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THE SHINING FACE OF MOSES:
THE INTERPRETATION OF EXODUS 34:29–35 AND
ITS USE IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

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THE SHINING FACE OF MOSES:
THE INTERPRETATION OF EXODUS 34:29–35 AND
ITS USE IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

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For my parents, Gary and Pam Philpot.

יברכך יהוה וישמרך

יאר יהוה פניו אליך ויחנך

ישא יהוה פניו אליך וישם לך שלום

Numbers 6:24–26

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	D. N. Freedman, ed., <i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
ACCS	Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANE	Ancient Near East
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
BAGD	W. Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, eds., <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BTC	Brazos Theological Commentary
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten (und Neuen) Testament
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CRINT	Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
<i>EBC</i>	<i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i>
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary

<i>ER</i>	M. Eliade, ed., <i>The Encyclopedia of Religion</i>
<i>ErIsr</i>	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
ET	English Translation
<i>ExAud</i>	<i>Ex auditu</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>HALOT</i>	L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, eds., <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HO	Handbuch der Orientalistik
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series
L&N	J. P. Louw, E. A. Nida, eds., <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains</i>
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text

<i>NDBT</i>	T. D. Alexander, B. A. Rosner, D. A. Carson, G. Goldsworthy, eds., <i>New Dictionary of Biblical Theology</i>
<i>NIB</i>	<i>The New Interpreter's Bible</i>
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDOTTE	W. A. VanGemeren, ed., <i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
SBL SBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study
<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
SDI	Studia et documenta ad iura Orientis antiqui pertinentia
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SOTB	Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology
SP	Sacra pagina
<i>TA</i>	<i>Tel Aviv</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, eds., <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

WUNT Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZDPV *Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins*

PREFACE

This project would not have been possible without the guidance of the many people who encouraged me to pursue a seminary degree, and who were faithful to support me through to its completion. This entire dissertation was written from Spring, Texas while serving as Pastor for Worship at Founders Baptist Church. I am deeply thankful to Founders for allowing me to spend this last year writing. The people of Founders have been truly amazing in their display of love for me and my family. I am especially thankful for Pastor Richard Caldwell for his constant care and support, as well as his interest in my topic.

My interest in Exodus 34 and the episode of Moses' shining face began with a discussion outside of the office of my supervisor, Dr. Duane A. Garrett, who was completing a commentary on Exodus at the time. He suggested that I write a paper on this passage seeing that it was commonly misunderstood, especially in evangelical circles. My later work on Exodus 34 was generally well received, and so Dr. Garrett suggested that I consider it for my dissertation. I am extremely grateful to him for his support and guidance during this process, and for taking me on as one of his doctoral students.

My doctoral studies began while I was serving with Dr. James M. Hamilton Jr. on the pastoral staff at Kenwood Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. Dr. Hamilton has influenced me pastorally and theologically more than any other person. I am grateful to him for his friendship and love for me and my family, not to mention his keen insight on all Old Testament matters and comprehensive biblical knowledge. Out of all the things I miss about Louisville, I miss serving with Dr. Hamilton the most. Thank you for modeling a strong work ethic, humility, sincerity, and biblical preaching.

My wife, Jenn, has been the constancy one needs when completing a large-scale project. Thank you for your endless prayers and encouragement, and your devotion to me when I grew weary from time to time. Thank you for your love, most of all, and for your commitment to being a godly wife and a mother. You bring more joy to me than you will ever know! And, “The heart of her husband trusts in her” (Prov 31:11).

To our kids, Isaiah, Eliana, and Mikaela, thank you for confirming for me each day that “the light of the eyes rejoices the heart” (Prov 15:30). I am looking forward to having many more mornings and evenings together!

Lastly, I am dedicating this dissertation to my parents, Gary and Pam Philpot. Your influence on me as a young man was a significant blessing throughout. And now, as a husband and father, I am beginning to understand just how important Christian parents are in the lives of their children. Thank you for your prayerful encouragement and loving example of a godly marriage. My prayer is that the Lord would “make his face to shine upon you” (Num 6:25) as you persevere in the gospel of grace.

Joshua Matthew Philpot

Spring, Texas

December 2013

CHAPTER 1

THE SHINING FACE OF MOSES: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Introduction

The narrative of Moses' descent from Sinai in Exodus 34:29–35 and his shining face is perhaps last on the list of extraordinary events in the book of Exodus. But the story is important for the following reasons. The story is situated, first of all, as the conclusion to the narrative of the Israelites at Sinai, the special place designated by Yhwh from which he manifests his nature, confirms his covenant, communicates his law, and expresses his grace, justice, and mercy to the people. Second, the story expounds on the man Moses, one of the few with whom Yhwh is said to know “face to face,” and whose very countenance reflects the glory of Yhwh. Third, the story functions to illustrate the key theme of Yhwh's *presence* in the transition between Sinai and the tabernacle—a theme which some have argued is the ultimate meaning of the whole book.¹ And fourth, the story tells about Yhwh and his relationship to the Israelites and subsequent generations. In sum, the story of Moses' shining face leaves a lasting impression on the reader, which is evident not only in Old Testament (OT) literature, but in the New

¹Donald E. Gowan, *Theology in Exodus: Biblical Theology in the Form of a Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994); Michael E. Lodahl, *Shekhinah/Spirit: Divine Presence in Jewish and Christian Religion* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992); Samuel L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978); Thomas W. Mann, *Divine Presence and Guidance in Israelite Traditions: The Typology of Exaltation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); Baruch A. Levine, “On the Presence of God in Biblical Religion,” in *Religions in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough*, ed. Jacob Neusner, *Studies in the History of Religions* 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 71–86.

Testament (NT) as well. A fuller treatment of the passage, therefore, will contribute substantively to the overall field of biblical studies.

Thesis

Scholars are well aware of the interpretive difficulties in Exodus 34:29–35 relating to the phrase קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו (“the skin of his face shone”), as well as the מִסְּוָה (“veil”) that Moses dons after he descends from Sinai.² The passage is primarily concerned with Moses’ ongoing practice of communicating the word of Yhwh to the people as a mediator, a conclusion that is generally not disputed. The meaning and function of Moses’ “shining face” and “veil,” however, and how these terms operate within the context of the entire Sinai episode (Exod 19–40) is unclear. Indeed, these difficulties have led interpreters to propose a variety of theories and solutions, and thus a consensus opinion remains elusive.

Moreover, the burgeoning interest in the NT use of the OT in the last century has led to a lively discussion concerning several NT passages, namely, the transfiguration narrative in the Gospels (Matt 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36) and Paul’s use of Exodus 34:29–35 in 2 Corinthians 3:7–18. In the former, the face of Jesus is displayed in similar terms as the brilliant face of Moses in Exodus 34, and with Moses himself present. Just what these parallels mean, however, is not entirely certain. In the latter, Paul draws an analogy between the “glory” of the old covenant that is displayed on Moses’ face—a glory that had to be veiled—and the greater “glory” of the new covenant that comes unveiled. This text is burdened with interpretive difficulties, not least of which is how Paul conceives of the function of Moses’ shining face in the context of Exodus 32–

²All translations are my own unless noted otherwise. Hebrew text in this dissertation will be pointed for direct quotes (even single words) but not pointed when root words are referenced.

