it logical and simple to move from believing that they had been entrusted with the true revelation from God to punishing in various degrees those who did not hold these beliefs. This had been done throughout the Middle Ages and continued during the Reformation with Christians seeing it as their duty to create Christian societies. The Mosaic Law fed this conception as they administered God's rule, finding precedence for dealing with non-conformists in the very actions of God. Luther points out,

God threatens the godless, who feel proud and secure. And if threatening does not help, he backs it up with penalties, pestilence, famine, war, until they are destroyed. Thus does God make good his threat in the first commandment (Exod. 20:5). But he comforts those who fear him, who are in all sorts of need, and backs it up also with aid and counsel, by means of all kinds of wonders and signs, against all the might of the devil and the world. Thus does God make good also his comfort in the first commandment (Exod. 20:6). (Luther 1960: 266)

A particular country's ruler then carries out God's decrees by ensuring that God's commandments are followed by all his subjects. In turn, just as Moses, under God's direction, gave laws to the Israelites, who were obligated to obey them, "so each country and each household is duty-bound to observe the ordinances of its prince and head of a household. For these also are the commandments of God, who ordained all the governments of the world" (Luther 1971: 91). Of course, each ruler believed that his decrees adhered to God's, just as those who contested the decrees believed about their protests. Controlling the interpretation of the biblical commandments, therefore, became essential in determining what vision of society and religion was followed.

John Knox illustrates the type of conclusions – by no means unique or original with him – that grew from such an outlook. He describes the Decalogue as elucidating those works that please and displease God, and divides them into two groups: those aimed at honoring God and those designed to benefit one's neighbor. The first group or table consists of having one God, worshipping and honoring him, calling upon him in times of trouble, reverencing his name, hearing and believing his word, and participating in the holy sacraments. The second table manifests itself in honoring, loving, supporting, and obeying parents, princes, rulers, and superior powers, saving the lives of innocents, repressing tyranny, defending the oppressed, keeping one's body clean and holy, living in sobriety and temperance, dealing justly with all in word and deed, and repressing all desires to hurt one's neighbor. Knox does not counsel blind obedience to all superior powers, however, but notes in qualification that any human decree contrary to God's laws or any authority overstepping the bounds of his office should not be obeyed. This idea is also inherent in his support for defending the oppressed and opposing tyranny

(Knox 1966: 2.106–7). Deciding who was oppressed and what constituted tyranny, of course, was debatable.

Knox's understanding of the prohibition against idolatry precludes having "fellowship" with any religion except that confirmed by God in Scripture. He reasons that God's unchanging justice requires the same obedience of all people in all ages. So anyone at variance with this religion is not worshipping God and should be excluded from "fellowship." In combination with Deuteronomy 13, he makes plain the implications of the first commandment. Idolatry – defined as anything not in accord with Scripture – is not only forbidden, but also not tolerated. The husband should not conceal his wife's idolatry, nor the father that of his children. Instead, the father, husband, or brother should be the first to accuse. In Knox's eyes such intolerance is necessary in light of God punishing not only evildoers, but also anyone associated with them. This principle is clearly delineated in Romans 1 and illustrated in the drowning of pharaoh and the Egyptian army, the complete destruction of the Amalekites, and the death of Jonathan with Saul (Knox 1966: 3.190–2). In essence, worshipping the one true God had been defined as stamping out anything deemed at variance with Scripture. The implications of such a mind-set were dramatic. They generated the need to control Scripture's meaning, as well as the ability to implement it.

Protestant uses of the Ten Commandments to transmit their beliefs, among other things, motivated the Roman Catholic Church to respond. The Council of Trent (mid-sixteenth century) asserted that an authoritative catechism needed to be issued because of "those who intend to corrupt the minds of the faithful" with their "poisoned doctrines." Reaffirming the place of the Decalogue in the catechism, the Council underscored its role as a summary of the whole Law by which the priest could "regulate his own life" and "instruct in the law of God the people committed to his care" (McHugh and Callan 1982: 3–4, 357).

Most Reformers, including Anabaptists, continued to use the Decalogue in catechetical instruction (Snyder-Penner 1994). Seventeenth-century Puritans and Anglicans agreed upon the Ten Commandments' importance for defining appropriate Christian behavior, but their different emphases and interpretations led them to criticize each other. Like John Calvin, Puritans emphasized the first table (duties to God as espoused in commandments 1–4), while Anglicans stressed the second table (duties to humans as reflected in the last six precepts). The two groups also differed on the interpretation of the requirements arising from the first table. Puritans expressed their obedience to the first table by opposing any liturgical practice not found in Scripture (because it amounted to idolatry), while advocating "godly preaching" and stringent sabbath observance. Anglicans, led by Archbishop William Laud, advocated

practices preserved in the Prayer Book and Canons of 1604 (considered by Puritans to be “popish”), allowed for various recreational activities on Sunday, and sought to silence Puritan preachers. According to J. Sears McGee, “Both anglican and puritan saints obeyed all ten of God’s commandments to the best of their ability” (1976: 92). Their differences stemmed from their basis of authority. In McGee’s words:

Thus anglicans denounced “opinions of men” just as strongly as puritans did – but for diametrically opposed reasons. Puritans insisted that the Scriptures had to be obeyed whenever mere men, regardless of their temporal authority, commanded the performance of things which were not warrantable . . . The anglican response to the puritan “opinion of sanctity” was to insist that holy mysteries had to remain holy mysteries. To pry into the deep mysteries of godliness too closely was to court grave danger. The good Christian avoided theological disputation and cleaved to moral improvement. (McGee 1976: 101–2)

The Ten Commandments had become an arena in which to express and argue for differing concepts of spirituality, deriving from different interpretive positions. Generally speaking, Anglicans viewed the Decalogue from the perspective of an authoritative church, leading them to conceive of obedience in terms of church-directed practices. Puritans, by contrast, read the Decalogue outside a formalized hierarchical system, choosing to invoke a more strict reading of Scripture as their authority. Their differences in emphasizing one table over the other also influenced how they understood and applied the commandments.

### *Modern period*

#### SOCIETAL USES

The different uses of the Ten Commandments and other verses in Exodus 19–24 by Anglicans and Puritans represent one of a plethora of variants in their understanding. William Blake’s poem *The Everlasting Gospel* recognizes that such differences existed: “Both read the Bible day & night, But thou read’st black where I read white” (Blake 1972: 748, A13–14). Believing that reading the Bible was not done with rational objectivity, resulting in a single meaning, he greatly valued art’s ability to spark the imagination. He once wrote, “I know that This World Is a World of imagination & Vision. I see Every thing I paint In This World, but Every body does not see alike.” To him, the Bible was the most entertaining and instructive book, because it appealed to the imagination, something he called “spiritual sensation” (see *The Laocoön* and his letter dated

August 23, 1799; Blake 1972: 775–7, 793–4). He recasts the Mosaic laws' revered status, however, by describing them as "forms of dark delusion" (Blake 1972: 245; *Song of Los* 17), portraying Jesus as one who did not slavishly follow the commandments, but instead "acted from impulse" (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in Blake 1972: 158). Blake was reacting to the enslavement created by absolute laws made without considering the individual (Damon 1965: 90). Yet he does not merely follow Christian tradition by placing the Israelite and Christian covenants in opposition. Instead, he asserts the need for combining justice (Mosaic Law) and mercy (Jesus) (Kuntz 2000: 441–2), calling for a reimagining of the Mosaic Law, Christianity, and their relationship to each other. His negative portrayal of the Law serves his call for a more imaginative spirituality. Rudyard Kipling similarly used the Ten Commandments as a foil to express his desire for a freer environment. In his poem "Mandalay" he fondly remembers a certain Asian girl and longs to leave the dreary life of England and go to the Far East "where there aren't no Ten Commandments an' a man can raise a thirst."

While people like Blake and Kipling resisted what they believed were the Ten Commandments' constraints, others found the Decalogue and other Mosaic precepts useful for social control. The injunction of Exod. 22:18, commanding the Israelites to kill witches, helped spark the seventeenth-century Salem witch trials (Steinbach 1983; Watson 1992). Napoleon issued a medal commemorating his convening the Sanhedrin in 1806. Shown receiving the tablets of the Decalogue from a rabbinic figure resembling Moses (Korshin 1982: 338 and fig. 11), this representation left little doubt who was in control. Charles J. Jones, a southern Presbyterian minister, taught slaves in his *A Catechism for Colored Persons*, that the commandment prohibiting stealing meant they should not steal themselves by running away, nor should they conceal knowledge of someone who intended to run away. Thornton Stringfellow, a Baptist minister in Virginia, used Exod. 21:2–4, 11–12, 20 (along with other verses) to indicate that God had authorized slavery in the only national constitution he ever organized. "Now, here are laws," he explains, "that authorize the holding of men and women in bondage, and chastising them with the rod, with a severity that terminates in death. And he who believes the Bible to be of divine authority, believes these laws were given by the Holy Ghost to Moses." James Henry Hammond of South Carolina argued similarly, appealing to Exod. 21:6 to show that slavery reflected God's will. "We accept the Bible terms as the definition of our Slavery," he concludes, "and its precepts as the guide of our conduct. We desire nothing more" (Faust 1981: 152–3, 175).

An 1837 editorial in an American paper, *The Weekly Advocate*, extolls the virtues of sabbath keeping by first pointing out the absolute necessity of the "religion of the gospel" for "the purity and the preservation of our political



and social institutions.” Sabbath observance is necessary to preserve religion. Where the sabbath no longer exists as a day of rest, as in “nominal christian [sic] communities” such as Roman Catholicism, crime abounds. The writer concludes, “Let this day be desecrated, and the spirit, the life of religion is wounded and dies; humanity, benevolence, justice, flee away affrighted; the seminaries of learning, the temples of justice, the pillars of the political fabric, totter on their foundations, and soon tumble into ruins” (*Weekly Advocate* 1837). While others of varying religious persuasions may have agreed with the need for sabbath observance, they would have disagreed regarding what it meant. During the middle and latter parts of the nineteenth century, momentum built for a national law forbidding most business activities on Sunday in the United States. Many supported such a law, but others did not. Jews, for example, protested the government’s recognition of the Christian sabbath (S. Langston 2000: 112–18; see also C. Z. Lincoln 1916: 745–87 for brief descriptions of the many legal cases surrounding Sunday activities during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries). Some Christians, however, such as those known variously as Sabbatarians or Seventh-Day Adventists, contended that Sunday was not the biblical sabbath (Preble 1845; *Sunday Law* 1892).

During the twentieth-century American struggle over segregation, the Decalogue was used to buttress white supremacy. One Southern Baptist minister, Carey Daniel, pastor of the First Baptist Church of West Dallas and cousin of the then governor of Texas, Price Daniel, issued his “Ten Commandments for the Race Mixers.” They were as follows (Daniel c.1970: 25):

THOU SHALT HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME, not even the most idolized jazz singer or prize fighter.

THOU SHALT NOT MAKE UNTO THEE ANY GRAVEN IMAGE, OR LIKENESS OF ANYTHING (and) BOW DOWN, not even to those adored pictures and relics of Father Divine and Mother Divine.

THOU SHALT NOT TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD THY GOD IN VAIN by professing to be true Christians while violating God’s sacred laws of racial segregation.

REMEMBER THE SABBATH DAY TO KEEP IT HOLY and not to preach or to hear mongrelizing sermons.

HONOR THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER at least enough to preserve the racial purity they have passed down to you.

THOU SHALT NOT KILL either individuals or races.

THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, remembering that God sometimes considers interracial marriage as “whoredom” deserving death (Numbers 25).



THOU SHALT NOT STEAL the Constitutional rights, States rights or God-given rights of White Southerners.

THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST THY NEIGHBOR with false propaganda against the White South.

THOU SHALT NOT COVET, colored man, thy White neighbor's wife or daughter or school or anything else that is thy White neighbor's.

Daniel had used the Decalogue to communicate ideals denigrating Roman Catholicism, African Americans, and racial equality, while glorifying an amalgamation of American patriotism, Protestant Christianity, white supremacy, and southern autonomy. This version of the Decalogue was aimed at those opposing his perspectives, but he also issued a version for his supporters, known as "The Ten Commandments for the Segregationists." Explaining each commandment in much more detail, the first commandment, for example, states, "Refuse to send your children to integrated schools," and the second instructs his followers to "Insist that your pastor preach the Word of God on this subject if he mentions it at all." The remaining commandments deal mainly with organizational steps for fighting integration (Daniel c.1970: 27–30). Carey invoked the Ten Commandments' authority by wedding them to his ideology and portraying his arguments as outgrowths of them.

Others have found various verses in Exodus 19–24 helpful in challenging and reforming the existing social order. Denmark Vesey, the former slave whose 1822 plan for a slave revolt was foiled, used Exod. 21:16 to argue against slavery. That verse prohibited the kidnapping or stealing of an individual, leading Vesey to reason that since Scripture did not allow the Israelites to hold an Israelite slave in perpetuity and that African Americans were the new chosen people of God, then holding African Americans in perpetual slavery violated the command (Egerton 2002: 80, 84). Sarah Grimké affirmed that the law given by God on Mt Sinai contained all the necessary precepts for ordering human relationships. Noting that the Decalogue did not include any command for women to obey their husbands, she concluded that the subordination of women was tantamount to idolatry (Ceplair 1989: 240–1). John R. McDowell, known as the Martyr to the Seventh Commandment, led in the formation in 1833 of the American Society for Promoting the Observance of the Seventh Commandment. This society sought to bring about reform in the area of sexual immorality (Kuykendall 1972).

The impetus to challenge and reform society using the Ten Commandments has continued into the contemporary period, as each generation appropriates them to address new situations. People have found them useful as a barometer or standard to critique societal failings. In 1914–15 Henry Sloane Coffin, pastor of New York City's Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church and professor at

Union Theological Seminary, preached a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments in response to the upheavals created by World War I. Coffin remarks, “A restatement of the Ten Commandments seemed timely; their application an urgent necessity” (Coffin 1915: 8). A few years later, Harry F. Atwood, a lawyer and educator, appealed in part to the Decalogue in calling for a restoration of American ideals. “We need a revival of the home spirit and higher appreciation of its genuine value. This is a good time for the young people to read and ponder the Fifth Commandment, and for the older people to read and interpret in their daily lives the Tenth Commandment, and for all of them to sing together, over and over again, ‘Home, Sweet Home,’ ‘The Old Oaken Bucket,’ and ‘The Swanee River’” (these three songs pine for a return to the childhood home) (Atwood 1921: 25, 35, 41). Cecil B. DeMille’s 1923 silent movie, *The Ten Commandments*, combines the dramatic appeal of the exodus with an effort to address contemporary issues, while offering Hollywood an opportunity to rehabilitate its image in the wake of mounting negative publicity (Birchard 1992a: 79). After presenting the biblical exodus, the film then fashions a modern example of the power and value of the Decalogue by tracing the activities of six individuals. It focuses on two brothers, one of whom observes the Commandments, while the other does not and eventually suffers personal destruction. From its beginning, the film cast its story in the context of the devastation of World War I, portraying the Ten Commandments as “fundamental principles without which mankind cannot live together.” Through various characters, the film expresses sentiments such as “You can’t break every law of God and man and get away with it,” and “If you break the Ten Commandments, they’ll break you” (see also MacMahon and MacPherson 1924; Birchard 1992a and b; Tooze 2003).