34, and the analogy he makes with the function of the new covenant. The plain sense of the passage is ambiguous, and thus a variety of proposals have been suggested.

In light of this ambiguity there is room for a fresh assessment of Exodus 34:29–35 with consideration of the historical, theological, and ancient Near Eastern (ANE) contexts, and to trace the implications for understanding later biblical and extrabiblical texts. The primary goal of this dissertation is, first, to determine the primary *meaning* and *function* of Moses’ shining face and veil in Exodus 34:29–35.

Secondly, this dissertation seeks to determine how later OT texts highlight the image of a shining face as a theological metaphor for grace and compassion. Several passages in the OT refer to “the light of the face” or to God making his face “shine.” Aside from the instance of Moses’ face in Exodus 34:29–35, the most well-known reference to Yhwh’s shining face is in the Aaronic Blessing (or Priestly Blessing, Priestly Benediction): “May Yhwh make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you” (Num 6:25). Many later biblical texts (e.g. portions of the Psalter and book of Daniel)³ also echo this language in prayers and songs. In addition, idiomatic expressions about the “face” or the brightness of the face are found in some extrabiblical sources and ANE inscriptions.⁴ One aim within this study will be to show how the image of a shining face

³Pss 4:7 [ET 4:6]; 31:17 [ET 31:16]; 44:4 [ET 44:3]; 56:14 [ET 56:13]; 67:2 [ET 67:1]; 80:4, 8, 20 [ET 80:3, 7, 19]; 89:16 [ET 89:15]; 90:8; 119:135; Dan 9:17.

⁴For a selected study that points to anthropological parallels, see Chaim Cohen (“The Biblical Priestly Blessing [Num. 6:24–26] in the Light of Akkadian Parallels,” *Tel Aviv* 20 [1993]: 228–38), who suggests that the themes of the “shining divine countenance and of the lifting of the divine countenance” have parallels in the late second millennium BC, in Middle Babylonian and Late Bronze Ugaritic texts. See also A. Leo Oppenheim, “Idiomatic Accadian,” *JAOS* 61 (1941): 251–71; Yochanan Muffs, *Studies in the Aramaic Legal Papyri from Elephantine*, vol. 8 of SDI (Leiden: Brill, 1969); Michael A. Fishbane, “Form and Reformulation of the Biblical Priestly Blessing,” *JAOS* 103 (1983): 115–21; Avinoam Cohen, “‘The Lord Shall Lift up His Countenance Upon You’ (Numbers 6:26): An Anti-Christian Polemical Midrash by the Sages?,” in *Studies in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Boston: Brill, 2010), 67–84; Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1993); Horst Seebass, “YHWH’s Name in the Aaronic Blessing (Num 6:22–27),” in *Revelation of the Name YHWH to Moses: Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco–Roman World, and Early Christianity*, ed.

functions in the OT in light of biblical and ANE data. In other words, what is being communicated culturally and theologically in texts that emphasize the shining (or light) of a face? Further, which OT texts emphasize the divine aspects of Yhwh's eschatological "glory" and his "shining forth?" After reviewing the relevant biblical material and secondary sources I will attempt to synthesize the contents.

Lastly, this dissertation will apply the OT study to the NT, where special attention will be given to three passages in particular: the narrative of the transfiguration of Jesus in Matthew 17:1–8, Paul's statements in 2 Corinthians 3:7–18, and the prologue to John's Gospel (John 1:1–18). The meaning of the Pauline text depends especially on Paul's use of the verb *καταργέω* to describe the effects of Moses' face and the purpose of the veil, which will be treated in detail.

With this outline in mind, the thesis defended below is that the term קָרַן in Exodus 34:29–35 means "to shine" in context, which is the result of Moses "talking with God" at Sinai (34:29), and specifically of his exposure to God's glory in 34:5–7. When Moses descends the mountain, God's glory is reflected on Moses' face, which functions to communicate, primarily, Yhwh's grace and compassion to the Israelites in renewing the Sinaitic covenant in spite of their sin with the golden calf. This thesis is applied inductively to the OT and NT texts mentioned above, where later biblical authors validate the interpretation and expand the image of a "shining face" theologically to varying contexts and, in the case of Jesus, one person.

Tracing the background to the book of Exodus as a whole is beyond the scope of this dissertation, so I will delimit this study to the context of Exodus 32–34.⁵

George H. van Kooten, *Themes in Biblical Narrative: Jewish and Christian Traditions* 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 37–54; Sharon R. Keller, "An Egyptian Analogue to the Priestly Blessing," in *Boundaries of the Ancient Near Eastern World* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 338–45.

⁵See the critique of historical criticism and an argument for literary criticism in Hans Frei, *The*

History of Modern Research

An exhaustive study of Exodus 34:29–35 necessitates engaging in the history of ideas on this particular passage. Scholarly studies in Exodus as a whole have changed dramatically in the last few centuries. The Enlightenment brought about an intellectual return to the classical roots of art and literature. This return resulted in the demand for use of the scientific method as the primary tool for analyzing the criteria of rationality and reliability with respect to the biblical documents. Judged by these standards, the Bible was thought by critical scholars to be implausible due to its claims to supernatural events, prophecies, and self-revelation, all of which lack empirical evidence.⁶ Although it took many years for this new “rationalism” to reach churches, these viewpoints dominated theological education, first in Europe and subsequently in America.⁷

The Pentateuch was perhaps first to be exposed to Enlightenment scrutiny, probably due to its antiquity and general interest in its content.⁸ And although the

Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974). For a straightforward approach to understanding OT narrative from a literary vantage point—with aspects of plot, theme, character, setting, climax, resolution, etc.—see especially Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). M. H. Segal, *The Pentateuch: Its Composition and Its Authorship and Other Biblical Studies* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985). For an attempt to apply literary methodology to systematic theology, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005). In my view, the best treatment of the literary framework of Exodus 32–34 is R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34*, JSOTSup 22 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1983).

⁶A few of the classic critical works on the OT that adopt this approach are S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956); Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper, 1948); J. Alberto Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976); Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. Peter R Ackroyd (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965).

⁷See Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800–1870: The New England Scholars* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969).

⁸Eugene H. Merrill, Mark F. Rooper, and Michael A. Grisanti, eds., *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 134.

scholarly criticism on Pentateuchal literature has undergone significant revisions over the last two centuries,⁹ the locus of criticism—viz., the sources of the documentary hypothesis—seems to have settled to a comfortable consensus in the latter twentieth century.¹⁰ Even now the JEDP source division still dominates the landscape of critical biblical studies.

Pre-critical interpreters considered Exodus 32–34 to be the work of one author,¹¹ while most critical scholars since Wellhausen¹² follow source methodology and

⁹See, e.g., the influence of the canonical method of Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Augsburg Fortress, 1979), and Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. David E. Orton (Leiderdorp, The Netherlands: Deo Publishing, 2005).

¹⁰Wenham speculates that a consensus was reached around 1970 on the sources of the Pentateuch: Gordon J. Wenham, “Pondering the Pentateuch: The Search for a New Paradigm,” in *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches*, ed. David W. Baker, and Bill T. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 116; Rolf Rendtorff, writes, “Current international study of the Pentateuch presents at first glance a picture of complete unanimity. The overwhelming majority of scholars in almost all countries where scholarly study of the Old Testament is pursued, take the documentary hypothesis as the virtually uncontested point of departure for their work; and their interest in the most precise understanding of the nature and theological purposes of the individual written sources seems undisturbed” (*The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch*, JSOTSup 89 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990], 101). Cf. Merrill, Rooker, and Grisanti, *The World and the Word*, 163. For the view that the documentary hypothesis is less influential and has come under greater scrutiny in recent years, especially with regard to the book of Exodus, see Mark S. Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus*, JSOTSup 239 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 144–91; Duane A. Garrett, “The Undead Hypothesis: Why the Documentary Hypothesis is the Frankenstein of Biblical Studies,” *SBJT* 5, no. 1 (2001): 28–41.

¹¹Mosaic authorship is without question in pre-modern interpretations, yet I do not think Exod 34:29–35 is treated well by Patristic interpreters. During this time (Apostolic era to AD 750) the majority of commentators relied heavily on the spiritual and/or allegorical interpretation of Moses’ face and veil. For a very limited overview see Joseph T. Lienhard, ed., *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, ACCS (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 155. Rabbinic interpretations are reviewed in the footnotes below, although there is near uniformity. For a more extensive discussion along these lines, see Linda L. Belleville, *Reflections of Glory: Paul’s Polemical Use of the Moses-Doxa Tradition in 2 Corinthians 3:1–18*, JSNTSup 52 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991); Scott J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3*, WUNT 1, Reihe 81 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995). Both of these works review the Rabbinic and Jewish readings of Exod 34:29–35 in order to assess their influence on Paul in 2 Cor 3.

¹²Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, Reprint (New York: Meridian Books, 1957); idem, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1963).

regard the book of Exodus as an amalgamation of J (Yahwist), E (Elohist), and P (Priestly) sources.¹³ But the JEP coalition is the extent of agreement. Nearly every critical scholar offers his/her own paradigm for the Exodus sources.¹⁴ In his majestic commentary on Exodus, Propp, for instance, sets out to determine the sources behind every individual text-unit before moving on to meaning and theology. A consensus remains elusive.

Studies on Exodus 32–34, which is the context of the present dissertation, are largely focused on three distinct sections: 32:1–6; 33:7–11; and 34:1–28.¹⁵ It is beyond the scope of this work to analyze each pericope in detail, but the significance of these three chapters as a whole should not be overlooked. Durham emphasizes, “if a narrative paradigmatic of what Exodus is really about were to be sought, Exodus 32–34 would be the obvious first choice.”¹⁶

¹³For an overview of the various proposals of literary approaches to the OT see Paul R. House, ed., *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism*, SBL/SBS 2 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992). Of the more recent commentaries where source analysis is advocated see John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987); Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991); William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1999); idem, *Exodus 19–40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, vol. 2A (New York: Doubleday, 2006). Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 696–700, rather sees the majority of Exodus as the hand of the “Non-P” historian, which is a combination of the J and P sources, and “closely related to the Deuteronomist.” The P source, in Dozeman’s view, only makes additions in the golden calf episode. This type of proposal offered by Dozemann illustrates that there is now no consensus among scholars as to the sources of the Pentateuch. See also George W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness: The Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness Traditions of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968).

¹⁴E.g., Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1974), who attempts to hold source criticism in one hand—arguing throughout his commentary that the book of Exodus is made up of J, E, and P—and canonical unity in the other. In other words, the sources are important for a scientific analysis of the text, but the only thing that matters theologically is the final “canonical” form of the text.

¹⁵See, e.g., the recent dissertation by Craig Evan Anderson, “The Composition of the Golden Calf Episode in the Book of Exodus” (Ph.D. diss., The Claremont Graduate University, 2011).

¹⁶Durham, *Exodus*, 418.

In critical circles, Exodus 34:29–35 is typically subjected to tradition-historical investigation. Based on the ANE evidence of priestly masks (discussed below), the textual unit is thought to have derived from an older tradition then attached to the end of Exodus 34 to close out the Sinai narrative.¹⁷ This theory assumes both an understanding of early Israelite religion as well as knowledge of religious/cultic borrowing in the early Israelite settlements.¹⁸ Both are complex matters and at present there is no objective, methodological criterion existing that leads to absolute certainty. Yet the influence of such theories, originally championed by Gressmann, is widespread, as noted below in the works of Morgenstern, Childs, and Dozeman. The dissentient voice of Moberly, however, is equally influential.

At the heart of the discussion of Exodus 34:29–35 is the question of the meaning and function of קָרַן עוֹר פְּנָיו and the subsequent מִסְּוָה, and, further, how these terms contribute to the overall structure and message of the whole Sinai pericope. Moreover, the issue of Moses himself and how his experience on Sinai transforms his image in both literal and metaphorical ways remains an interesting topic. Many scholars even conclude that the text is meant to portray Moses as a divine figure. Thus a closer analysis is needed and intended here. The following survey is not meant to be entirely exhaustive, and falls roughly in chronological order.

Hugo Gressman (1913)

In an effort to resolve the supposed tension in the account of Moses speaking

¹⁷The view that sees Moses' veil as a priestly mask primarily derives from Hugo Gressmann, *Mose und seine Zeit: Ein Kommentar zu den Mose-Sagen*, FRLANT 18 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 246ff.; Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 267; Karl Jaroš, "Des Mose 'Strahlende Haut': Eine Notiz Zu Ex 34:29, 30, 35," ZAW 88 (1976): 275–80; F. Dumermuth, "Moses Strahlendes Gesicht," ThZ 17 (1961): 241–48.

¹⁸Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 178–79.

to the Israelites with both a veiled and unveiled face, Gressman claims that there is “a deliberate alteration of the text” (*absichtliche Aenderung des Textes*). For Gressman, this problem “sets matters almost on their head” (*stellt die Dinge nahezu aufden Kopf*).¹⁹ Following a suite of other critical scholars, he seeks to show that Exodus 34:29–35 actually represents two separate forms of the same story that have been fused together.²⁰ In the first form (or “tradition”), 34:29–33, Moses comes down from the mountain with a radiant face, which is repulsive to the Israelites and who recoil from his presence. This causes Moses to put on the veil, and thus the Israelites return to him. When he finishes giving them the commands of God Moses removes the veil. In the second form (34:33–34), each time Moses convenes with God he removes the veil, but when he ventures back out to meet with the people he veils his face, which becomes a recurring pattern.²¹

With relation to the *מִסְפָּה*, Gressman contends that the veil corresponds to the types of masks that certain religions in the ANE would use during cultic ceremonies. In his view, “the mask is the anthropological parallel and the tangible cultic basis for the semi-mythical story of the shining of Moses’ face.”²² The mask in the ANE was typically an image or representation of the god from whom it was conceived. According to Gressman, the Israelites utilized such “masks” in their own cultic worship, called the

¹⁹Gressmann, *Mose und seine zeit*, 246–48.

²⁰The first among those to suppose a division of 34:29–35 was Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs*, 97; See also Gerhard von Rad, *Die Priesterschrift im Hexateuch Literarisch Untersucht und Theologisch Gewertet*, BWANT 13 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1934), 78–80; Martin Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1948), 33 n118.

²¹Gressmann, *Mose und seine Zeit*, 246–48.