In 1943 a book was published entitled *The Ten Commandments: Ten Short Novels of Hitler’s War Against the Moral Code*. Seeking “to open the eyes of those who still do not recognize what Nazism really is,” it includes short stories interpreting each of the commandments by writers such as Thomas Mann, John Erskine, and Bruno Frank (Robinson 1943: editor’s foreword). In the same year Arthur Szyk’s work of art *De Profundis* portrayed a mass of dead European Jews, topped by a dead Jesus, wearing a crown of thorns and embracing the Ten Commandments with one arm and a dead child with the other. Szyk communicates that Jesus was a Jew who would have been murdered by the Nazis. The combination of Christian and Jewish symbols is made more poignant by the quote adorning the work: “Cain, where is Abel thy brother?” (Luckert 2002: 109–12).

In 1956 DeMille remade his earlier film, *The Ten Commandments*. Although focusing exclusively on the biblical story, it has been understood as an epic expressing and advancing American interests and culture during the Cold War

(see Nadel 1993; Vernet 1991; and Higashi 1996). In the late 1980s Kim Mammedaty, a Native American Baptist pastor in Oklahoma, preached a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments, challenging their dominant American interpretation by pointing out that values foreign to Native Americans had been thrust upon them through the Decalogue. Native Americans, for example, did not, and do not, embrace typical American work and leisure ethics. Yet the latter had been transmitted by non-Native Americans through the teaching and preaching of the sabbath command. Mammedaty (1996) therefore reinterprets the Commandments from a Native perspective.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century a Presbyterian man and his wife, disturbed over the lack of morality in the United States, began the Ten Commandments Project. The couple offered ten dollars to every child who memorized and recited them to an “authorized” adult witness. While the project had the goal of convincing ten million children in ten years to memorize the commandments, it has had to suspend operations due to a lack of funds (*New York Times* 2002b; Ten Commandments Project).

On a larger scale, the United States has recently been involved in a legal and political debate over displaying the Ten Commandments in public settings. Many, but not all, stem from suits filed against monuments erected during the 1940s and 1950s by the Fraternal Order of Eagles. Spurred on by a Minnesota juvenile court judge, E. J. Ruegemer, who believed that the Ten Commandments would give youth moral guidance, the Order placed in local communities granite monuments inscribed with what it considered to be a non-sectarian version of the Decalogue; Cecil B. DeMille and Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic clergy also assisted. Now many of those monuments, as well as other displays of the Decalogue, are being challenged as violating the separation of church and state. The United States Supreme Court ruled in 1980 in the case *Stone v. Graham* (449 US 39), that a Kentucky statute requiring the display of the Ten Commandments in each public classroom violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the federal Constitution. In reversing the decision of Kentucky’s state trial and Supreme Court, the federal Supreme Court ruled that the Ten Commandments were “undeniably a sacred text,” because the first four commandments taught religious duties. Chief Justice William Rehnquist dissented, asserting that they have been instrumental in the development of secular Western law.

In 2001 the United States Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals considered a request for an injunction against placing a monument containing the Ten Commandments, the US Bill of Rights, and the preamble to the 1851 Indiana state constitution on the grounds of the Indiana state house in Indianapolis. The Court reaffirmed the Decalogue as a religious text transcending secular ethical and moral concerns, while recognizing that the Ten Commandments

may have a legitimate secular purpose because of the role they have played in secular society. The judges pointed to the frieze on the wall of the United States Supreme Court building depicting Moses, holding the tablets, among the great lawgivers of the world, and to secular uses of the Ten Commandments in public schools (in the study of religion, history, etc.). The Seventh Circuit ultimately ruled that simply placing the Decalogue alongside secular texts did not automatically constitute a primarily secular purpose. The state of Indiana, therefore, had not demonstrated a valid secular reason for erecting the monument (*Indiana Civil Liberties Union, Joan Laskowski, Alice Bennett, et al. v. Frank O'Bannon, Governor of Indiana*).

Just a few months prior to the Seventh Circuit's decision, the United States Supreme Court, in a split decision, refused to hear an appeal of the case *City of Elkhart v. William A. Books, et al.* in which the Seventh Circuit had ruled that the Ten Commandments monument standing outside a municipal building in Elkhart, Indiana, violated the Establishment Clause. The monument had been placed in the city by the Fraternal Order of Eagles over forty years ago. In an unusually rare move, Chief Justice William Rehnquist and Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas published a dissent to the high court's refusal. Justice John Paul Stevens then published a response to the dissent (*USA Today* 2001; Lazarus 2002). The disagreement among the Supreme Court justices reflected the dissent in lower courts which have rendered decisions both for and against the display of the Ten Commandments on public grounds. In late 2002, for example, a federal District judge ruled that the Ten Commandments monument on display in the Texas state capitol building in Austin did not violate the Establishment Clause (*Associated Press* 2002). The United States Supreme Court, however, will take up this case, as well as a similar case from Kentucky in March 2005 (*New York Times* 2005).

Perhaps the most controversial Ten Commandments case arose when Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore secretly moved a two and one-half ton granite monument containing the Ten Commandments (taken from the King James Bible) into the rotunda of the state judicial building during the night of July 31, 2001 (see plates 15 and 16). Coral Ridge Ministries, an Evangelical Presbyterian organization, taped the event. Each of the monument's four sides contains quotations from various American Founding Fathers, as well as the Declaration of Independence, the National Anthem, the National Motto, the Pledge of Allegiance, the Constitution of Alabama, and other texts. As a circuit judge in the early 1990s, Moore had displayed a copy of the Ten Commandments on the wall of his courtroom, which precipitated a lawsuit and a vow from Governor Fob James, Jr., that he would send in the National Guard if necessary to protect the plaque. Judge Moore then ran for and won the Chief Justice position in 2000, calling himself "The Ten Commandments



*Plate 15* Demonstrators lie on the ground and pray in the plaza of the Alabama Judicial Building in Montgomery, Alabama, August 27, 2003. AP/Wide World Photos.

Judge,” asserting that America had lost its moral foundation, and promising to display the Commandments in the state judicial building. After installing the monument, Moore was sued almost immediately. The case was tried in the United States District Court for the Middle District of Alabama, Northern Division.



*Plate 16* A moving crew uses a bar to lift one end of the Ten Commandments monument in the Alabama Judicial Building in Montgomery, Alabama, August 27, 2003. AP/Wide World Photos.

Passions ran high as Moore's supporters held rallies across the nation and stood vigil outside the courtroom during the trial. He ultimately lost the suit and was ordered to remove the monument. When he refused to comply with the judge's order, he was removed from his position as Chief Justice (*New York Times* 2002a; *C. Wade Johnson, Robert A. Beckerle, and Melinda Maddox v. Rich Hobson and Roy Moore; Stephen R. Glassroth v. Roy S. Moore; Amici Curiae* Brief filed in support of Glassroth's motion).

In the trial's opening statements, Judge Moore's attorneys argued that the suit was part of a nationwide movement "to misuse the Establishment Clause as a sword to censor the historic relationship between GOD and our government by prohibiting the open and public acknowledgement of GOD by our elected government officials." They also contended that the purpose of the monument was to restore the moral foundation of the law. In short, the lawsuit was about freedom versus censorship. The opposing attorneys argued that Judge Moore's actions violated the Establishment Clause. One expert witness for the plaintiffs, historian Edwin Gaustad, surmised that the Ten Command-

ments monument represented or was associated with governmental power, rather than personal piety (*Glassroth v. Moore*, trial transcript, October 15, 2002, pp. 4–13 and October 21, 2002, p. 212). Both sides called expert witnesses and debated the sacred and secular contexts of the Decalogue.

The controversies surrounding the Ten Commandments monument represent the Decalogue's ability to invoke great passion as a public symbol of devotion to God. Many Americans believe the mere presence of the Ten Commandments will bring about moral change and divert divine wrath against the nation. They vigorously protest efforts to remove or hinder their display in public places, understanding such attempts as offending God and indicating a society that has lost its moral moorings. Advocates have also recently proposed in the House of Representatives the Ten Commandments Defense Act of 2003 (H.R. 2045), which would give states the power to decide whether or not to display the Decalogue. In addition, proponents of their public posting typically view them as universal laws transcending sectarian use or interpretation. As such, they serve secular purposes by promoting civic morality. Opponents of the Decalogue's public acknowledgment contend that it must inevitably be interpreted, which then becomes a sectarian matter; even the translation and arrangement of the commandments are not neutral actions. While the United States legal system has acknowledged a secular use of the Decalogue, the distinction is often difficult to establish and maintain. It quickly becomes an instrument to express and advance varying points of view. Although it offers the possibility for some Jews, Protestants, and Roman Catholics to unite, at the same time it brings division. The legal opinions involving the Decalogue have made much of the contexts in which it appears, and rightly so because of their importance for determining meaning. The Commandments have been perceived both as instruments of tyranny, particularly religious tyranny, and tools with which to free and protect individuals from abusive practices that ultimately corrode society. Their meaning and significance continue to be contested, as they are not neutral or objective precepts, but volatile and powerful ideas.

Elsewhere in the world, the Ten Commandments have formed the basis of various attempts at social change, ranging from specific issues to overthrowing or reforming entire social systems. In Uganda the sixth commandment has been part of an effort encouraging the use of condoms. In light of widespread HIV infection, one church official argues that those who do not use condoms and then contract AIDS violate the sixth commandment by committing murder (*New Vision* 2003). The Lord's Resistance Army, led by Joseph Kony, has engaged in armed combat against the Ugandan government for almost twenty years. Kony's group wants to overthrow the government and establish a society ruled by the Ten Commandments (although the group is notorious for kidnapping



and rampant murder) (*Mail & Guardian* 2003). Also in Uganda, a group known as The Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God arose in the late 1980s as a fringe Catholic group. Reacting to the hopelessness and violence of mainstream Ugandan society, its members hoped to form a community based on the Commandments. In March 2000, however, hundreds of its members either committed suicide or were victims of homicide by the group's leaders. Some have suggested that the mass suicide/homicide resulted from a failed prophecy of the world's end, but the reason is not entirely clear (Katongole 2003; Mayer 2001).

In a quite different manner, Father Carlos Mesters, a Carmelite friar who has served in Brazil for fifty years, uses the exodus and Mosaic laws to articulate a social vision known as "equalitarian." He defines "equalitarian" as equal treatment of people, including equal social voice and equal access to societal resources. Arguing that the Ten Commandments should be read corporately rather than individualistically, he asserts that they form the constitution of an equalitarian society. "The law of the Ten Commandments defends the freedom that had been won, and defends the new social relationships . . . This was all to defend the rights of the little people against the everlasting temptation of power and greed." So, for example, the prohibition against taking God's name in vain means that one should not act in the name of God, who brings liberation, to support oppression. God's project in the Bible and for today is to free oppressed people and create equalitarian societies (Mesters 1987: 3, 17–19). Mesters identifies the continuity between the exodus and the Decalogue, showing that they cannot be separated, because forming a properly ordered society depends on freedom from oppression. At the same time, freedom from oppression remains incomplete unless an equal society is established.

#### RELIGIOUS USES

In addition to its societal applications, the Ten Commandments have been prominent in corporate worship and personal piety. A common sight in churches and synagogues is some sort of representation of the Decalogue. For example, above the altar in Saint Paul's Chapel in New York City is a design by Pierre L'Enfant, the architect of Washington, D.C., representing the giving of the Law, with light and lightning emanating from clouds (known in religious art as "glory"), the tetragrammaton in a triangle, and the Decalogue's two tablets. These elements lead down to the altar (Caemmerer 1970: 98–100), allowing Christian worshippers to contemplate the significance of the two covenants as part of their worship. In Judaism, the Law's two tablets with an abbreviated form of the Decalogue adorn virtually every synagogue and are also found on various religious objects. It has become the religion's principal symbol (Sarfatti 1990: 383). An example of personal piety is the exposition of



the Decalogue which Susanna Wesley addressed (but may not have sent) to her daughter, which focuses on the first four commandments, especially the fourth. She urges the sabbath's proper observance by private contemplation and public worship, putting aside thoughts of "the things of the life," and considering God as "a boundless inexhaustible subject for thought" (Wallace 1997: 408–24). Abraham Heschel saw the sabbath as an expression of spiritual living, with a higher goal "not to amass a wealth of information, but to face sacred moments." Focusing on time, rather than space, he explains, "Judaism teaches us to be attached to *holiness in time*, to be attached to sacred events, to learn how to consecrate sanctuaries that emerge from the magnificent stream of a year. The Sabbaths are our great cathedrals; and our Holy of Holies . . . the Day of Atonement" (Heschel 1951: 8). Observing the sabbath thus becomes an experience of the sacred, not simply fulfilling a sacred duty. Heschel elaborates how the sacred experience critiques the secular:

To set apart one day a week for freedom, a day on which we would not use the instruments which have been so easily turned into weapons of destruction, a day for being with ourselves, a day of detachment from the vulgar, of independence of external obligations, a day on which we stop worshipping the idols of technical civilization, a day on which we use no money, a day of armistice in the economic struggle with our fellow men and the forces of nature – is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for man's progress than the Sabbath? (1951: 28)

Sabbath observers are provided not only with a respite from life's struggles, but also in this sacred critique with a vision for what life can be.

Cessation from labor and life's normal activities has always been an important part of sabbath observance as people have devised a multitude of ways to implement this. Some Americans moving west during the nineteenth century attempted to maintain its observance, although as their journeys progressed, this became difficult. When Lorenzo Dow Chillson left Plattsmouth, Nebraska, in 1859 with a wagon train going to California, he initially refused to travel on Sundays, even though his companions continued. By the second Sunday on the trail, however, he remarks in his diary, "Worked hard all day. The first Sabbath I ever worked in my life." A few weeks later he writes, "Attended church in a camp about ½ mile below us. it [*sic*] puts one in mind of Civilization again to attend meeting if it is on the plains in the wild west." For Chillson the sabbath represents the ordered life he had left. But he too would soon leave the sabbath behind, at least while on his journey. As the trek continued, he ceased making observations about sabbath observance, even traveling with the rest of his company on that day (Chillson 1859; see entries for May 15, 22; June 5, 19; July 24; and August 7, 21, 28). Lucy Rutledge Cooke in 1852 records that her

wagon train going to California had “quite a fuss” about traveling on Sundays. While the others left her family behind, she hoped they would soon “get with some Sabbath keeping friends” and feel more comfortable. But, as the trip continued, they too were compelled to travel on Sundays (Holmes 1985: 237, 240). Mariett Foster Cummings, while traveling in 1852 from Plainfield, Illinois, to California, remarked, “It is Sunday, but circumstances compelled us to travel. However, I do not think we are quite so bad as some that stopped just before us that were playing ball for a Sunday pastime.” Cummings clearly felt convicted that she had to violate the sabbath prohibition against work, but she could take some comfort in knowing that she had not completely discarded its observance. Her ambivalence about traveling on Sunday revealed itself again three months later when she wrote: “It is the holy Sabbath time but rest is denied the worn traveler. This is like all other days on this road and the weary pilgrim to the shrine of gold plods on his tiresome way . . . Made 28 miles” (Holmes 1985: 121, 155; see entries for April 18 and July 18). Her comment reflects the tension between her Christian duty to observe the sabbath and her violation of it, ultimately in order to gain economic prosperity.