²²Quoted in Menahem Haran, “The Shining of Moses’ Face: A Case Study in Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography,” in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature*, in Honor of G.W. Ahlström, ed. W. Barrick and John R. Spencer, JSOTSup 31 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 163.

teraphim—the Hebrew word meaning “statue” or “idol”²³—which was set over the ephod. Thus for Gressman, the mask is a statue god. During the priestly editing process, the intention was to imply that the priests used the mask outside of the tent, since only the high priest could enter it and only once a year. At the time of the Exodus, however, if an Israelite sought out God they would come to Moses at the tent of meeting, and Moses would employ the mask for cultic purposes. This is the conclusion Gressman reaches as he analyzes the final form of the text—or rather, the final two forms of the text—calling them “etiological sagas,” or “burlesques in their literary form.”²⁴ Various scholars have followed Gressman in his innovative interpretation.²⁵

Julian Morgenstern (1925)

Morgenstern writes in a similar vein to Gressman and other critical scholars. He first maintains the priestly character of the text, a character which he calls “undeniable.”²⁶ He notes, however, that the passage does not contain the typical “smoothness” he expects, and thus the text has an awkwardness that betrays the hand of an editor or glossator. Morgenstern also provides a suggestion for what the original narrative looked like in Hebrew before an editor changed it.²⁷

²³The meaning of this word is disputed: Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *HALOT* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), s.v. “תרפים.”

²⁴Gressmann, *Mose und seine zeit*, 149–51. The German translation of these two terms is provided by Haran, “The Shining of Moses’ Face,” 164, who calls the nomenclature a “chain of conjectures, rather curious in themselves and quite loosely connected with each other.”

²⁵E.g., Noth, *Exodus*; Childs, *The Book of Exodus*; Jack M. Sasson, “Bovine Symbolism in the Exodus Narrative,” *VT* 18, no. 3 (1968): 380–87; A. Jirku, “Die Gesichtsmaske Des Mose,” *ZDPV* 67 (1944): 43–45.

²⁶Julian Morgenstern, “Moses with the Shining Face,” *HUCA* 2 (1925): 2.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 3.

According to Morgenstern, the plain meaning of the text, that is, its intended meaning, is that Moses has become the official, earthly representative of Yhwh, “his substitute on earth as it were.”²⁸ Since Moses has a shining face like Yhwh has a shining face, which mortals could only gaze upon with difficulty and fear, Moses possesses divine qualities. In other words, “Moses has become in this story a kind of a deity, or at least a semi-divine mortal.”²⁹

Morgenstern then deals heavily with the composite source material that make up Exodus 34:29–35, and only secondarily with the exposition of the passage. In part I, he ascertains varying degrees of influence as it relates to Yhwh’s conception of brilliance. In his view, this is the result of the growing influence of Assyrio-Babylonian religion during the middle of the eighth century BC and “certain solar elements thereof.”³⁰ Yhwh came to be understood in Israelite religion as a divine, radiant being, emitting dazzling brilliance, “just like the great gods of the Assyrian pantheon, and particularly Shamash, the sun-god.”³¹

Part II entertains the possibilities of other texts that depict Moses as a semi-divine being or a demigod, texts like Exodus 32:9–14 and 32:30–34.

Part III is an attempt to draw together the source material in a coherent way that makes sense of what redactors have done to portray Moses as a demigod. At the heart of Morgenstern’s discussion is the desire, like many scholars, to reconcile how “no one can see [Yhwh’s] face and live,” and yet Moses sees something that reflects on his

²⁸Ibid., 5.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰This ambiguous phrase is undefined. Ibid., 8.

³¹Ibid., 9.

own face.

Morgenstern also examines the various motifs that turn up in Exodus and other books of the Hebrew bible and are possibly from a similar redactor. One motif is the concept or doctrine of the importance of Yhwh's reputation,³² and a second is that Yhwh must forgive Israel because of his previous commitment to the patriarchs.

Morgenstern's final point is that the character of Moses expanded to legendary status due to redactions and emendations in the text. He formerly was a simple, mortal being like any other Israelite, but then developed into a being "that transcends all the powers and bounds of ordinary mortality . . . whose face shines almost like [Yhwh's] with a radiance that defies all mortal vision."³³ Therefore, Moses is almost a demigod, "the most interesting and significant figure of early Jewish legend."³⁴

Brevard Childs (1974)

The golden calf narrative is generally attributed to J and E,³⁵ although 34:29–35 is commonly given to P since its characteristics pertain to the cultus—worship, law, and the role of intercessor. But as mentioned above, there is a tendency to attribute the entire pericope of Exodus 32–34 as a composition of several authors while also acknowledging its unity. This is the type of reading Brevard Childs espouses in his commentary on Exodus:

³²Ibid., 18–20.

³³Ibid., 26–27.

³⁴Ibid., 27.

³⁵So Durham, *Exodus*, 417. The near identical phrases in Exod 32:4 and 1 Kgs 12:28—"These [or 'Here'] are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt"—have led some scholars to conclude that the construction of the golden calf incident is meant to be an interpretation of the story of Jeroboam. For this view see Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 687; John Van Seters, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 300. An alternative would be that Jeroboam is presented by the author of 1 Kings as repeating the sin of the Israelites at Sinai.

The achieving of this compositional unity [of Exod 32–34] appears to stem from the hand of a literary redactor, who composed his story. Of course, he made much use of older sources, but it is important to recognize that his task was far wider in scope than simply piecing together parallel accounts from the J and E sources. Indeed, it is the decisive role of the redactor in the formation of chs. 32–34 which distinguishes the character of this section from that of Ex. 19–24.³⁶

Thus, Childs attempts to hold the final form of the Sinai episode as the standard for exegesis while also adhering to critical reconstructions. That is, Childs desires to have a critically reconstructed text but an authoritative and unchangeable literary unit. This applies not only to his methodology on Exodus 32–34 but also the entire book of Exodus. Childs' emphasis on the final form of the text is central: the context from which one reads the scriptures historically is the context provided in the canonical text itself, which is authoritative and inspired by God.

On the passage at hand, Childs contends that Exodus 34:29–35 is related to Exodus 33:7ff. in terms of its genre, but questions why the passage is given at the end of the rebellion narrative instead of in its proper place. Childs agrees against Gressman that Moses' face has a glow and is not actually horned or hardened. It is not a type of metamorphosis, for Moses himself did not know that his face had changed. It is simply a reflection of God's glory.³⁷

Childs frequently calls the veil a "mask" as well as a "veil." He proposes that the tradition explicitly resists having Moses speak to the people with a mask because of the ANE practice of the "shaman," which Childs fails to document.³⁸

³⁶Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 558. The Childsean method of arguing for the veracity of source criticism on the one hand while dismissing it in favor of canonical criticism on the other is evident throughout Childs' literary career.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 619. Childs also engages the difficulties in 2 Cor 3, which will be reviewed below.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 619.

R. W. L. Moberly (1983)

The influence of Moberly on Exodus 32–34 is widespread. His published dissertation, *At the Mountain of God*, has far-reaching implications for the literary understanding of the Sinai pericope and for Exodus 34 in particular. Moberly’s analysis tends toward looking for unity and patterns of thought within the exegetical framework. In his view, Exodus 32–34 represents a coherent narrative text in contrast to modern source critical readings.³⁹ He writes, “It is reasonable . . . in terms of the presentation within Exodus to treat Ex. 32–34 as a narrative in its own right, whose contents are to be interpreted primarily in relationship to themselves.”⁴⁰ His exegesis is literary in that it attempts to take seriously the Sinai pericope as a work of literature that belongs to a larger work. He utilizes literary devices such as foreshadowing, irony, suspense, climax, symbolism, etc. Moberly admits that there are risks to this type of reading, risks of misinterpreting certain features in the text (such as scribal errors or edits) as deliberate stylistic features.⁴¹ But even so, if one does misinterpret these features “one is still commenting upon actual phenomena in an actual text, which is certainly preferable to commenting upon hypothetical constructions of one’s own.”⁴²

Moberly’s exegesis is not historical in the sense that he seeks to determine the sources that lay behind the text. But it is historical in that he does not deem the meaning and theological import of his exegesis to be anachronistic. Thus, Moberly’s intent is to ascertain the meaning of the text as it is presented in historical context and from a literary

³⁹Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 15–43.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 38.

⁴¹The risks of literary analysis are mentioned in Jacob Licht, *Storytelling in the Bible* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 1978), 103–105.

⁴²*Ibid.*, 146.

perspective, and to draw theological conclusions.⁴³

On Exodus 34:29–35, Moberly notes the many ways in which the narrative weaves together themes from chapters 32–34, such as the theme of “face” and the descent from the mountain, the tablets in Moses’ hand, etc. With respect to קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו, Moberly agrees that it must mean “shine” in context, and accordingly מַסְוֵה must mean “veil” and not “mask.” On the latter, Moberly supposes that the use of the veil may be to *contrast* a known practice (such as wearing a mask), not to conform to it. Whereas other ANE gods are represented by a mask which hides the priest’s face, Yhwh does not use a mask but shines directly through the face of his servant. No mask is needed to communicate Yhwh’s presence; it is a man and not an object who is in the role of mediating between the Israelites and Yhwh. The uncovered face of a man lets the divine glory shine through, reflecting the same profound theology of the role of man within the purposes of God (cf. Gen 1:26).⁴⁴

Relating to the word קָרַן, Moberly draws the connection to the ancient conception of a bull being symbolized by a horn. He concludes that Moses’ shining face is, in the end, an echo of the golden calf that is meant to convey a false god and to remind the Israelites of their sin.⁴⁵ This presents a “daring parallelism” between Moses and the calf. “The writer makes clear that Moses was to the people what they wanted the calf to be—a leader and a mediator of the divine presence.”⁴⁶ The veil, for Moberly, is of secondary importance and its function inconclusive.

⁴³Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 39–40.

⁴⁴Ibid., 108.

⁴⁵Ibid., 109.

⁴⁶Ibid.

Menaheh Haran (1984)

Haran writes a response to the interpretation of Gressman on Exodus 34:29–35 and the various critical reconstructions that follow.⁴⁷ Haran’s main argument is that the cultic parallels offered by Gressman and his contemporaries are insufficient and conjectural. There is nothing in the text that has any cultic basis.

Since the majority of critics who side with Gressman tend to neglect the issue of Moses imparting some of his “radiance”—his הוֹד—to Joshua in Numbers 27:20, Haran examines the הוֹד of God and how it connects with Exodus 34:29–35. Haran writes that this connection was already sensed in the Midrash, and Jewish medieval commentators followed suit.⁴⁸ The later concept of כְּבוֹד (“glory”) is a synonymous term that is used in similar texts and contexts in the Hebrew Bible. Even so, the terms bear their own meanings and are not exactly the same.⁴⁹

Haran’s ensuing discussion on the ANE concept of *melammu* (discussed below) leads him to conclude that the only real parallel to the shining of Moses’ face and the divine הוֹד is to be found in ANE mythical and iconographic imagery.

George Coats (1987)

George Coats characterizes Moses’ shining face and “masking” as his “transfiguration.” This is to establish his authority in the Pentateuch as arising from God’s power.⁵⁰ And Mosaic authority is at the heart of the entire Sinai pericope

⁴⁷Haran, “The Shining of Moses’ Face.”

⁴⁸Ibid., 165.

⁴⁹Ibid., 167.

⁵⁰George W. Coats, *Moses: Heroic Man, Man of God*, JSOTSup 57 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987). Coats does not note any additional instances of transfiguration in the ANE that designate authority. Coats’ older work, *Rebellion in the Wilderness: The Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness Traditions of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), does not deal with Exod 34:29–35 in any detail.

according to Coats. He writes,

The veil would, in a fashion, function as a visible and concrete symbol of Mosaic authority derived from his intimacy with God. The veil might then be defined as a symbol for Mosaic authority, derived from Moses' presence with God, and thus ranked alongside the rod as a symbol of Moses' stature. Moreover, that authority stands at the foundation of the covenant.⁵¹

Additionally, Coats draws upon the tension in the text between the duality of "offices" explicit in the Exodus tradition, and then emphasizes how the shining face episode corroborates at least one of those offices. The two images of Moses emerge from the Sinai tradition are (1) that Moses is the leader of the Israelites at their own request after they experience the presence of God at Sinai in Exodus 19, and (2) that Moses is the leader of the Israelites because God chose him for the task.⁵² Coats explores whether these two conceptions are contradictory or complementary based on setting and literary sources. The pertinent question is whether or not Moses is in the office of overseer because the people have designated him as such, or because God chose him specifically.

As it relates to Exodus 34 and the shining face pericope, Coats maintains that the section fits within the confines of both images mentioned above: "Moses exercises the authority bestowed on him by God *when* he leads his people under the stamp of his validation."⁵³ Coats submits that the two images are not contradictory but complementary, which is evident not only in Exodus 34 but also in Exodus 14:31 after the passing through the sea, an event which occurs so that the people might believe both Yhwh *and* Moses, not one or the other.⁵⁴

⁵¹Coats, *Moses*, 131.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 133.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 134, emphasis mine.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

Williams H. C. Propp (1987/88, 2006)

The Anchor Bible Commentary is known for its critical interaction and detailed historical-grammatical exegesis. Propp's magnum opus is his two volumes in this series on Exodus.⁵⁵ Exodus 34:29–35 is of particular interest to Propp, who published two articles prior to the publication of his commentary dealing with the ANE and philological details of Moses' shining face.⁵⁶

Propp rejects the notion that Moses' face represents a horned mask.⁵⁷ He admits to the contrary that if קָרַן means “shine” then it must literally refer to luminosity.⁵⁸ His main contention is that the text says Moses' “skin” shone, not simply his “face.” Propp scans the ancient languages to note the many texts that associate skin with “horniness” in the sense of a toughened texture.⁵⁹ This supposedly took place when Moses entered Yhwh's glory in Exodus 24:16–18, and Propp lists a few sources which describe similar “toughening” or “blackening” of skin from being in the presence of God.⁶⁰ Propp's proposal is that the interpretation of Moses' face as beaming “rays of

⁵⁵Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, AB, vol. 2; idem, *Exodus 19–40*, AB, vol. 2A.

⁵⁶Propp, “The Skin of Moses' Face—Transfigured or Disfigured?” *CBQ* 49, no. 3 (1987): 375–86; idem, “Did Moses Have Horns?” *BRev* 4, no. 1 (1988): 30–37.