Even among those who did observe the sabbath while on the trail, some felt slighted. Martha Ann Freeman Roe, traveling with her husband in 1864 from Grinnell, Iowa, to Bannack, Montana Territory, notes on several occasions that while members of their party participated in various religious activities on Sunday, the cooks did not get much rest. On May 15 she writes that after getting up around seven in the morning, she “got breakfast and us cooks that is (Mr. Cathcart and I) have but little rest on sabbath.” After the “ordinary work” was done, dinner was served, followed by “a good sing” and baking biscuits. The cooks then took a walk, and before going to bed she participated in prayers. Two weeks later she describes her sabbath as consisting of waking by sunrise and making breakfast, which entailed baking biscuits and bread, boiling ham and beans, stewing apples, and brewing coffee. While doing this, she did not get to read the Bible with the rest of the group, so she had to do so alone. After cleaning the dishes, she took a short nap, made supper, sang “a few tunes” with another individual, took a ride on a pony, sang some more, had prayers, and then went to sleep (Roe 1864; see entries for May 15 and 29). These were typical sabbaths for Roe, and her descriptions, as well as those previously cited, reveal how those traveling west attempted to negotiate sacred and secular demands. Even though they did not maintain their traditional sabbath observances while on the trail, a sense of sabbath still shaped their thoughts and activities. For some, sabbath observance functioned as an indicator of civilization; that is, it served as a distinguishing marker between high social development and inferior forms of society.

Struggles between the sacred and the secular have not been confined to nineteenth-century Americans moving west. The Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski explores similar conflicts in his film series entitled *The Decalogue*, composed of ten one-hour segments, each based on one of the commandments. Widely acclaimed, it was made for Polish television in 1988 and 1989. While trying to relate the commandments to modern life, one reviewer observed, “The films do not pretend to provide answers, but to present questions.” In doing so, “The viewer is not overwhelmed with super-colossal images of divine power but, instead, is intellectually and emotionally stretched by a series of closely observed moral dilemmas” (Cunneen 1997: 12, and 2001: 79; see also S. Kaufmann 2000; Tennant 2001). The *New York Times* also published a series on the Ten Commandments profiling how some Americans struggled with the Decalogue’s implications for modern life (Hedges 2002).

## Chapters 25–31 The Tabernacle

As Exodus 24 closes, the reader learns that Moses has ascended Mt Sinai, remaining there for forty days and nights. While there, he received the instructions for constructing the tabernacle and related items (Exod. 25:1–31:17), as well as the stone tablets bearing the Ten Commandments (Exod. 31:18). The actual construction of the tabernacle and its accessories occurs in chapters 35–40.

### *Ancient uses*

Modern critical scholars have attempted to discern the relationship between Exodus 25–31 and 35–40, while questioning the historical existence of the tabernacle. Ancient readers, however, did not think in this manner. At least by the Hellenistic period, the tabernacle had come to be understood symbolically (Childs 1974: 537). Although it did not receive great attention in the New Testament, Stephen’s speech before the high priest alludes to Exod. 25:40 by elaborating on God’s many appearances to Israel (Acts 7:44). The tabernacle also constitutes an important part of the argument in the book of Hebrews that Jesus is superior to the Mosaic high priest. The writer quotes Exod. 25:40 to demonstrate that the earthly tabernacle was a mere shadow of the heavenly one, and therefore inferior (Heb. 8:1–7). Other writers before and after the book of Hebrews also talked about a heavenly tabernacle (1 *Enoch* 14:16–18;

*Jubilees* 31:14; *Testament of Levi* 5:1–2; 2 *Enoch* 20:1–4; Rev. 4:1–2, 6, 8; Wisd. 9:8; 2 Bar. 4:3–5; Pseudo-Philo 11.15; see Kugel 1997: 418–20). Reflecting Platonic philosophy, Philo explains:

He [i.e., Moses] saw with the soul's eye the immaterial forms of the material objects about to be made, and these forms had to be reproduced in copies perceived by the senses, taken from the original draught, so to speak, and from patterns conceived in the mind. For it was fitting that the construction of the sanctuary should be committed to him who was truly high priest, in order that his performance of the rites belonging to his sacred office might be in more than full accordance and harmony with the fabric.

So the shape of the model was stamped upon the mind of the prophet, a secretly painted or moulded prototype, produced by immaterial and invisible forms; and then the resulting work was built in accordance with that shape by the artist impressing the stampings upon the material substances required in each case. (1935: *Life of Moses* 2.15–26)

Philo also allegorizes the tabernacle's various aspects found in Exodus 25–8. For example, the ark represents the non-physical world, the table physical items, the lampstand the heavens, and the tabernacle the elements (air, water, fire, and earth) (1937b: *Questions and Answers* 2.59, 69, 73, 83). Josephus contends that everything about the tabernacle and the priestly garments had been made in imitation of the universe, and so ought to cause those who revile Jews to realize that Moses was a holy man and therefore cease persecuting them (1974b: *Antiquities* 3.7.7).

Other emphases also arose from these chapters. Sirach does not discuss the tabernacle, but sees the items associated with the high priest's clothing (Exodus 28) as reflecting the stature of Aaron and the priesthood (45:6–17). The rabbis also discuss the implications of the various descriptions of the tabernacle and its accoutrements. For example, the table of showbread provokes extended discussion regarding subjects such as its placement and the making of the loaves (*b. Menachoth* 94–102).

### *Medieval uses*

Not surprisingly, the early church overwhelmingly interpreted Exodus 25–31 in light of Christian ideals, with each aspect reflecting something of the Christian faith. Whereas Jewish interpreters had viewed the earthly tabernacle as a copy of the heavenly one, Christian readers understood it to prefigure the Church. The tabernacle was significant, therefore, not for what it was or how it functioned in ancient Israel, but for what it represented. Gregory the Great,



Plate 17 The Tabernacle. Ashburnham Pentateuch, fol. 76r. Bibliothèque nationale de France.

for example, says that the two cherubim on the ark's mercy seat signify the Old and New Testaments. The twelve stones in the high priest's breastplate, according to Tertullian, point to the twelve apostles (Lienhard 2001: 122–38). Origen identifies the various materials used to construct the tabernacle with those traits characteristic of the Church. “Its faith can be compared to the gold; the

word of preaching to silver; bronze to patience; incorruptible wood to the knowledge which comes through the wood, or to the incorruptibility of purity which never grows old; virginity to linen; the glory of suffering to scarlet; the splendor of love to purple; the hope of the kingdom of heaven to the blue” (1982: 340). The Ashburnham Pentateuch represents the tabernacle somewhat in accord with the instructions in Exodus, but then includes various elements indicating that it prefigured the Church (Verkerk 2004: 97–102, fol. 76r) (see plate 17). Yet even though these and other Christian interpreters connected the tabernacle with Christianity, the first Christian work entirely devoted to it came from Bede during the early eighth century (Bede 1994: p. xv).

Bede gave a verse-by-verse allegorical rendering of Exod. 24:12–30:21. He defines proper Christian belief and actions, condemning those not living in accord with them. Explaining the command in Exod. 25:1 to bring the first fruits to God as meaning that one should always attribute doing good to divine grace, he chastises the Pelagians for believing that good could be done apart from this grace. He also finds in these chapters numerous allusions to the Church’s spreading the Gospel throughout the world. Reflecting an institutionally centered approach, he explains how the Gospel should be disseminated. The four gold rings on the corners of the ark of the covenant (Exod. 25:12) represent the four Gospels. Their position on the ark’s four corners indicates the preaching of the Gospel to the four corners of the world, while the poles used to carry the ark represent the teachers who carry the Lord to other people. He furthers this connection in Exod. 27:6 by explaining the poles used to carry the altar as “the teachers who are accustomed to carry the Holy Church (as it were) as long as they either bear the faith and the sacraments of truth by preaching to those who are ignorant of them, or strengthen them by confirming them in those who have already come to know and accept them.”

Bede also uses the reference in Exod. 25:26 to the table’s four feet to explain how Scripture ought to be interpreted by means of the quadriga, or the four senses of scripture. But he recognizes that not all who hear Scripture have the same capacity for understanding (Exod. 25:29), as is evident from the various vessels placed on the table. “For it is not possible for one and the same doctrine to be suitable for everyone.” Elaborating further on biblical interpretation, he teaches that Exod. 25:38, which describes the tools used to extinguish the lampstand’s lights, indicates that not all Scripture is to be handled in the same manner. Some commands are to be obeyed at all times, even in the next life (Exod. 20:3; Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:39; Mark 12:30). Others are to be obeyed in this life, although the reward for obedience will not come until the next (Luke 16:9). Yet others were to be kept literally during Old Testament times, but with the advent of the Gospel are now to be kept mystically in the Church (for example, the sabbath and the sacrifice of the Passover lamb).

The tabernacle itself represents the Church in this life, and therefore presents Bede the opportunity to discuss Church life. For instance, the tabernacle's eleven goat-hair coverings (Exod. 26:7) represent "the rulers of the Holy Church, by whose industriousness and labour the dignity of the same Church is protected and defended with unceasing care, lest the life and faith of the elect should be liable to be corrupted by the seduction of heretics, or defiled by the depravity of false catholics, or contaminated by the filth of tempting vices, or brought down into despondency by a lack of material resources." The boards of the tabernacle (Exod. 26:15–16) denote the apostles and their successors through whom the Church expands into the world. Using the description of the priestly garments in Exodus 28, he expounds the qualities and life-style appropriate to church leaders. The gold plate fastened to the high priest's turban reading "Holy to the Lord" indicates "the very pledge of our profession," that is, "each of us saying with the Apostle, *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Exod. 28:36–8). Bede sees in the description and positioning of the bronze basin (Exod. 30:18–20) an allusion to baptism and the "washing of compunction and of tears which is required of us at all times, and especially when we draw near to minister at the heavenly mysteries." Conversion must be accompanied by tears shed over one's sins, but tears also arise from yearning to leave this life for the Christian's ultimate goal, eternal life. His development of these chapters makes clear that the Church will convey the believer safely to heaven.

Bede's exposition of Exod. 24:12–30:21 essentially comprises a handbook on the Christian life. He treats a wide range of topics that would not have been possible in his own context without using the four senses of Scripture, while the passage's ancient context contributes little meaning. Articulating a concept of this life that made the Church central to it, the tabernacle itself could not be understood apart from the Church. Medieval Christian interpreters continued to treat the text in this manner, although the renewed emphasis on literal interpretation that arose in the twelfth century brought greater appreciation for the tabernacle. Nicholas of Lyra's fourteenth-century *Postilla in Testamentum Vetus* (one of the most influential works of the late Middle Ages) inserted numerous illustrations of it at appropriate points in his commentary on Exodus 25–8. Reflecting his literal exegesis, he made the illustrations with concern for exact accuracy, forming a type of visual exegesis (Kaczynski 1973). Nonetheless, spiritualized readings continued. The *Bible moralisée* identifies God's commanding Moses to construct the ark of the covenant with Jesus' command to Peter to form the Church; the ark signifies the Church (Guest 1995: 80, fol. 24rA). The fifteenth-century blockbook *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* (*Mirror of Salvation*) portrays the ark (Exod. 25:10–22), which contained the Ten Commandments, as signifying the Virgin Mary, who did not break any of



the commandments (Labriola and Smeltz 2002: 36–37, 115). Although the meaning of the various details related to the tabernacle proved flexible in the hands of Christian interpreters, their shared Christian context unified them.

The image of Bezalel, the craftsman mentioned in Exodus 31, became the medieval prototype of the master jeweler, while also contributing to a Christian mystical understanding of the relationship with God. Richard of St Victor (1123–73), as well as the author of the fourteenth-century work *The Cloud of Unknowing*, portrays Bezalel as “the prototype of the ideal Christian labouring, like the jeweler in *Pearl*, towards a vision of God by his own spiritual effort with the help of divine grace.” Casting him as the model of the “earth-bound artist, achieving a spiritual vision of grace, by sheer craftsmanship and the perfection of accomplished art,” Richard explains how this vision is achieved:

We make progress in the grace of contemplation by three ways: sometimes by grace alone, sometimes through effort added to grace, sometimes through the teaching of others. We have types and examples of these three in Moses, Bezaleel and Aaron. Moses first saw the ark in the mountain, and in the cloud, without any labour on his part and solely by the revelation of God. Bezaleel by his own labour, made such an ark as he could imagine, Aaron was accustomed to see the ark already made by the labour of others. We see the ark of God without any human effort, after the fashion of Moses when we receive the ray of contemplation solely by God’s showing. Yet afterwards as in the case of Bezaleel, we make progress in contemplation by our own work, when we acquire skill in using the same grace by our own effort and activity. And then we attain to seeing the ark of God as by the work of others, when we grow accustomed to the use of this grace as it is taught us by others. (1957: 181; *Benjamin Major* 5.1)

Like Richard, *The Cloud of Unknowing* also uses Bezalel to demonstrate the proper way to interact with God, by detailing how the ark of the covenant expresses the practice of contemplation. The ark contains the virtues of the soul, and Bezalel, along with Moses and Aaron, shows how to attain them. Another fourteenth-century work, *Pearl*, portrays its author as a jeweler, fashioning the pearl of Christian faith. While the poet of *Pearl* does not mention Bezalel, “the thematic and structural relationships of the pearl and its setting are so deeply encased in biblical thought that the association with the jeweler-craftsman of the Book of Exodus may be one of the mysteries woven into the fabric of the poem.” The medieval poet also makes significant use of Exodus 28 in describing the Heavenly City (Finkelstein 1973: 417–22).

Of course Jewish interpreters read Exodus 25–31 differently from their Christian counterparts, believing these chapters to be part of a climactic event – the giving of Torah, rather than pointing to something greater. *Midrash Tanhuma* relates Exod. 25:1–2 to Prov. 4:2, showing the Torah’s superiority by



comparing it to someone who acquires material goods. Although goods are sometimes lost, this does not happen to one who acquires Torah. Instead, its various parts consistently support the person possessing it. *Exodus Rabbah* (33.1) connects the commands to take an offering for God (Exod. 25:1) and to build a sanctuary (Exod. 25:8) by comparing God to a king whose only daughter married another king. This king requested that his son-in-law always provide a place for him to live, because he could not bear to leave his daughter. So it was with God who gave Israel the Torah, but so loved it that he could not bear to part with it. He asked Israel to build him a sanctuary, therefore, so that he could dwell with both Israel and the Torah. Through this and other illustrations, the rabbis constantly affirm its value. They point out that the table, the altar, and the ark of Exodus 25 refer respectively to the crown of kingship, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of the Torah. Noting that the ark stood above the table and the altar, thereby indicating the Torah's superiority, they conclude, "When a man acquires the Torah, it is as though he has acquired all the rest" (*Exodus Rabbah* 34.2). Likewise the instruction in Exod. 27:20 to use pure oil to fuel the tabernacle lamp indicates how the Torah gives light to its students. The one neglecting Torah, by contrast, is like someone stumbling and falling in the darkness. "It is the same with the ordinary individual who has no Torah in him; he strikes against sin, stumbles, and dies" (*Exodus Rabbah* 36.3). The Torah's value is also revealed when explaining the rationale for choosing Aaron to be God's priest rather than Moses (Exod. 28:1). According to the rabbis, Moses was displeased about not being chosen, but God explained that he had given him the greater honor by bestowing the Torah on him (*Exodus Rabbah* 37.4).