⁵⁷Propp, “The Skin of Moses' Face—Transfigured or Disfigured?,” 375n1, 382–83.

⁵⁸Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 621.

⁵⁹See again Propp, who says that the first to apply this meaning to Exod 34:29–35 was the medieval heretic Hiwi of Balkh (confuted and anathematized by ibn Ezra): “Moses' face dried up like a horn” (Ibid., 622). He also points to *Hekhalot Rabbati* 159, where angels are described to serve God only for a day, “for their vigor has grown weak and their faces have turned black.” Propp mentions both W. F. Albright, “The Psalm of Habakkuk,” in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy, Presented to Professor Theodore H. Robinson by the Society of Old Testament Study on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday, August 9th, 1946*, ed. H. H. Rowley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1950), 14n1, and B. D. Eerdmans, *The Covenant at Mount Sinai: Viewed in the Light of Antique Thought* (Leiden: Burgersdijk & Niermans, 1939), 20–22 as modern scholars who are in agreement with this theory.

⁶⁰Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 622–23.

light” is from the traditional understanding of קָרַן *rather than* the lexical evidence.⁶¹ His analysis of the word in the light of ANE ritualistic and medicinal practices leads him to conclude that Moses’ face became blistered due to prolonged exposure to the radiation-like heat of Yhwh’s presence on Sinai. Moses’ face, then, gave the appearance of horns to the Israelites, which is why the term קָרַן is used as opposed to the usual אֹר (“light”).

The people therefore flee from Moses in Exodus 34:30 because they are revolted by his ugliness, not simply because they are startled at his “shining.” But why would the Torah depict Moses in such ugliness? Propp contends that this is the price that Moses, the lawgiver *par excellence*, had to give to mediate Yhwh’s presence to the Israelites. Further, in Propp’s view the priestly nature of the vignette simply confirms the character of other P-texts—a slow denigration of Moses and the Levites in favor of the Aaronides and their house. In other words, “if the Priestly Writer could not deny Moses’ pivotal role, he could at least describe him as of hideous aspect.”⁶²

Propp’s discussion of the major versions of the OT (especially the Targumim) and his analysis of the ANE data provide valuable components for the lexical analysis of קָרַן that this dissertation will undertake.

Bena Elisha Medjuck (1998)

The unpublished thesis by Bena Elisha Medjuck⁶³ seeks to show that Jerome’s fourth-century rendering of קָרַן עוֹר פְּנָיו as *cornuta asset facies* (“his face was horned”) is not a mistake of interpretation, but rather a deliberate attempt to preserve the Hebrew

⁶¹Propp, “The Skin of Moses’ Face—Transfigured or Disfigured?,” 377–79.

⁶²Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 623.

⁶³Bena Elisha Medjuck, “Exodus 34:29–35: Moses’ ‘Horns’ in Early Bible Translations and Interpretations” (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1998).

idiom. Medjuck further argues that this interpretation was the standard one from the time of the canonization of the Hebrew bible until Jerome.⁶⁴ Thus, the medieval iconographic depictions of Moses with actual horns⁶⁵ is attributed to a *misunderstanding* of Jerome’s intention in his Latin translation of קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו.

The majority of Medjuck’s work is his analysis of the Jewish sources to corroborate his thesis. Although the Talmud has nothing to say of Exodus 34:29–35, and there is no interpretation given of קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו, it is generally understood that the Aramaic Targumim are an important repository of early rabbinic interpretations and techniques, especially on Exodus.⁶⁶ There are several Aramaic translations that are pertinent to his study: Targums Onkelos, Pseudo-Jonathan, Neophyti 1, a fragment of Targum Yerushalmi and three different versions of the Samaritan Targum. These translations share the basic premise that קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו means the “radiance” or “glory” on Moses’ face.⁶⁷ With very minor exceptions, then, the Jewish translations of Exodus 34:29–35 “reflect exegetical traditions contained in the rabbinic midrashim by describing the brilliant radiance of Moses’ face and even attributing it directly to his interaction with God.”⁶⁸

Further, the NT (i.e. Greek) emphasis on “glory” is a notable parallel to Christ

⁶⁴Ibid., 4–5.

⁶⁵Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Horned Moses in Medieval Art and Thought*, California Studies in the History of Art 14 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970). According to Mellinkoff, the artistic portrayal of Moses with beams or rays appeared simultaneously with the portrayals of Moses with horns (eleventh century AD), though she admits that the interpretation of Moses as “radiant” or “glorified” is the standard throughout the ANE (76–93).

⁶⁶Medjuck, “Moses’ ‘Horns’ in Early Bible Translations and Interpretations,” 67.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid., 90–91.

in the transfiguration narrative (particularly in Matthew 17:1–8). Additionally, Medjuck comments that “the significance of Moses’ glorious light originating from God is most evident in the comments of those Christian theologians who portray it as fading and hidden to emphasize the superseding of the ‘old’ Law of Moses by the ‘new’ Law of Christ.”⁶⁹ Thus, if both Jewish and NT interpreters understood Moses’ face in the “spiritual” sense rather than literal one, it is reasonable to suppose that Jerome did as well. Moreover, Jerome’s commentary on Amos makes it clear that his translation of קָרַן as *cornuta* is a metaphorical reference to Moses’ “glorification.”⁷⁰

Medjuck’s theory is that Jerome followed Aquila in translating Exodus 34:29–35 more literally but with the intention that the spiritual sense would be more prominent and assumed.

Thomas B. Dozeman (2000/09)

Aside from recently completing a major commentary on the book of Exodus,⁷¹ Dozeman has also published widely on the exodus tradition,⁷² the book of Numbers,⁷³ and inner-biblical interpretation.⁷⁴ But most pertinent to this study is his commentary and

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid., 2 *et passim*, especially 100ff.

⁷¹Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

⁷²Thomas B. Dozeman, “Horeb/Sinai and the Rise of Law in the Wilderness Tradition,” *SBLSP* 28 (1989): 282–90; idem, *God at War: Power in the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁷³Thomas B. Dozeman, “Numbers,” in *Numbers–Samuel*, ed. Bruce C. Birch and Nancy Kaczmarczyk, vol. 2 of NIB (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

⁷⁴Thomas B. Dozeman, “Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Yahweh’s Gracious and Compassionate Character,” *JBL* 108, no. 2 (1989): 207–23.

one of the more recent treatments on Exodus 34:29–35 and Moses’ veil.⁷⁵

Dozeman maintains that the most recent research on ritual masks confirms Gressmann’s original thesis of identifying Moses’ veil as a mask.⁷⁶ He does not attempt an argument for the cultic use of masks in Israel, but, first of all, to show that the shining face of Moses and his veil are actually *both* masks, and their interrelationship establishes Mosaic authority.⁷⁷ This dual emphasis, secondly, influences Moses’ portrayal as a divine mediator throughout the Pentateuch. And thirdly, the composite nature of 34:29–35 illustrates two separate interpretations of Moses’ authority, one in the pre-Priestly setting of the tent of meeting, and another in the Priestly version setting of the Tabernacle. For Dozeman, Moses’ shining face and veil are pivotal to the pre-Priestly tradition since it provides both the conclusion to the covenant at Sinai (Exod 19–34) as well as an introduction to the wilderness tradition (Num 11ff.). Further, “in the process the cultic and social authority of Moses as the mediator of divine law is established.”⁷⁸

As noted, Dozeman follows Gressman’s hypothesis in calling Moses’ veil a “mask,” which to him is a simple hood or fibers falling in front of the face, and which means that interpreting the *shining face* as actually a mask is not out of the question.⁷⁹ According to Dozeman, a mask is any mode of facial stylization. This is substantiated in

⁷⁵Thomas B. Dozeman, “Masking Moses and Mosaic Authority in Torah,” *JBL* 119, no. 1 (2000): 21–45.