Whereas Christians made sense of Exodus 25–31 in light of their relationship with Jesus, Jews did so in terms of their relationship with God. Christians used these chapters to exalt the Church, Jews to glorify the Torah. Like medieval Christians, however, Jews, beginning halfway through the Middle Ages increasingly emphasized the literal aspects of the tabernacle. Ibn Ezra, for example, explains how the Israelites obtained acacia wood to make the various items associated with the tabernacle (Exod. 25:5), surmising that a forest of acacia trees must have existed next to Mt Sinai. He also elucidates the description of Bezalel in Exod. 31:3 in terms reminiscent of his discussion of Exod. 23:20–6 and 24:25:

Wisdom (*chokmah*) refers to the type of intelligence that is stored in the back of the brain. The word *tevunah* (understanding) and also the word *binah* (reason) are related to the word *ben* (between). They refer to the intellectual faculty that lies in the middle cavity of the brain between knowledge and wisdom. For wisdom is situated in the posterior cavity of the brain, and knowledge, which is

gathered by the senses, is located in the cavities of the brain that are adjacent to the forehead.

He then concludes that Bezalel had mastered “mathematics, geometry, proportions, astronomy, biology, and the secret of the human soul” (1996: 536, 646). This explanation reflects his concern with reason and science, leading him to integrate scientific understandings with the biblical text.

### *Modern uses*

As the Middle Ages ended, Jews and Christians continued to use Exodus 25–31 to explain their respective contexts in literal and non-literal manners. But literal explanations, emphasizing the passage’s original context, increased. Hans Holbein the younger, for example, illustrates Exodus 25 by portraying precisely the tabernacle accoutrements in his sixteenth-century woodcuts *Historiarum Veteris Testamenti Icones* (Holbein 1976). By the nineteenth century, efforts to understand the ancient background of Exodus 25–31 had created doubts about the tabernacle’s authenticity. Julius Wellhausen put forth what became a commonly accepted idea among critical scholars. The tabernacle never existed, but was a literary projection of the Solomonic Temple back into the Mosaic period (Childs 1974: 530–2). In 1887 an Oxford professor, George Rawlinson (brother of the distinguished scholar Henry Rawlinson), characterized scholarly opinion thus:

Among the instructions given to Moses on Mount Sinai was a long series (Exod. xxv.–xxx.), which had reference to the externals of worship, and involved the exercise of various arts and industries, belonging to a somewhat advanced civilization – a civilization which has seemed to many out of harmony with the circumstances of the people, just escaped from slavery, and from employment in agriculture, building, brick-making, and other servile labours. It is therefore important to consider what the opportunities the Hebrews had had of attaining proficiency in the arts and industries in question, and what it may reasonably be concluded that their civilization in these respects was at the time of the exodus. (1887: 155)

Rawlinson reflects scholarly efforts to reconcile the materials and technology necessary to produce the items mentioned in Exodus 25–31 with the realities of a newly freed slave people living in a desert wilderness. Scholars like ibn Ezra had wondered about some of the same things, but did not question the authenticity of the biblical accounts, assuming that some explanation for

the events' portrayal must exist. Furthermore, just as ibn Ezra had explained these accounts in terms of contemporary knowledge, so too modern scholars applied the growing information about the ancient periods and civilizations. Many post-Enlightenment scholars concluded that the passages in question were written at a later time and, therefore, reflected that period's technology. Exodus 25–31 was deemed historically unreliable. Arguments like these sparked raging debates as some defended the Bible's historical reliability, believing its credibility to be linked to its historical veracity. The point of reference for understanding these chapters had expanded from Christianity and Judaism to the discipline of history. Efforts at reconciling Exodus 25–31 as religious, theological, and historical texts proved just as difficult to resolve as the conflicts arising between Christian and Jewish uses.

Even in light of the surge in reading Exodus 25–31 literally, non-literal uses continued to thrive. Bezalel came to describe a style of art established by Boris Schatz in 1905 at his Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts in Jerusalem, which Joseph Budko reopened in the 1930s. Other artists working in this style were Ephraim Lilien and Ze'ev Raban (Ronnen 2002). Arthur Szyk illustrates Exod. 25:8 and 36:2 by portraying Bezalel as the master artisan, holding the plans of the tabernacle while construction proceeds behind him. Bezalel's Jewish identity is clearly signaled by the Star of David adorning his belt buckle (Cohen 2002). Illustrations of the tabernacle, especially in Bibles and Bible dictionaries, have been commonly used to convey allegorical teachings. Reflecting the overwhelming popularity of modern allegorical readings, Beth Moore, a favorite speaker among many American Evangelicals, characterizes the tabernacle as "the most vivid portrait of God's Son in the Old Testament," using it to teach that "the desire of a holy God (is) to dwell among mortals." She propounds its tenets by infusing popular evangelical theology into the biblical text (1995: 7, 9).

Ellen Frankel uses the passage describing the priestly vestments to speculate on those whose job it was to make these garments. In her creative dialogue between various ancient and modern characters, she has the rabbis extolling the clothing's beauty and detail. "Our daughters" – the current and future generations of Jewish women – ask who made such garments. "Our mothers" – the collective wisdom of the Jewish folk tradition – reply, "Although the Torah doesn't say, we can make a pretty good educated guess! Given that women have been the primary weavers and tailors in every culture since before recorded time, it's likely that it was the Israelite women who knit, sewed, and ripped." She then relates this conversation to the plight of the Russian Jewish seamstress, engaged in difficult and prolonged work. Yet Lilith – the voice of protest – points out that some seamstresses, representing the resistance and power of

the oppressed, had actually produced a shroud for the Czar (Frankel 1996: 134–5). Frankel cleverly uses Exodus 28, a passage not even mentioning women, to highlight and address their status and treatment. As with all of the preceding interpretations, Frankel puts aside the original intent of the biblical chapters and produces a lively reading from contemporary circumstances.

# Exodus 32–40

As the last major section of Exodus begins, the Israelites commit idolatry by making and worshipping the golden calf. This act had serious implications, provoking YHWH to send a plague on the people and to refuse to travel in their midst (although he relented on the latter at Moses' behest). Moses, enraged by the Israelites' faithlessness, shattered the tablets of the Law and marshaled the Levites against the people, killing 3,000 of them (Exodus 32–3). After Moses reconciled with YHWH on behalf of the people, the covenant was reestablished (Exodus 33–4), and the people built the tabernacle (Exodus 35–40). As recounted in Exodus, the story leaves much room for interpreting the characters' actions and motives, something that readers have exploited with great diversity and vigor.

## Chapters 32–34 The Golden Calf

### *Ancient Judaism*

Within biblical tradition the golden calf episode symbolizes Israel's unfaithfulness. The Deuteronomist portrays Moses as cautioning Israel that their occupation of Canaan would come about through YHWH's power rather than their own righteousness (Deuteronomy 9–10). The golden calf incident emphasizes Israel's rebellious nature, while receiving the Law tablets actually highlights the heinous nature of Israel's idolatry and demonstrates Moses' ability as an intercessor. These emphases become more apparent when the two biblical versions are compared. The Exodus account prefaces the calf incident with Moses having received the Law tablets (31:18), while Israel's disobedience subsequently precipitates dire consequences. The Deuteronomist begins his account by referring to Israel's provocation of YHWH (9:7–8), then contrasts Israel's unfaithfulness with Moses' self-sacrifice and care of the people. Portrayed as going without food and water in YHWH's presence while the Israelites sin with the calf (9:9, 18; Exodus mentions this at the end of its account [Exod. 34:28]), in Deuteronomy he appears less hostile and more protective of the people, even though he is frustrated and angry. Although in both accounts he implores YHWH not to destroy the people, in Deuteronomy he lies prostrate before YHWH, hoping to save the people (9:18, 25–9), while actually saving Aaron's life (9:20).

The sequence of events also helps communicate different images of Moses. In Deuteronomy he goes down the mountain, smashes the tablets, lies prostrate before YHWH, intercedes for Aaron, and then destroys the calf (9:15–21). In Exodus he goes down the mountain, smashes the tablets, destroys the calf, leads the Levites to kill 3,000 Israelites, and then returns to YHWH to intercede for the Israelites. YHWH responds by sending a plague and vowing not to dwell with Israel, whereupon Moses institutes the practice of pitching the Tent of Meeting outside the Israelite camp. Whenever he enters the Tent to meet YHWH, the people bow down. As a result of Moses' favored position with YHWH, YHWH again consents to accompany the people in their travels. Furthermore, YHWH shows Moses his glory, causing Moses to bow down. The Exodus account thus communicates a distinct rupture in the relationship between YHWH and Israel. While Moses is favored by YHWH, Israel is tolerated merely as a result of Moses' favored status. In Deuteronomy, he is also favored, but is not nearly so exalted. He appears closer to YHWH than the people in Exodus, but closer to the people in Deuteronomy. Both accounts highlight Israel's rebelliousness, but Exodus widens the rift between YHWH

and his people by positioning Moses more closely to YHWH. Deuteronomy bridges the rift by showing Moses protecting the people from YHWH's wrath, while also demonstrating the tenuous position of Israel created by Moses not accompanying them into the Promised Land. He would not be there to protect them when, in keeping with their rebellious history, they would sin. Only fear of YHWH manifested in obedience to the Law could save them (10:12–22). The golden calf episode thus became a means to warn against unfaithfulness by representing the rupture created by Israel's disobedience (Exodus) and the precarious situation such sinfulness placed them in (Deuteronomy). Both these emphases seem to be present in the account of Jeroboam's setting up of golden calves in Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12–13).

Psalms 106 reflects these dual emphases, but also points out that YHWH had mercy and compassion on Israel, something not overlooked in Exodus 32–4. While beholding YHWH's glory, Moses received what came to be a standard description of YHWH as merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, forgiving, but not excusing sin (Exod. 34:6–7). These sentiments, often repeated (Num. 14:17–19; Pss. 86:15; 111:4; Neh. 9:16–25; Mic. 7:18–20), gave hope that the rift between YHWH and his people was not impassable. Yet YHWH's wrath was not always far away. Nahum (1:2–3) reminds his hearers that while YHWH is slow to anger, he can still be provoked. Not having limitless patience, he will not allow the wicked to go unpunished. The golden calf episode demonstrated that.

Although the twin emphases on Israel's rebellious nature and YHWH's graciousness dominated the way subsequent interpreters used the golden calf incident, they did not obviate other interpretations. Philo used Israel's rebelliousness to demonstrate the Levites' piety and faithfulness, explaining that because Israel was so pious, as demonstrated by the multitude of sacrifices they offered, a large number of priestly personnel were needed to manage the worship activities. The Levites' actions during the golden calf incident led to their selection as priests. Philo attributes the idolatry to the actions of "men of unstable nature" who thought that Moses' absence presented an opportunity to involve themselves in "impious practices" and to become "zealous devotees of Egyptian fables." Hearing the revelry from "the great masses of men" in the camp below, Moses struggled with "God's love for him and his love for man." As he pondered what to do, God commanded him to return, although he remained long enough to lessen God's wrath against the people. Classifying Israel's idolatry as a "contagion" that spread throughout the camp, Philo explains that Moses wanted to determine who was incurable, who objected to the actions, and who participated but then repented. So he administered a test by calling on those who sided with God to come to him. The Levites ran with haste, zealously carrying out his command to kill the offenders. Proving

themselves meritorious in defending God's honor, Moses awarded them the priesthood (1935: *Life of Moses* 2.31–2, 49).

In keeping with his efforts to portray the Jewish people and religion favorably by showing Moses' royal, legislative, and priestly skills, Philo turned a negative story about Israel into something positive. He parlayed the golden calf incident into a stage for exhibiting Israel's positive traits, having Moses appear as the ultimate priestly mediator who is concerned equally with God and humanity. Identifying the most important attribute of the priesthood as piety, Philo then stresses Moses' piety by demonstrating his receiving on Sinai divine instructions related to his priestly duties (1935: *Life of Moses* 2.13–15). Moses discharged these by building the tabernacle and giving those most zealous for God (the Levites) oversight of the sacrificial system. The priestly personnel themselves demonstrated their dedication and zealotry by their actions at Sinai. Finally, Philo attributes Israel's idolatry not to an inherently flawed character, but to an overpowering but curable disease (*Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* 32:1, 19, and *b. Shabbat* 89a make Satan the cause of the idolatry, while *Targum Onkelos* 32:25 says that Aaron "made them worthless by causing them to assume a bad reputation for that generation"). Rather than use the incident to disparage Israel, he focuses on the story's favorable characters and actions, putting them forth as the norm for Jewish behavior.

Pseudo-Philo (chapter 12 in Charlesworth 1985: vol. 2) tried to reform Aaron's image by portraying him as a victim of force, while at the same time maintaining Moses' heroic stature. Accordingly, the people's hearts were corrupted, leading them to ask Aaron for an idol. When he attempted to discourage them, they would not be deterred. Quoting Gen. 11:6, Pseudo-Philo indicates that only God could have stopped them, while suggesting that Aaron consented to their demand only because he feared the people's great strength. Moses, upon seeing the idolatry, "became like a woman bearing her firstborn who, when she is in labor, her hands are upon her chest and she has no strength to help herself bring forth." He rallied, however, and destroyed the calf. Pseudo-Philo maintains the lofty reputations of Moses and Aaron by exonerating the latter and glorifying the former. In similar fashion, one rabbinic tradition records that Aaron saw Hur lying dead, reasoning that if he did not comply with the people's request he too would be murdered, and then the people would never be forgiven (*b. Sanhedrin* 7a and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* 32:5). *Targum Neofiti I* (32:5), by contrast, portrays Aaron as seeing Hur before the altar, thereby indicating that Hur had participated in the idolatry.

Although in rabbinic tradition Israel's worship of the golden calf was thought in some way to be at the root of all their sins, and partially responsible for all of God's judgments on the world (*b. Sanhedrin* 102a), it also demonstrated Moses' greatness. Applying Isa. 53:12 to his actions, the rabbis believe



that Moses exposed himself to death when offering to be expunged from YHWH's book in exchange for the Israelites' forgiveness (Exod. 32:32). He also bore the sins of many, because he gained the Israelites' atonement, making intercession for sinners by asking YHWH to have mercy on them (*b. Sotah* 14a). Furthermore, the rabbis explain the breaking of the tablets as something Moses did on his own initiative, albeit with divine approval. His actions were justified, because if foreigners were not allowed to eat the Passover lamb (Exod. 12:43), then Israel should certainly not be allowed to have the Torah while acting as apostates (*b. Yevamot* 62a; see also the idea that when Moses broke the tables, the words flew up to heaven, *b. Pesahim* 87b and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* 32:19). Yet Moses still gave of himself to the people while protecting the Torah. According to the rabbis, when YHWH informed Moses of the people's idolatry, Moses lost all strength. When YHWH vowed to destroy Israel, though, Moses realized that its life depended on him. So he arose and implored YHWH to be merciful, taking hold of him as someone might grab another's garment (*b. Berachot* 32a). Had it not been for Moses, Israel would have perished. Aaron's response, on the other hand, encouraged heretics to put forth support for their beliefs (*t. Megillah* 3.36–7). Moses' privileged status was further demonstrated by his being allowed to see the back of God, which the rabbis understand to mean the knot of the tefillin (*b. Berakhot* 7a; in *b. Berakhot* 6a God is said to wear tefillin).

### *Ancient Christianity*

Christian writers used the golden calf incident in similar ways to their Jewish counterparts, but their different theological context produced divergent implications. Some pointed to it as an example of behavior that should be avoided (1 Cor. 10:7), while others used it to illustrate how Jews first rejected God and then rejected Jesus (Acts 7:38–43), thus demonstrating Christianity's superiority (2 Cor. 3:7–18). Paul develops Exod. 33:19 to show God's freedom in choosing who may be designated as his people (Rom. 9:14–16). This forms part of his argument for redefining the term "Israelite" so as to include those who accept Jesus as the Messiah and exclude those who do not, regardless of their genetic connection to Abraham. The *Epistle of Barnabas* understands the idolatry as the reason why Jews no longer possess the covenant, which has now passed to Christians. Apprehending this, Moses broke the tablets to signify the annulment (4.5–9; 14.1–9). Yet not all early Christian writers use Israel's idolatry to establish Christian superiority. To the writer of *1 Clement* (53–4), Moses' offer to have himself blotted out of YHWH's book stands as a shining example of love.

The actions of Moses and the Levites typically provided the framework for promoting desired behavior, while the Israelites' actions acted as the counterpart. So, according to Jerome, Moses' efforts to curb YHWH's wrath encourages people to pray, while Ambrose points out his unselfish behavior in offering himself to be blotted out of God's book. To Cassiodorus, Moses' anger at the Israelites' idolatry and his offer of self-destruction on their behalf are "devoted and splendid" attitudes. Gregory the Great holds up the Levites as examples encouraging pastors to rebuke the sins of their parishioners (Lienhard 2001: 141, 143–5). Ephrem explains that Moses broke the tablets because they would be useless to "a people who had exchanged the very Lawgiver for a Calf." He then characterizes Moses' two roles: "On the mountain Moses was an intercessor, but below he was an avenger; confronted with God's justice he sought mercy, but in the camp he became a zealot who carried out chastisement" (Salvesen 1995: *Exodus Commentary* 32.8). For Ephrem the proper response to others' sinfulness was twofold: to beg for divine mercy on behalf of sinners, but also to rebuke these individuals zealously. Augustine, by contrast, concludes that Exodus 32 sanctions the persecution of heretics by the Roman state (rather than by individual Christians), because such actions ultimately benefit heretics (Walzer 1968: 4–6). Gregory of Nyssa explains that the people's idolatry prevented them from sharing in "God-given grace." They had acted "like a little child who escapes the attention of his pedagogue," giving in to "uncontrolled impulses" and forcing Aaron to make the calf. Moses, however, purified the people's guilt with their own blood (1978: *Life of Moses* 1.57–60). Caesarius of Arles remarks: "The first tablets were broken on account of the infidelity of the Jewish people, but the second ones were preserved because of the faith of Christians." He then surveys numerous other biblical incidents in order that his hearers "may clearly recognize that a figure and mystery of the Catholic Church was shown very frequently in all the books of Scripture ever since the beginning of the world. If you will remember these truths, as we hope, you can clearly explain the mystery of the Christian religion to both Jews and pagans whenever there is an opportunity to do so" (1964: 117).

Christians also found Exodus 32–4 helpful in explaining the proper relationship to God. While considering the deeper meaning of Moses' ascent up Sinai to receive the Law a second time, Gregory of Nyssa perceives a model for following God. According to him, "If these things [i.e., the passing of God before Moses] are looked at literally, not only will the understanding of those who seek God be dim, but their concept of him will also be inappropriate." Moses' ascent models the spirit's ascent to God as it is drawn from the beauty that is seen to the Beauty [God] that is beyond it. Just as Moses wanted to see God, so the spirit wants to see Beauty face to face. When Moses is told that no

one can see God and live, the spirit understands “that the Divine is by its very nature infinite, enclosed by no boundary” and that what is “unenclosed” cannot be “grasped.” Yet the person’s desire for the Good [God] is never satisfied, constantly ascending, leading Gregory to counsel that “one must always, by looking at what he can see, rekindle his desire to see more.” The springboard for this constant ascent is the rock (Exod. 33:21), which is Jesus. As Moses stood on the rock and beheld God passing by, so the Christian understands that “to follow God wherever he might lead is to behold God.” The follower of God sees only his back, because if he saw his face, he would not be following God, but facing him, and “what looks virtue in the face is evil.” The one who sees God’s face, therefore, cannot live because he is evil (1978: *Life of Moses* 2.221–55). Gregory had sketched a never-ending journey of seeking virtue in which the good and the beautiful that one encounters in this world constantly points to the ultimate Good and Beauty (see also 1.7–10, 15). At the foundation of this spirituality is an understanding of an infinite and unbounded God that pushes the individual to transcend the physical. In many ways Gregory’s hermeneutic reflects his spirituality by always seeking to look past the physical. Of course Gregory, as well as others, understood this spirituality to occur only within the context of Christianity. Origen, for example, asserts that the cleft of the rock stood for the revelation of Jesus, while Augustine associates Moses’ experience with God as prefiguring Jesus’ coming (Lienhard 2001: 150, 152).

### *Medieval uses*

While the golden calf story provided Christians with a vehicle with which to denounce certain groups or practices, it did the same for Muslims. The Qur’an twice records it in detail (Suras 7.148–54 and 20.83–98), but also makes other brief references to it (Suras 2.51, 54, 92–3, and 4.153). In Sura 7 Moses does not break the tablets, but instead drags Aaron by the hair of his head. When Aaron explains that the people had almost killed him, Moses then prays for forgiveness for himself and Aaron, leading the Qur’an to assert that those who “invent falsehoods” will suffer God’s wrath, while those who repent and believe will be forgiven. Some Islamic exegetes used this Qur’anic passage to criticize various groups for different reasons. One commentator points out the similarities between a group of Islamic mystics and those who worshipped the calf, thereby discrediting the mystics (Albayrak 2002: 56–8). Sura 20 explains the event as a divine test in which a figure named Samiri made the calf and led the people to worship it. Aaron tells the people that it is a test, but they vow to

worship the calf until Moses returns. The account ends with Moses vowing its destruction and asserting God's uniqueness.

Within Jewish contexts Exodus 32–4 addressed important ideas related to Judaism. Exod. 34:27, for example, reads, "And YHWH said to Moses, "Write these words for in accordance with (*al pi*) these words I will make a covenant with you and Israel." The *Midrash Tanhuma* (9.17–18) explains that while the phrase "write these words" refers to the Written Law, the Hebrew words *al pi* (literally "on the mouth of") refer to the Oral Law (see also *b. Gittin* 60b). Realizing that the Talmud "separate(d) Israel from the peoples of the world," medieval Jews used this verse to affirm the divine authority of both the Torah and the Talmud. This idea of separation also helped explain Exod. 34:27, with the rabbis teaching that on Sinai Moses received the Bible, Mishnah, Talmud (Gemara), and Haggadah, as well as answers to any question a student might ask his teacher. When Moses asked God if he should write these things down for Israel, God responded that the nations would one day rule over Israel, depriving them of these things. So God decided to give only the Bible in writing, while the other works were given orally, "so that when the idolaters enslave them, they will remain distinct from them" (*Midrash Tanhuma* 9.17; *Exodus Rabbah* 47.1). Others point to the gravity of the golden calf incident, reasoning that there would have been no exile had this sin not been committed; nor would the tablets have been given to Israel had the sin been committed prior to Moses receiving them (*Exodus Rabbah* 32.1, 41.5). Some, however, did not completely blame Israel, indicating that when the exodus occurred, God wanted only to bring Israel out of Egypt (see Exod. 7:4, where "my people" is mentioned). But Moses implored God that repentant foreigners be allowed to go, and God consented. These proselytes then made the calf, causing Israel to sin by saying, "This is *your* God" (not *our* God; Exod. 32:4) (*Exodus Rabbah* 42.6; see also Rashi 1934: 180b). This reading reflects an uneasy feeling toward proselytes and their potentially adverse impact on Jewish faithfulness. Yet another tradition explains Israel's characterization as "stiffnecked" (Exod. 32:9) to mean that Israel is the most impudent and arrogant of all nations, while another indicates that it reveals a resolve or stubbornness helping Israel to remain obedient to God even in the Diaspora (*Exodus Rabbah* 42.9; see *b. Beitzah* 25b, where Israel was given the Torah because the people were impetuous). How could such divergent readings arise from the same passage? In general, each reflects the difficulties associated with living in the Diaspora, cautioning against certain dangers inherent in diasporic life, such as being led astray by proselytes who might bring with them ideas foreign to Judaism. The golden calf incident encourages devotion to God by warning of the gravity of unfaithfulness and counseling that stiffnecked obedience to God – that is, strict adherence to the Torah and the Talmud – could help them overcome it.

Aaron's actions and motivations captured the imaginations of Jewish readers as they attempted to understand why he consented to make the golden calf. Many of the same explanations given by the ancients continued during the Middle Ages, but other rationales also arose. His actions were explained as being motivated by fear over Hur's death, or his plan that while building an altar for the people Moses would come and presumably stop the idolatry (*Midrash Tanhuma* 9.14; *Exodus Rabbah* 41.7; Rashi 1934: 180b). Ibn Ezra lists and refutes several reasons for Aaron's actions. Among them were: (1) Aaron was afraid to die because he had seen Hur killed for opposing the people's actions; (2) Aaron was tricked by the people into making the calf; (3) the Aaron who made the calf was not Aaron, the brother of Moses; (4) Aaron's proclamation that "Tomorrow shall be a festival to the LORD" meant that the idolaters would be killed at that time; (5) Aaron meant to trick the idolaters by luring them into revealing themselves so that they could then be killed (also held by Saadiah Gaon). Ibn Ezra, by contrast, suggests that Aaron originally built it to glorify God, believing that God would not choose a messenger to reveal his commandments who would ultimately worship idols (claiming that all philosophers embraced this principle). It was unthinkable to him that Aaron would make an idol or that Israel had asked for one. Thinking that Moses had died, Israel wanted an image to lead them (just as the pillar of cloud and fire and Moses had done previously). Surmising that "the word *elohim* [god] refers to a glorious being dwelling in an image of a body," he identifies the calf as the image, being made "for the glory of God." But the "mixed multitude among Israel" turned the calf into an object of worship. Only a small group among the Israelites, therefore, were guilty of idolatry (the 3,000 killed by Moses represented only 0.5 percent of the 600,000 Israelites), but the whole people suffered for it (1996: 655–63). By exonerating Aaron, ibn Ezra reduces the seriousness of Israel's sin, following an earlier explanation that foreigners traveling with the Israelites caused the sin. To be sure, Israel and Aaron had both sinned, but their transgression was falling under the influence of foreigners, not blatant idolatry. Ramban (Nachmanides), however, gave a different explanation, finding the key to the entire incident in Exod. 32:1. The Israelites had not requested a god to worship, but someone to lead them, as Moses had done previously. Aaron made a calf, therefore, because it represented God's justice and power, and he wanted to direct the people's thoughts to this as they journeyed through the wilderness. Connecting Jer. 1:14, which mentions that evil (or in this case divine justice) comes to the world from the north (or the left when facing east), with Ezek. 1:10, which places the face of the ox on the left side of the divine chariot, Nachmanides points to the symbolism of the calf. The feast on the following day was designed to gain God's favor or power, represented by the calf (1973: 549–53).

Rashbam does not mention Aaron at all in his explanation, perhaps implying that he did not perceive Aaron's role to be significant. If so, this would also be tantamount to an indirect exoneration of him. But he understood the idolatry to have been the product of a divine test. Arguing that the gods requested by the Israelites were a type of teraphim that provided information through sorcery, he saw the Israelites as having been duped when the calf spoke to them by virtue of "impure spirits," which they mistakenly identified as the "divine holy spirit." In reality God had placed the impure spirits in the calf in order to determine the degree of the Israelites' faithfulness, but they obviously failed. Commenting on *Exod.* 32:25, where the people are said to have been "out of control" (Hebrew *parua'*, which he connects with *Prov.* 1:25 and 4:15 because of the presence of the same verb root), Rashbam explains that the verse indicates that the people had been separated from the commandments. Rather than portraying the Israelites as being in a state of delirium during the worship of the golden calf, he understands this verse simply to reflect their violation of the commandments (1997: 393–401).

These portrayals do not depict the Israelites as a mindless mob intent only on wholeheartedly engaging in idolatry, but as acting from more controlled and reasoned motivations. This is not Gregory of Nyssa's little child escaping the attention of his pedagogue. Jewish interpreters recast the image of the Israelites by means of their explanations of the actions of Moses, Aaron, and the people. The people were not exonerated, but their image was in a sense rehabilitated, especially when contrasted with Christian portrayals trying to demonstrate the Jews' unworthiness to be God's people.

Within medieval Christianity, overwhelmingly negative depictions of the Israelites continued. The *Vorau Books of Moses* describes the Israelites as "evil and audacious," being misled by "the harmful devil." "The misguided and dumb" dance around the calf until Moses stops it, giving an example to all leaders. God tells Moses, "If you avenge the heresy, then my anger will be stilled." As Moses set about rooting out the heresy, guilt appeared on the temples of all those responsible for the sin, causing him to mete out God's wrath. Accordingly, "no one was such a good friend, neither father nor mother, that they were spared. They spared neither friends nor enemies, avenging the honor of God and gathering more honor now than they had previously lost." After Moses informed God what had been done, he told Moses to give the people two commandments: to love God with all their mind, heart, and works, and their neighbor as themselves (E. M. Jacobson 1981: 53–7). The two commands, based on Jesus' words in *Matt.* 22:34–40, replaced the Ten Commandments, constituting a clear allusion to Christianity having replaced Judaism. At the same time this recounting of the golden calf taught Christians to respond

to those deemed to be involved in heresy by taking a militant and merciless posture against them.

Hildebert of Lavardin makes the same application by characterizing Moses as being “filled with zeal for justice.” He counsels priests to follow this example.