⁷⁶Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 753.

⁷⁷Dozeman, “Masking Moses and Mosaic Authority in Torah,” 23; idem, *Commentary on Exodus*, 753.

⁷⁸Ibid., 32–34. The masking of Moses and the tent of meeting are the culmination of theophany at Sinai “because they remedy the idolatry of the golden calf.” Cf. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 755.

⁷⁹Dozeman, “Masking Moses and Mosaic Authority in Torah,” 25. On this point Dozeman follows the study of Henry Pernet, “Masks: Theoretical Perspectives,” in vol. 9 of *ER*, ed. Mircea Eliade, trans. Michele P. Cros (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 259–63.

that the function of Moses' mask is "concretion" and "concealment." It is *concretion* in that the exterior of the wearer conforms to the demands of the mask and is transformed in personality by an external force. This act of masking is intentional on the part of Moses. But the mask is *concealment*, too, in that Moses' identity is concealed in the process.⁸⁰

The veil does not inherently represent deity, but for Dozeman, by separating Moses from the other Israelites the veil establishes his social authority. In this way the veil is functional rather than practical: "The veil symbolizes unification and consolidation of judicial authority in Moses. It designates Moses as law-giver, who administers divinely revealed legislation into the life of Israel."⁸¹ The final point of the story is not the veil but the imprinting of the divine name on Moses' skin (cf. Exod 34:1ff.).⁸²

Furthermore, for Dozeman the glory imprinted on Moses' skin includes imagery of the *כְּבוֹד יְהוָה* ("glory of Yhwh").⁸³ When the tabernacle is completed, Moses' authority no longer resides in the glory of the divine name on his face, but in the *כְּבוֹד יְהוָה*, which now resides behind the veil of the tabernacle. Thus a transfer takes place with respect to glory and with respect to leadership, for now the Aaronide priesthood and the Levites have functional control of the tabernacle.⁸⁴ This is God's ultimate goal—to dwell in the tabernacle and not on Moses' face—and the implications of that goal is that Moses is, in the end, the founder of the cult, ensuring the succession of its mission.⁸⁵

⁸⁰Dozeman, "Masking Moses and Mosaic Authority in Torah," 26; idem, *Commentary on Exodus*, 753: "Moses' shining skin indicates Moses' transformation, concealing his profane identity in order to reveal the presence of God in him during cultic mediation."

⁸¹Dozeman, "Masking Moses and Mosaic Authority in Torah," 28.

⁸²Ibid., 35.

⁸³Dozeman, "Masking Moses and Mosaic Authority in Torah," 40–42.

⁸⁴Ibid., 44.

⁸⁵Ibid.

Martin Hauge (2001)

Martin Hauge calls Exodus 34:29–35 the “Apotheosis of Moses,” or, the culmination of the Sinai pericope.⁸⁶ At the conclusion of the “drama of Exodus 32–34,” Hauge draws a parallel between Moses as the central “actor” and the development of the people as “narrative figures” in Exodus 19–40.⁸⁷ These factors are not entirely identical, as is clear in Moses’ encounter with Yhwh as opposed to the people’s encounter. Nevertheless, Moses is elevated in terms of status to an “extraordinary *visio*.”⁸⁸ This character is especially pronounced in Moses’ final descent from the mountain.⁸⁹ Although the very fact that Moses comes down with new tablets is significant, it is outshone by Moses’ radiant face.

Hauge argues that the literary nature of the text indicates that the final *visio* experience (meaning, the final vision of God on the mountain) substitutes for a “traditional” experience of God. Thus, like Exodus 20:18–21, “the visual impression of the face of Moses has the same effect as the theophanic presence,” especially in light of the motifs of “seeing” and “fear” connected with distance, which describes the people’s reaction.⁹⁰ In other words,

The subtle elaboration of the established scenes indicates that in the story cycle of 32.20–34.35 . . . , the third episode [i.e., 34:29–35] represents a climax of “theophanic” experience. The categories of *visio Dei* have been shifted from the

⁸⁶Martin Ravndal Hauge, *The Descent from the Mountain: Narrative Patterns in Exodus 19–40*, JSOTSup 323 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

⁸⁷Ibid., 164.

⁸⁸Ibid., 165.

⁸⁹Here Hauge points to the parallels in the various descents from the mountain and how the tablets of the testimony act as a central motif. There is an inherent juxtaposition of the descent scenes. “The tablets brought down from the mountain (34:29a) provide the positive contrast to the former descent of ch. 32, which was concluded with the tragic destruction of the tablets” (ibid., 165).

⁹⁰Ibid., 166–67.

traditional imagery of theophany to the transformed version with Moses as the embodiment of the divine presence.⁹¹

Hauge notes further that the “horned” character of Moses makes the reader uncertain as to its meaning. While he understands “light” to be a clearer interpretation, Hauge thinks that the linguistic material makes some connotation of “horn” rather unavoidable.⁹² Therefore, following Moberly, Hauge understands the use of קֶרֶן to be a deliberate allusion to the only other “horn” in context, namely, the golden calf. Coupling this notion with the ANE concept of an ox as a divine, Hauge supports the thesis that the “horns” of Moses could be placed in iconographical categories, thus representing “a rather radical understanding of Moses as a divine figure.”⁹³

Seth Sanders (2002)

In his recent essay, “Old Light on Moses’ Shining Face,”⁹⁴ Seth Sanders focuses on the contradiction in “vision” in the Sinai account in that God is unapproachable on the one hand and yet approachable on the other. In other words, how is it possible that Moses can speak to Yhwh “face to face,” whom no one can see “face to face” (Exod 33:23)? Sanders’ main question in the essay is to ask whether or not this contradiction is equally salient to the ancient Israelites.⁹⁵ In his investigation of this question the text of Exodus 34:29–35 is paramount.

⁹¹Ibid., 167.

⁹²Ibid., 168.

⁹³Ibid. As already noted, Hauge is not alone in this interpretation. See, e.g., Van Seters, 359–60: “The impression of Moses as ‘bearer of divine majesty’ is transcribed into the divine presence ‘symbolized and attested by the shining face.’” Hauge further notes a parallel between the plea for “gods who can go before us” in Exod 32:1 and the divine qualities impressed on Moses’ face in Exod 34:29: “the imagery of Moses substituted by the ‘gods’ in the shape of an ox is reversed by the imagery of divine presence ‘horned’ from the skin of Moses” (169).

⁹⁴Seth L. Sanders, “Old Light on Moses’ Shining Face,” *VT* 52, no. 3 (2002): 400–406.

⁹⁵Ibid., 401.