Moses is to be imitated in this, my dearest brothers: if the people of the Lord sin, let the priests gird on the swords of correction. First, let each priest put on the strongest possible sword, by disavowing the unlawful attractions of personal gain; then let him go through the middle of the camp. There let him who judges in this way destroy the camp, being in no way distracted by personal affection. With his sword let him spare neither brother nor friend. The priest ought to break into pieces the body of the idol, grind it into dust and sprinkle it in the water, and give it to the children of Israel to drink. The body of the idol is that of the devil or of the impious man. It is to be broken from pride and crushed into the dust of humility by the preacher’s words. Then it is to be sprinkled in the water of baptism and incorporated into the body of the faithful by confirmation. (1973: 186–7)

By placing the “impious man” on the same level as the devil, he leaves no doubt as to the source of sin, which justifies drastic measures. “Breaking,” “grinding,” and “crushing” are strong metaphors, graphically illustrating the proper treatment of such individuals. Once they and their sin are eliminated, the remnants are distributed via baptism and confirmation to the remaining faithful, becoming an object lesson to the rest of the Church.

The *Bible moralisée* makes similar connections, associating the idolatrous Israelites with “heretics” and “the miscreants and the usurers who by amassing their fortunes form the devil.” Moses represents Saint Peter helping the people overcome the devil’s onslaughts, and breaking the tablets signifies the destruction of the “Old Law” due to the people’s wickedness. While some “good Christians” repent their “misdeeds,” “Jesus Christ commands good Christians to burn the devil and trample him beneath their feet.” Furthermore, killing the idolaters represents excommunicating them (Guest 1995: 82–4; fols 25rA–26vA). The golden calf incident thus provided the Church with a paradigm for dealing with sinners.

Thomas Aquinas limits persecution of heretics by his reading of Exodus 32, even though he accepts it as a valid action. Denying suggestions that this passage allows any individual to punish sinners and that clergy can kill anyone deemed such, Aquinas understands it to be an exceptional act. God no longer issues such commands, especially since the Old Law had been replaced by the new covenant. He essentially considers Exodus 32 to be an invalid

source as regards justifying Christian persecution of heretics and sinners (Walzer 1968: 8–11). But in this instance, Aquinas represents a dissenting, minority voice.

One of the most influential uses of the golden calf incident actually arose in the late fourth century, when Jerome, in the Vulgate, rendered the Hebrew word *qeren* (“horns” or “rays of light”) in Exod. 34:29 with the Latin word *cornuta* (“horned”). As an ancient symbol of strength, honor, power, divinity, and kingship, horns were placed on images of Moses in the Western Church during the eleventh century, gaining popularity until they became commonplace. Their meaning, however, changed as medieval theologians typically explained them as horns of light, connecting them with the horns of the bishop’s mitre (Mellinkoff 1970: 1–2, 138–40).

### *Early modern uses*

Portraying Moses with horns continued into the modern period, as did using Exodus 32–4 to denounce those at odds with Christian understandings of God and religion. Martin Luther identifies worshipping the golden calf with the Jews continuing to “think in a carnal manner about God and Christ and fuse Scripture into a literal meaning which contains nothing that is eternal and divine but only earthly and mortal matters.” He reasons that the calf did not possess spirit and intellect, but was only “mortal flesh.” Therefore, “to fuse Holy Scripture, which is gold, with the human spirit and to arrange it according to human thought, this is truly to make a calf and a graven image” (1976: 40–1). The fact that Moses had to cover his face with a veil after conversing with God (Exod. 34:33–5) indicates that Jews failed to understand Moses’ teaching as pointing to the Gospel (1971: 170–1). Luther also discerns in this event three types of students of the Law. Worshippers of the golden calf represent those who despise the Law and “lead an impious life without fear.” Those who could not look upon Moses without him wearing the veil indicate individuals trying to fulfill the Law in their own power apart from grace. The final group – those able to look on Moses without the veil – refers to people who grasp the Law’s intent and impossible demand for freedom from sin’s power. Although the Law of Moses reveals the shamefulness of one’s sin, Christ’s glory makes it bearable and explains why the three disciples present at Christ’s transfiguration could look upon Moses’ face. Jesus’ grace overcomes the pain created by the Law’s exposure of sin (1960: 244–5).

John Knox, on the other hand, uses the golden calf episode to illustrate the power of God’s Word, thereby encouraging those suffering for the Gospel’s sake. This word, spoken through Moses, compelled the Levites to attack the



multitude, even though they were greatly outnumbered. Such an example of God's compelling power should encourage the persecuted to continue in the faith (1966: 3.310–11; *A Faithful Admonition to the Professors of God's Truth in England*). Knox does not view the incident from Moses' perspective, which usually led to denouncing some group or activity. Nor does he view it from Aaron's perspective or the Israelites', which typically led to exonerating some group. Instead he emphasizes the Levites' perspective, as a minority reacting against the majority in spite of the dangers inherent in doing so. The Levites, preferring "Goddes commaundement before bloude, nature, and also affection," and in turn receiving "blessing and prayse," modeled faithfulness by enthusiastically uniting in the face of hostility, danger, and emotional attachments. Likewise, his readers should remain steadfast, bound together by their common faith, and should overcome any ties that might shear the group apart. This kind of thinking provoked defensive and aggressive actions as the group banded together to fight. John Calvin similarly emphasizes that the Levites had killed kinsman as well as idol worshippers, showing that God's elect must do the same. According to Michael Walzer, "Calvin saw it [i.e., the Levites' action] as an example of zealous activity by a band of saints free from earthly and natural law, instruments of the divine will, but voluntary instruments" (Walzer 1968: 11–14).

In the hands of people like Knox and Calvin, the golden calf incident inspired aggressive action against outsiders. Their use of Moses' and the Levites' actions to support violent responses to opposition parallels Niccolo Machiavelli's application of the passage. But Machiavelli posits a different reason, arguing that Moses had no choice but to kill the idolaters. They represented a challenge to his authority, and in trying to preserve his rule, Moses had to respond violently. His example taught modern secular rulers to confront threats to their government and, if necessary, deal with them violently (Geerken 1999: 589–90). Knox, Calvin, and Machiavelli thus embrace the passage's violence as paradigmatic for defending their interests. Such an application did not merely affirm persecution as a technique to obtain conformity within the group, but advocated and even required aggression to protect and advance the group's interests.

Although readers of Exodus 32–4 often found these chapters tremendously useful in shaping responses to those challenging them, others applied them to different issues. Lucas van Leyden painted a triptych entitled *Dance Around the Golden Calf*, highlighting vices such as gluttony, drunkenness, and sexual promiscuity, rather than worship of the calf, while shifting the story's focus by re-configuring the participants. Painted around 1529–30, van Leyden situates the revelers of Exod. 32:6 at the forefront of the painting, thus focusing on their moral degeneracy. Typical of sixteenth-century attitudes, he casts women

as agents of temptation, placing in the painting's center a woman with prominently displayed breasts and abdomen, common symbols of feminine sexuality and seduction. Those dancing around the golden calf appear behind the revelers, while Moses with the tablets is barely visible in the distance (E. L. Smith 1992). Domenico Beccafumi's *Moses and the Golden Calf* (1536–7) emphasizes Moses using the tablet of the Law in order to strike the golden calf, which is quite small in comparison to the surrounding human figures (all male with one exception). Highlighted in the foreground are a nude man and a child, and a woman whose breasts and abdomen are seen clearly through her clothing. The man, lying on the ground near the woman, draws back in fear, while the woman seems irritated. The painting couples the sins of idolatry and promiscuity, virtually equating the golden calf with the seductress, while Moses is poised to use the Law to smash the calf.

Around 1560 Jacopo Tintoretto painted *The Worship of the Golden Calf*, an elaborate scene with various layers of activity. Like van Leyden's work, it places the worship of the calf in the background. In the left foreground, a couple with a child seem to move away and hide from the worship as the woman protectively cuddles the child. Just in front of them an old man calmly watches the action. Opposite these figures are five individuals sitting around a table. The woman closest to the viewer looks at something brought to her by a child, embracing him with her left arm. Her bare right breast may reflect the sensual overtones associated with the worship of the golden calf, although in connection with the child it could suggest nourishment and life. At the top of the painting appears an individual kneeling, engulfed in flames. The individual's head and shoulders are not visible, but the figure may represent Moses receiving the Law. These images frame the action in the middle of the painting. There at the bank of a stream, a priestly figure stands with outstretched arms, while two individuals subserviently place jewelry at his feet. Behind him are two rows of men and women sitting and talking, while behind them the calf worship takes place, with two priestly figures presiding as other individuals dine. Projecting several different ideas, the painting does not show everyone participating in the worship, even though it is at the center of the picture. Placed in the background, radiating out from it, are various scenes depicting self-indulgence, greed, and sexuality. The majority of the community thus participates in the idolatry by engaging in sinful behavior rather than involving themselves directly in the worship. The painting clearly establishes a relationship between idolatry and other sins, while also portraying the various responses, ranging from active participation to passive acceptance to rejection of sinful behavior. The group in the foreground shuns the idolatry and its attendant sins. The old man positioned near them does not participate directly, but watches passively. Only the young family takes action against the sinfulness by moving away from the community. The painting and the scripture passage combine to make relevant

the practice of idolatry for a society that did not involve itself in worshipping physical idols, showing that idol worship manifested itself in the sixteenth century through various sinful acts.

Nicolas Poussin's *Adoration of the Golden Calf* (1634) presents a different point of view. Rather than emphasizing the various sins and erotic overtones associated with idolatry, Poussin focuses on Aaron's role. In a scene that places the golden calf and Aaron almost side by side, dancers whirl around the calf, forming a line that draws the eye toward Aaron. The last dancer's arm extends outward toward the high priest, who himself gestures toward the calf while looking at another group of worshippers. Some of these also point in the direction of Aaron and the calf, further drawing attention to his leadership in the worship. In the background Moses and Joshua, with the tablet held high in the air, descend from Sinai; almost directly opposite them a dead tree bearing only two limbs pointing upward takes on a human-like form. The uplifted tablet of the Law and the tree's upward-pointing twin branches call attention to Israel's God and his requirements for his people. The motion and activity associated with the worship, however, overwhelm the images related to YHWH, although dark clouds gather ominously in the background. Yet, as Moses and the clouds approach the calf, the viewer is reminded that YHWH will soon overwhelm it and its devotees.

Sébastien Bourdon also highlights the worship of the calf in his *The Israelites Dancing around the Golden Calf* (c.1645) (plate 18). Poussin and Bourdon portray Exod. 32:17–18 in similar terms, but differences do exist. For instance, Aaron is not as prominent in Bourdon's depiction. Two priestly figures stand around an altar situated to the right and slightly behind the calf, while Moses and Joshua, with upraised tablet, approach in the foreground from the left, seemingly unnoticed. The viewer of Bourdon's painting is far more cognizant of their approach, and less so of Aaron's actions. It is just the opposite in Poussin's work. The two works focus on the role of religious leaders, but with varying emphases. Poussin's Aaron represents those leading their flock astray, while Bourdon's Moses portrays those acting as standard-bearers in providing correction. In both, the people are subject to their leader's actions, while in the biblical account the people take the lead. William Blake's *Moses Indignant at the Golden Calf* (c.1799), on the other hand, portrays Moses' revulsion at the people's worship. Unlike the works of Poussin and Bourdon, Blake depicts the moments after Moses has broken the tablets of the Law. With the broken tablets at his feet, Moses draws back in horror while the people continue to worship. Juxtaposed with the people's continued worship of the calf, standing tall above the scene and looking at Moses, the broken tablets reflect the power of idolatry over the people and the powerlessness of YHWH to attract their willing devotion. Blake's work indicates Moses' powerlessness to gain the people's attention without resorting to force.



*Plate 18 The Israelites Dancing around the Golden Calf*, c.1645. Sébastien Bourdon, pen and brown ink, brown and white oil paint, 47.6 × 64.9 cm (18 3/4 × 25 9/16 in.). The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. Courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum. Accession number: 88.GG.39.

Taken together, the works of Poussin, Bourdon, and Blake emphasize the dynamics between the people and their leaders and the interplay of power and human devotion. Although the biblical text has given birth to these depictions, it does not portray any interplay. The people sinned, and YHWH through Moses administered punishment. It is less a matter of gaining the people's affection and more of making them obey YHWH's Law. The three artists have not merely reproduced a scene from the biblical text, but instead have prompted thought on the perils and difficulties related to obtaining and maintaining religious devotion.

### *Modern uses*

The issue of religious commitment was specially pertinent to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europeans in the midst of the various wars sparked in part

by religion. With the mixing of religion and politics, the golden calf became a useful tool for discrediting the opposition. For example, Jacobites, or supporters of the Stuart monarchy who wanted to restore James II and his descendants, derided Protestant Whigs and their mercantilism as the golden calf that had replaced Stuart rule in Scotland (MacKenzie 2001: 48; see also Pittock 1991: 140). In an American setting, Benjamin Franklin compared the anti-Federalists opposing the proposed Constitution to the Israelites who, wanting to return to Egypt, complained when the golden calf was destroyed. In Franklin's analogy, the golden calf represents the anti-Federalists' understanding of government (Franklin 1904: 382–4).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer utilized the golden calf incident in a similar manner when in 1933, amid Hitler's implementation of increasingly anti-Semitic policies, he delivered a sermon at the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin (1965: 243–8). For example, Jews, as well as non-Jews with Jewish spouses, were disqualified from holding governmental positions. Basing his sermon on *Exod.* 32:1–7, 15, 19f, 30–4, Bonhoeffer challenges the church and its officials to act as the church of Moses opposing the church of Aaron, prophet against priest, “the church of faith” against the “worldly church.” Pointing out that even though Moses and Aaron were brothers, sharing the same history and working together for a time, they still had conflict. This is the “eternal conflict in the church of Christ,” the result of Aaron's church, the church of the world, becoming impatient with the church of God on Sinai, hearing the Word of God. This unwillingness to wait combined with the desire “to see something” leads Aaron's church to force its priests to make gods and religions. Bonhoeffer explains, “They really want to keep a church with gods and priests and religion, but a church of Aaron – without God. And Aaron yields. He looks to his office, to his consecration; he looks to the people. He understands their impatience, their urge to do something, and their pious tumult only too well – and he yields.” He then makes his application more specific: “The human race is ready for any sacrifice in which it may celebrate itself and worship its own work. The worldly church, the church of Aaron, is ready for any sacrifice if it is to be allowed to make its own God.” At this point, however, “the unexpected prophet,” Moses, comes and shows the worldly church the Law, shatters its idol, and brings it to an end. Bonhoeffer sees this event playing itself out in the German church. According to him,

Church of the priests against church of the Word, church of Aaron against church of Moses – this historical clash at the foot of Sinai, the end of the worldly church and the appearance of the Word of God, repeats itself in our church, day by day, Sunday by Sunday. Time and again we come together for worship as a worldly church, as a church which will not wait, which will not live from the invisible; as

a church which makes its own gods; as a church which wants to have the sort of god which pleases it and will not ask how it pleases God; as a church which wants to do by itself what God will not do; as a church which is ready for any sacrifice in the cause of idolatry, in the cause of divinisation of human thoughts and values; as a church which appropriates to itself divine power in the priesthood. And we should go away again as a church whose idol lies shattered and destroyed on the ground, as a church which must hear afresh, 'I am the Lord your God . . .', as a church which is humbled as it is faced with the Word, as the church of Moses, the church of the Word.

Bonhoeffer uses the golden calf account as a model for explaining the conflict in the contemporary church, employing language from Exodus to challenge the direction being taken by the majority in the German church. But he refrains from identifying explicit contemporary examples of what makes a church worldly and what constitutes an idol. One can imagine that the political situation in Germany in 1933, the year Hitler came to power, discouraged him from being too explicit.

Like Bonhoeffer, Arnold Schoenberg also juxtaposed Moses and Aaron as representatives of two different religious conceptions. He focuses entirely on the golden calf incident in the second act of his opera *Moses und Aron* (composed between 1930 and 1932, but not performed publicly until the 1950s), pitting Moses' somewhat abstract and imageless understanding of God against Aaron's more "practical" conception aimed at quelling the peoples' restlessness. Following Moses' descent from Sinai, Aaron argues that even the tablets of the Law constitute an image, at which point Moses smashes the tablets. The act concludes with the people following yet another image, the pillar of fire (*Viking Opera Guide* 1993: "Moses und Aron"; *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* 1992: "Moses und Aron"; *New Grove Dictionary of Music* 2001: "Schoenberg, Arnold"). Using the golden calf episode to explore the implications of both more idealistic and more utilitarian religious expressions, the opera questions the purity of any religious system.

Exodus 32–3 has also stimulated many other uses in a variety of contexts. Augustus Toplady's popular hymn written in 1776, *Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me*, articulates both the spiritual and physical experience of Christian salvation by reading Exod. 33:22 in light of Jesus' death and resurrection. For Jews, however, the passage meant nothing of the sort. In 1854 Rabbi James K. Gutheim of New Orleans' congregation Dispersed of Judah used Exod. 32:30–3 to argue against Christian claims for vicarious atonement. He asserts that God rejecting Moses' offer to remove himself from God's book on Israel's behalf invalidates vicarious atonement. The rabbi warns against using "false means" to obtain

God's forgiveness: "Every man is individually held responsible for his acts. He has the power to restore the disturbed relations between himself and his Maker by his own individual exertions. *The Bible sanctions no vicarious atonement, no expiation of sin by proxy.*" He then categorizes Exod. 32:33 as being "of the highest importance to our religion" and involving a doctrine which had become "the Shiboleth [*sic*] of our faith." Admitting that Moses possessed worthy sentiments, he concludes, "The idea of a vicarious atonement as being necessary to the salvation of mankind, of a nation or of a single individual is, therefore, in direct opposition to the letter and spirit of the Bible" (Gutheim 1854a). In challenging the Christian doctrine of vicarious atonement, Gutheim also used this passage to strengthen his congregation's commitment to Judaism. Living in an overwhelmingly Christian environment, Jews of mid-nineteenth-century America faced tremendous pressure to assimilate to a dominant American culture equating Protestant Christianity with American citizenship (S. Langston 2000).

In addition to the many religious uses of the golden calf, it has taken on secular applications as well. For instance, it continues to be an emblem of excess, particularly of greed. In 1907 the popular English actress Lillie Langtry was asked why she performed in vaudeville. She reportedly replied, "I worship the golden calf, and there is money in vaudeville. That is the reason I am in it" (Golden 1930: 70). The artist Emil Nolde portrays erotic, primal ecstasy and "celebrated the spirit of paganism" in his 1910 painting *Dance Around the Golden Calf*. In this depiction bare-breasted women whirl uncontrollably around the idol (*Dictionary of Art* 1996: "Nolde, Emil"). Some have read these chapters from a legal standpoint as showing the interplay between legal craft (persuasion, negotiation, etc.) and commitment (social justice, fairness, etc.). Aaron's construction of the golden calf represents the use of legal craft (mediation), which undermines commitment (prohibition of idolatry). On the other hand, Moses' plea to YHWH for mercy on the Israelites represents balancing a commitment to law with a commitment to humanity; his craft aids his commitment. These examples offer "a lesson for contemporary legal education, particularly education in schools affiliated with world religions that take *Exodus* as part of their sacred canon" (Margulies 2000). Movements within Western medicine emphasizing mysticism and irrationality rather than clinical investigation have been compared to the Israelites' demand for the golden calf, something generated from an insecurity over the future, but nonetheless created to people's detriment (Berger 2002). In psychology, the golden calf story has been interpreted as "an archetypal expression of the collective unconscious of the Israelites" (Rosenfield 1995).



## Chapters 35–40 The Completed Tabernacle

### *Ancient and medieval uses*

The closing chapters of Exodus recount the construction and consecration of the tabernacle and its accoutrements. Since its reception history was discussed in some detail in the section addressing Exodus 25–31, only those appropriations of the *constructed* tabernacle will be considered here. Despite their repetitiveness, readers still found significance in these chapters. Christians often articulated the intricacies of their faith with them. Origen focuses on the tabernacle as the product of the people's offerings (Exod. 35:4–10), encouraging his listeners to help build the tabernacle of God by offering whatever they had inside themselves. Gold, for example, represents the person who "believed in his heart," while silver denotes the individual's verbal confession. He understands the men and women of Exod. 35:22 to represent, respectively, reason and the flesh. Thus the women who willingly brought their jewelry connote good wives who obey their husbands. Earrings represent one's hearing, while bracelets refer to good and skillful works, all of which are to be given to God's service (1982: 375–87). By identifying the list of items used in constructing the tabernacle with various attributes possessed by people, Origen instructs his audience about how to give themselves to God. The Ashburnham Pentateuch continues this kind of appropriation by using it to communicate Christian teachings. It accomplishes this by illustrating the tabernacle in terms of the Church, depicting, for instance, its altar as a reliquary altar. Joshua, Nadab, and Abihu appear in white clothing, garments worn by those who had recently been baptized, symbolizing the forgiveness brought through Christian baptism (Verkeerk 2004: 97–102). Later Christians frequently used it to communicate the idea of the Church as the vessel of God's forgiveness. The *Vorau Books of Moses* interpret the tabernacle as representing "holy Christendom" (E. M. Jacobson 1981: 59), while the *Bible moralisée* relates the bringing of offerings by the people (Exod. 35:4–9, 20–2) to God's commanding his people to make confession and offer their bodies and souls to God. Readers are assured that God will accept these offerings (Guest 1995: 84; fol. 26vD).

Within Jewish thought the tabernacle also represented the restoration brought by God's forgiveness, albeit with different implications than within Christian thought. Midrashic tradition considers the word "testimony" in the phrase "tabernacle of the testimony" (Exod. 38:21) to refer to the Torah, indicating that as long as Israel concerns itself with the Torah, it will avoid Gehinnom (*Midrash Tanhuma* 11.5; *Exodus Rabbah* 51.7). *Exodus Rabbah* (51.4) explains the phrase "tabernacle of the testimony" in Exod. 38:21 as sig-



naling God's love and forgiveness of Israel by giving them the Torah while they were sinning with the golden calf. Although the "heathen nations" thought that the relationship between God and Israel had been destroyed, God announced his forgiveness by making his presence dwell with Israel in the tabernacle. In a similar rendering, the midrash explains Exod. 36:8 in light of Song of Solomon 1:5, which has traditionally been taken as "I am black, but comely" (though "and" is possible!). The midrash, like many a European commentator in later centuries, wondered how one could be both black and comely. The explanation offered is that Israel had spoken this verse to indicate that it was black from being involved with the golden calf, but comely due to its construction of the tabernacle. Yet it was also black because, according to Ezek. 23:38, Israel had defiled YHWH's sanctuary. Nevertheless, it was comely because every wise-hearted man in Israel worked on the tabernacle (*Exodus Rabbah* 49.2). Likewise, the gold brought for the tabernacle atoned for the gold brought for the golden calf (*Exodus Rabbah* 51.8). Rashi also understands the construction of the tabernacle, which served as the dwelling place of God's Shekinah, to testify to God forgiving Israel's worship of the golden calf (Exod. 38:21; 1934: 214).

### *Modern uses*

The completed tabernacle also provoked other applications. Martin Luther characterized his interpretation of Psalm 77 as bringing goats' hair to the Lord's tabernacle. Admitting the difficulty of interpreting the psalm, he uses the reference to using goats' hair in the tabernacle (Exod. 35:26) to indicate how meager is his own reading (1976: 19). Rather than emphasizing the skill of the women spinning the goats' hair, he focuses on the hair's relative lack of value. This provides him with a metaphor to express his own feelings of inadequacy. Other readers have used replicas of the tabernacle for a variety of purposes. Mennonites in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, have constructed a life-sized model of the tabernacle. Groups are taken through the replica by a guide who explains its history and spiritual significance. The reconstruction serves as a visual aid conveying various biblical teachings, while an array of materials is available for purchase, including books, postcards, and tabernacle model kits (Mennonite Information Center). Another replica made to biblical dimensions exists in Timna Park, located in Israel's Aravah Desert. It is not meant to convey religious teachings, but is instead part of a tourist attraction (Jerusalem Report.com. 2000).

In New York City the tabernacle has been used to "create a sacred moment in a secular city." Architect Bonnie Roche drew the idea from the biblical

Mishkan's (the Hebrew term for tabernacle) status as "a vehicle for spiritual rootedness within nomadism, within mobility" and as "the vehicle that strengthened the bonds between individuals assisting greatly in their evolution as a People." It represents the progression from motion to stillness and from measured time to timelessness. Roche connects these ideas to the contemporary experience of being "nomads in the deserts of our cities," in danger of losing our individual and collective souls, hoping to reimagine and remap the urban landscape by temporarily transforming "mundane static places" into "sanctified gatherings." These ideas enliven the Mishkan Project, an endeavor undertaken several years ago by Roche's New York City congregation, B'nai Jeshurun, when it had to use several separate meeting sites for the High Holidays. The congregation decided to use the model of the Mishkan as a temporary structure in order to address the problem, while also opening its temporary religious space to all those in the city. After the congregation set up temporary risers in Damrosch Park at Lincoln Center, the public could enter the space and move from a forecourt into the sanctuary. Open to all, it was owned by no one and offered the opportunity for a collective communal and spiritual experience in an urban wilderness. Roche urges, "We need to establish vehicles that can hold us in sacred time in our cities as we move forward in our journey, to energize and unite us as a community in our inner lives. It is my belief that we, like the ancients, must renew our contract with one another and with the ineffable, by constructing places that have a continuous presence in the collective consciousness, with forms that remain silent, incomplete, waiting for human beings to enter" (Roche 2002: 351). For Roche the tabernacle provides a model for achieving these aspirations.

During the early spring of 1854 Rabbi James K. Gutheim addressed his New Orleans congregation, *Dispersed of Judah*, from Exodus 35–40, focusing on the union and harmony required of the biblical Israelites in constructing the tabernacle. As the prerequisites of "every great and glorious cause," Gutheim points out that these attributes constitute the strength of any society, nation, or religious community and ensure its welfare. Requiring all members of the community to participate in its construction, the tabernacle became a "bond of national union." He cautions his people against "the want of union and harmony," noting it has corroded all communities, whether ancient or modern, religious or political. The tabernacle thus teaches "that in unanimity and concert of action there is life and strength, and that disagreement and sluggish indifference lead to destruction." Calling its building one of the high points in "our history," Gutheim concludes: "The people proved, that their union was not merely founded on their common descent, and sustained by the bonds of consanguinity, but that they were spiritually united, that all were actuated by the same zeal for their God, by the same devotion to their religion." The rabbi

frankly admits that the Jewish people of his day need “a union not only of name, but of action,” meaning that all Jews should participate in those actions necessary to insure the “permanency of our religious institutions” and the welfare of the Jewish religion. He does not identify explicitly what actions he has in mind, but given the situation among American Jewry, one can suppose that he intended the Reform movement’s efforts to bring religious practices and institutions more in line with contemporary norms and practices.

His own congregation had experienced struggles created by the influx of German Ashkenazic Jews who brought different customs when they began emigrating to the United States in the 1830s. Dispersed of Judah had been founded when the mother congregation, Gates of Mercy, switched from the Sephardic to Ashkenazic ritual. Dissatisfied with the change, the Sephardic members of Gates of Mercy withdrew and created Dispersed of Judah in the mid-1840s. Gutheim had actually been rabbi of Gates of Mercy from about 1851 until 1853, and an organ had been installed in the synagogue during his tenure. This act generated tremendous controversy among traditional Jews, who believed that the presence of an organ in Jewish worship reflected Christian influence and threatened Jewish distinctiveness. Other Jews felt that such actions were necessary to make Judaism more contemporary and appealing, and thereby help to insure its survival. Gutheim concurred with the latter and eventually became a leading advocate of Reform. One can imagine that when Gutheim came to Dispersed of Judah, he wanted to lead the congregation to make reforms. Hoping to convince his Sephardic congregants to embrace certain changes to aid Judaism’s survival in the modern era, he highlighted the references in Exodus 35–40 to all Israel’s participation in constructing the tabernacle. It thus became an emblem and call for Jewish unity, leading him to close his sermon with an appeal: “May union and harmony inspire our hearts’ activity and zeal prove the sincerity of our sentiments and convictions – And to this end, we pray for thine blessing, oh Lord, who art our rock and redeemer. Amen” (Gutheim 1854b; Lachoff 1998: 14–16; S. Langston 2002: 69–74).

# Epilogue: A Personal Word

Recently a group of Jewish and African-American singers produced a CD entitled *Let My People Go! A Jewish & African American Celebration of Freedom*. In listening to these songs and reflections arising from the Passover seder and the Civil Rights Movement, I am reminded of the power of Exodus to speak to a variety of experiences and circumstances. The book's uses demonstrate the sorrows, hopes, tenacity, and exhilaration of those struggling against tyranny, and I am impressed by people's willingness to suffer to attain freedom. The CD's producers point out that the exodus story, or the "feast of freedom" as they call it, has inspired Jews and African Americans, and hopefully will remind others "of what can be accomplished by the purposeful collective efforts of those who are willing to work together and who believe that 'We Shall Overcome'" (Harris and Kligler 2005).

Affirming this hope, I also wonder about future uses of Exodus. Its reception history suggests that it will continue to be employed by people struggling against tyranny, remaining an effective source of inspiration and sustenance. There are currently ample opportunities for such an application. Indeed, as *Let My People Go!* reminds us, freedom is one of the book's most important goals. At the same time, oppression is also part of its legacy, demonstrating the propensity for the oppressed to become the oppressor. Freedom regularly turns into tyranny by enacting, often selectively, the very laws the Israelites received at Sinai for establishing a just society. Possessing power commonly seems to justify making one's freedom into another's oppression, and, unfortunately, despite the best of intentions, we frequently do not handle power well, whether on national and international levels or in local and personal settings. When freedom and power combine with a selectivity that overlooks the inherent ambiguity in reading and applying Exodus (and all biblical books), conflicting applications and struggles for dominance occur. Conquest is often the companion of freedom, while interpretive certainty often blinds people to a text's ambiguity.

I wonder if one of the prime opportunities for future applications of Exodus will emerge in response to the tyrannies created by religious and political coalitions, combinations increasingly evident in the United States, as well as other parts of the world. Rarely have people used the book's call for freedom and justice against themselves, typically aiming it against pharaohs standing outside their own group. In our minds it seems inconceivable that we could be the perpetrators of injustice and tyranny. Yet the reception history of Exodus demonstrates that people have often been convinced of the righteousness of their cause while confronting others who were equally convinced of the justice of theirs. This is especially true when religion is involved. Religion understandably seeks to give its followers faith and assurance, stamping out all vestiges of doubt. Uncertainty is usually not viewed favorably. Perhaps, however, future uses of Exodus might be able to create some doubt, at least enough to prompt introspection, humility, and questioning of one's use of power, particularly when religion mixes with politics. One of the book's great strengths has been emphasizing freedom and justice, but, as the previous pages show, this is often forgotten or limited by the very ones struggling for freedom and justice. Maybe the future will see Exodus, understood in light of its reception history, make uncertainty a positive part of strong faith, causing us to implement freedom and justice as broadly as possible, spreading them across multiple groups rather than confining them to a single group. A difficult task that has too rarely been tried or accomplished, perhaps "the purposeful collective efforts of those who are willing to work together" will increasingly become a part of Exodus's reception history.

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# Biographies and Glossary

**Alma-Tadema, Sir Lawrence** (1836–1912), Dutch-born painter in the Classicist tradition.

**Ambrose** (c.333–97), bishop of Milan and teacher of Augustine.

**Aquinas, Thomas** (c.1225–74), Dominican who developed a synthesis of Aristotelianism and Christianity and became one of the most important theologians of the medieval period.

**Artapanus** (third–second century BCE), Jewish author who lived in Egypt and

wrote *On the Jews*, of which only three fragments, dealing with Abraham, Joseph, and Moses, have survived.

**Athanasius** (c.295–373), bishop of Alexandria, who wrote against the Arians.

**Atwood, Harry F.** (1870–1931), American lawyer and educator known for his avid patriotism.

**Augustine of Hippo** (354–430), bishop of Hippo and the most influential theologian of Western Christianity,

who wrote numerous works on a wide variety of topics that continue to influence Christian thinking.

**Beccafumi, Domenico** (1486–1551), Italian artist and official painter to the Sienese republic.

**Bede** (c.672–735), born in Northumberland, became a monk, and detailed the history of Christianity in his *An Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.

**Beecher, Henry Ward** (1813–87), pastor of the Plymouth Church (Congregational) in Brooklyn, New York, and one of the most influential ministers of his day.

**Blake, William** (1757–1827), English artist and poet who was on the fringe of the radical movement in London at the time of the French Revolution.

**Bonaventure** (1221–74), Franciscan and scholastic theologian who served as Minister General of the order and also taught at the University of Paris.

**Bonhoeffer, Dietrich** (1906–45), German pastor who was imprisoned and hung for his participation in a plot to assassinate Hitler.

**Boniface VIII** (1235–1303), Italian became Pope in 1294 after the abdication of Celestine V.

**Botticelli, Alessandro** (1444–1510), Florentine artist of the early Renaissance who painted images in the Sistine Chapel, as well as all the major churches in Florence.

**Bourdon, Sébastien** (1616–71), French artist who was one of the founding members of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture.

**Breenbergh, Bartholomeus** (c.1598–1637), Dutch painter who was among the first Dutch Italianates.

**Browning, Elizabeth Barrett** (1806–61), English poet, whose verse novel *Aurora*

*Leigh* dealt with women and the restrictions placed on them in Victorian society; wife of Robert Browning.

**Caesarius of Arles** (c.470–543), bishop of Arles and popular preacher in Gaul.

**Calvin, John** (1509–64), theologian and reformer whose pioneering theological polity paved the way for Reformed Christianity.

**Casas, Bartolomé de las** (1484–1566), Spanish colonist, Dominican priest, and first bishop of Chiapas, who argued for better treatment of Native Americans.

**Chagall, Marc** (1887–1985), Russian-born Jewish artist who grew up in a Hasidic family and later moved to, and worked in, France.

**Coffin, Henry Sloane** (1877–1954), pastor of the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City and president of Union Theological Seminary.

**Cook, Howard** (1901–80), American printmaker, painter, and illustrator.

**Chrysostom, John** (c.347–407), bishop of Constantinople, who is often referred to as the greatest preacher of the patristic era.

**Dante, Alighieri** (1265–1321), Italian poet and political theorist.

**Donne, John** (1571–1631), English priest and poet.

**Doré, Gustav** (1832–83), popular French Romantic illustrator.

**Dryden, John** (1631–1700), English author who was a Puritan, but later converted to Roman Catholicism.

**Dubrow, John** (b. 1958), American artist known for painting cityscapes, including many made from the World Trade Center in New York City.

**Dura-Europos**, a site located in Syria and occupied from the late fourth century BCE until the mid-third century CE.

**Elliott, Stephen** (1806–66), Protestant

- Episcopal bishop of the diocese of Georgia.
- Engelhardt, Maja Lisa** (b. 1956), Danish artist whose works combine elements of the Romantic tradition of Danish, Nordic, and northern European landscape painting and Abstract Expressionism.
- Ephrem** (306–73), Syrian Christian who produced numerous hymns and biblical commentaries that followed to some extent the principles of the Antiochene school of exegesis.
- Fiorentino, Rosso** (c.1495–1540), Italian painter who pioneered Mannerism in Florentine painting.
- Flash, Henry Lynden** (1835–1914), American writer who served on the staff of Confederate general Joseph Wheeler during the Civil War.
- Foehr, Alain (Al For)** (b. 1955), Swiss artist and Protestant minister who lived in South Africa in 1992–3.
- Froment, Nicolas** (fifteenth century), French early Renaissance painter.
- Frost, Robert** (1874–1963), one of the most important American poets of the twentieth century, who won four Pulitzer Prizes for his work.
- Geoffrey of Monmouth** (1100–540), bishop of St Asaph.
- Gregory of Nyssa** (335–95), bishop of Nyssa and brother of Basil of Caesarea, whose approach to Scripture was influenced by the Alexandrian school of exegesis.
- Grimké, Sarah** (1792–1873), born into a South Carolina slaveholding family, she and her sister, Angelina, became prominent abolitionists and advocates of women's suffrage, and embraced Quakerism.
- Grosseteste, Robert** (1170–1253), bishop of Lincoln.
- Gutheim, James K.** (1817–86), rabbi of Congregation Temple Sinai in New Orleans, Louisiana, who was perhaps the most influential Reform rabbi in the South.
- Harper, Frances Ellen Watkins** (1825–1911), African-American author, abolitionist, and activist for African-American equality.
- He Qi** (contemporary), Chinese artist and professor at the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and a tutor for master's candidates in the Philosophy Department of Nanjing University.
- Heschel, Abraham** (1907–72), Jewish American scholar and philosopher who taught Jewish ethics and mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.
- Hibel, Edna** (b. 1917), American artist and 2001 recipient of the Leonardo da Vinci World Award of Art bestowed by the World Cultural Council.
- Hildebert of Lavardin** (c.1056–1133), bishop of Le Mans and archbishop of Tours, who composed many hymns and poems.
- Hugh of St Victor** (1096–1141), philosopher and theologian who served as the head of the School of Victor in Paris.
- Ibn Ezra, Abraham** (1089–1164), Jewish scholar, poet, grammarian, astrologist, and scientist, who first lived in Spain and then wandered through Italy, northern France, England, and Provence.
- Jerome** (c.340–420), biblical scholar who composed the Latin translation of the Bible known as the Vulgate.
- John of Damascus** (c.650–750), Syrian theologian, who was an official in the court of the caliph at Damascus, but resigned and joined a monastery in Palestine.
- Jones, Absalom** (1746–1818), African-

American abolitionist, former slave, and the first Episcopal priest of African descent in America, who helped to organize the first black church in Philadelphia, the African Episcopal Church of St Thomas.

**Josephus** (37–c.100), Jewish politician and soldier who produced important writings relating to first-century Jewish life and history in Roman Palestine. During the First Jewish Revolt he served as general of the Jewish forces in Galilee, but was captured and subsequently became a Roman citizen.

**Kafka, Franz** (1883–1924), Jewish author from Prague whose most important works include *The Metamorphosis*, *Amerika*, and *The Trial*.

**Kilar, Wojciech** (b. 1932), Polish pianist and composer of orchestral and chamber music, piano compositions, and film and theater music.

**Langner, Lawrence** (1890–1962), English producer, writer, director, and founder of the Theatre Guild in New York City.

**Lawrence, D. H.** (1885–1930), English writer and poet whose works often dealt with social problems.

**Leyden, Lucas van** (1494–1533), Dutch engraver and painter who is considered to be among the best engravers.

**Luther, Martin** (1483–1546), Augustinian monk who became leader of the Reformation in Germany.

**Machiavelli, Niccolo** (1469–1527), Italian political philosopher and civil servant in Florence, whose most famous work, *The Prince*, advised leaders on the necessities of ruling.

**Melito of Sardis** (d. c.190), bishop of Sardis, whose most influential work was *On Pascha*.

**Mendieta, Gerónimo de** (1524–1604), Roman Catholic Spanish missionary

who worked to convert the native populations of New Spain to Christianity.

**Midrash**, a type of Jewish hermeneutic and literature that attempts to discern the contemporary significance of a biblical text through a variety of means, including relating one biblical verse to another and keen attention to every detail of a text.

**Milton, John** (1608–74), poet, Nonconformist, anti-monarchist, and apologist for the Commonwealth in England from 1649 to 1660.

**Mishnah**, rabbinic commentary on the Torah collected around 200 CE.

**Müntzer, Thomas** (c.1485–1525), radical reformer who participated in the Peasants' Revolt, in which he was defeated and executed.

**Nachmanides** (1194–1270), Spanish Jew who was a rabbi, physician, and Torah scholar.

**Nolde, Emil** (1867–1956), German Expressionist painter whose art was confiscated by the Nazis and who was also forbidden by the Nazis to paint.

**Octateuch**, manuscripts dating from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries CE that contain only the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, and Ruth, and that are often illustrated.

**Paine, Thomas** (1737–1809), English rationalist, political reformer, and campaigner, who had great influence on Revolutionary politics in France and North America.

**Palmer, Benjamin Morgan** (1818–1902), pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of New Orleans, Louisiana, and one of the most influential clergy in the South.

**Philo** (first century CE), Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, who lived in Alexandria

- and produced numerous works addressing the Mosaic Law, philosophical issues, and contemporary events.
- Poussin, Nicolas** (1594–1665), French artist considered to be the founder of French classical painting.
- Prudentius** (348–c.410), Christian poet from Spain who eventually embraced asceticism.
- Pseudo-Philo** (first or early second century CE), author of *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (L.A.B.; *Biblical Antiquities*), a work that retells the biblical story from Adam to David. This text was originally attributed to Philo, but he is no longer thought to be its author.
- Rashbam (Rabbi Samuel ben Meir)** (c.1080–c.1174), French rabbi and grandson of Rashi, who gave great emphasis to literal exegesis.
- Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo ben Isaac)** (1040–1105), French rabbi who founded a school in Troyes that emphasized the literal meaning of Scripture while maintaining its spiritual sense.
- Richard of St Victor** (1123–73), successor to Hugh of Victor as the prior of the Abbey of Victor.
- Rossini, Gioacchino** (1792–1868), Italian composer who wrote many operas, including *The Barber of Seville* and *William Tell*.
- Saraceni, Carlo** (c.1579–1620), Italian painter and draftsman, whose career was spent almost entirely in Rome.
- Savonarola, Girolamo** (1452–98), Dominican reformer in Florence who was excommunicated in 1497 after refusing to heed an order to stop preaching and was subsequently put to death for heresy and sedition.
- Schoenberg, Arnold** (1874–1951), Jewish composer born in Vienna, who was forced to leave Germany and go to America when Hitler came to power.
- Scotus, John Duns** (1265–1308), Scottish Franciscan who founded the Scotist school, which often came into conflict with the followers of Thomas Aquinas.
- Septuagint** (third–first centuries BCE), a translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek that included additions to some of its books, as well as Greek works not originally in the Hebrew Bible.
- Silone, Ignazio** (1900–78), pseudonym for the Italian-born author Secondino Tranquilli, who was known for his anti-Fascist novels.
- Stanton, Elizabeth Cady** (1815–1902), American social reformer and feminist, known best for her efforts to obtain equality for women, and who led in the production of *The Woman's Bible*, wherein women commented on gender roles and assumptions as reflected in Scripture.
- Steffens, Lincoln** (1866–1936), American journalist and one of the leading muckrakers, best known for exposing municipal corruption in a series of articles that were later published in books such as *The Shame of the Cities* and *The Struggle for Self-Government*.
- Suger** (c.1081–1151), abbot of the monastery of St-Denis (located near Paris), who led in the refurbishing of the old abbey church and served as friend and counselor of Louis VI and VII.
- Szyk, Arthur** (1894–1951), Jewish illuminator who was born in Poland and later went to America, worked in the style of sixteenth-century miniaturist painters, and produced numerous anti-Axis illustrations and cartoons during World War II.

**Talmud**, rabbinic commentary on and including the Mishnah; two separate collections exist, and are known as the Palestinian Talmud (compiled c.400 CE) and the Babylonian Talmud (compiled c.500 CE).

**Targum**, Aramaic paraphrases or translations of the Hebrew Bible.

**Tertullian** (c.160–220), early Christian theologian who helped develop the foundations of Christology and Trinitarian doctrine.

**Timrod, Henry** (1828–67), American poet known as the laureate of the Confederacy.

**Tintoretto, Jacopo** (1518–94), Venetian painter of the High Renaissance.

**Tosefta**, rabbinic commentary collected at about the same period as the Mishnah and considered to supplement the latter.

**Trubert, Georges** (1469–1508), French illuminator who worked in the court of Duke René I of Anjou, titular king of Naples, and René II, duke of Lorraine.

**Tubman, Harriet** (c.1820–1913), African-American slave who obtained her freedom by running away, and then

made numerous trips on the Underground Railroad to bring other slaves to freedom.

**Tüür, Erkki-Sven** (b. 1959), Estonian composer of orchestral, chamber, and choral music who has also performed as a rock musician.

**Tutu, Desmond** (b. 1931), the first black Anglican archbishop of Cape Town, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his pacifist fight against apartheid.

**Veronese, Paolo** (1528–88), Italian Renaissance painter of the Venetian school.

**Walker, David** (1785–1830), African-American abolitionist who advocated rebellion on the part of slaves, if necessary, in his *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*.

**Wesley, Susanna** (1669–1742), mother of John and Charles Wesley, who also led popular, but controversial Bible studies in her home.

**Whitefield, George** (1714–71), English Methodist minister who also preached widely in North America and was instrumental in the First Great Awakening.

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Color plate 2 Maja Lisa Engelhardt, *Pillar of a Cloud*. Reproduced with kind permission of the artist.