Sanders writes that it has never been entirely clear what the Israelites saw when Moses came down the mountain in Exodus 34:29. While Propp makes the point that no words in Semitic lexica cover both the sense of *radiance* and *horns*, Sanders seeks to ask the separate question of whether ancient speakers of Semitic languages even made such connections.⁹⁶ He maintains that “while ambivalence about seeing God is distinctive in the bible, the conceptual connection between horns and light was in fact a common feature of the international Near Eastern cuneiform high culture of the early first millennium BCE.”⁹⁷

Sanders finds such connections in Babylonian lexicographic and astronomical traditions. The Sumerian **si**, for example, is a sign for a larger conceptual connection, as is clear from a few astronomical commentaries from ancient Babylon which note that **si** means both “horn” and “shine.” This conceptual phenomenon is also found in the Mesopotamian mythological object called the *melammu*, a blinding mask of light belonging mainly to gods and monsters, as well as the sun.⁹⁸

Sanders concludes from this data that Moses’ close proximity to the divine added a physical mark on his “face” of his own inhumanity—his divine persona.⁹⁹ Moses becomes “angel-like” from his experience on the mountain. This leads him to draw two consequences. First, the Sinai episode contributes to the overall picture of the Torah as parallel to the later apocalypses. In this way Moses’ experience is similar to Levi and Enoch in the Apocrypha. Like Enoch, Moses becomes angel-like, “imbued with a

⁹⁶Ibid., 402.

⁹⁷Ibid., 403.

⁹⁸Ibid., 404.

⁹⁹Ibid.

terrifying supernatural light.”¹⁰⁰

Second, the significance of drawing an intermediate link between the image of the *melammu* and the biblical account is exemplified in the midrashic interpretation of the passage, which, in Sanders’ words, “takes Moses’ radiance as a sign of his coronation in heaven.”¹⁰¹

All of this suggests to Sanders that there is no inherent contradiction in Exodus 33 and 34: “While no human could see God and live, in Ex. xxxiv the Israelites recoil from a transformed Moses who is no longer precisely human.”¹⁰² In other words, Moses’ divine encounter renders him a demigod.

Douglas Stuart (2006)

Stuart asserts that the function and purpose of Moses’ shining face is fivefold: (1) to confirm or reestablish Moses’ leadership and role as intermediary, (2) to confirm Yhwh’s presence among the Israelites, (3) to confirm Yhwh’s greatness, (4) to show that one can have a relationship with a personal God, and (5) to reveal the ultimate purpose of the greater reality of lasting glory in the NT.¹⁰³

The fact that Moses did not know that his face was shining means that “the glory of God is not a painful or harmful thing when borne by one upon whom God’s favor rests.”¹⁰⁴ If this true, then the proposal by Propp that Moses’ face was burnt to reflect horns would be untenable.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 405.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 735–36.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 737.

The people had not formally recognized Moses as their leader up to the point of Exodus 34:29–35. Stuart maintains that Yhwh does this by giving Moses an unmistakable credential: “radiant glory, residual to an obvious divine encounter, that no one could doubt establish him as a favorite of God.”¹⁰⁵

Stuart does not agree that the veil is an allusion or precursor to the veil of the tabernacle.¹⁰⁶ Rather, the veil was simply used for the sake of the people, “not because his unveiled face would physically harm them but because it apparently scared them so much psychologically that they found it hard to be near him.”¹⁰⁷

Duane A. Garrett (2010/13)

Garrett’s forthcoming commentary on Exodus argues against the consensus that the glory on Moses’ face communicates judgment and wrath, contending that it shows grace and compassion.¹⁰⁸ Nor does Garrett understand the shining to be an echo of the golden calf, or the result of overexposure to the (literally) radiating presence of God, as in Propp’s hypothesis. For Garrett, one must interpret the text as it stands, and the shining face is self-explanatory and not overly technical. The physical glow is the manifestation of Moses’ exposure to God’s glory. In addition, Garrett says that the veil is a purely practical measure meant to conceal Moses’ face due to the discomfort of the Israelites who had to see it regularly.

¹⁰⁵Stuart, *Exodus*, 737. Durham, *Exodus*, 466, similarly notes, “If Moses should remain discredited, both the repetition of Yahweh’s revelation and instruction given already, and also the continuing revelation and instruction to be given through him would be compromised. Moses’ authority must therefore be reestablished in the eyes of the very people who have rejected him and by none other than Yahweh himself.”

¹⁰⁶Stuart, *Exodus*, 740n245.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 740.

¹⁰⁸Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013).

For Garrett, the real difficulty of Exodus 34:29–35 is its later interpretation by the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 3. On contextual and linguistic grounds Garrett departs from standard English versions on 2 Corinthians 3 in his recent article, “Veiled Hearts,”¹⁰⁹ and argues that one of the primary reasons this text is so misunderstood is because it is mistranslated.¹¹⁰ Garrett contends that in Christ the old covenant is not “fading away” (*καταργέω*) as many claim,¹¹¹ but has been “nullified.” In this way, “Paul does not claim that Moses tried to conceal the fading of the glow from his face, and he does not speak of some new capacity to read the Old Testament.”¹¹² Thus, Garrett’s translation of *καταργέω* proves that the subtle differences in the way it is translated can have profound effects on the meaning of 2 Corinthians 3 as a whole.¹¹³ As a result,

[Paul] equates the inability of the Israelites to come to terms with Moses’ glowing face with his opponents’ inability to comprehend the significance of the New Covenant, which is the forgiveness of sin and the transformation of the heart under the ministry of the Spirit, as well as the fact that it renders obsolete the Old Covenant.¹¹⁴

Victor P. Hamilton (2011)

Hamilton’s new commentary on Exodus adopts a straightforward approach to

¹⁰⁹Duane A. Garrett, “Veiled Hearts: The Translation and Interpretation of 2 Corinthians 3,” *JETS* 53, no. 4 (2010): 729–72. It should be noted from the outset that this article is the impetus for my own interest in the relationship between Exod 34 and 2 Cor 3.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 729n1.

¹¹¹This interpretation is reflected in most English translations: RSV, NRSV, NJB, REB, NIV, TNIV, NASB, and CEV.

¹¹²Garrett, “Veiled Hearts,” 771.

¹¹³Garrett presents a new study of *καταργέω*, taking into account not only detailed analysis of all usage in the NT, but also the LXX and Classical Greek. This analysis forms the foundation for his interpretation. *Ibid.*, 739–45.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 771.

Exodus 34:29–35.¹¹⁵ The phrase under discussion, קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו, simply means “the skin of his face shone.” קָרַן does not mean “had horns.” On the question of why the author of Exodus 34 would use קָרַן instead of the typical אֹר, Hamilton, like Moberly, says that the former is an echo of the golden calf story in Exodus 32. This ties the two chapters together. He surmises, “Who will God have to lead his people, the horned calf or bull of chap. 32, or the ‘horned’ Moses of chap. 34? Will he go with the bovine of chap. 32 or with he-of-the-beaming-face of chap. 34?”¹¹⁶

Hamilton asserts that the veil is not a mask. Historically, it is replaced by the veil of the tabernacle. Hamilton also makes a connection, rather creatively, between Moses’ veil and Jesus’ “cloth” that he left neatly folded in the tomb (cf. John 20:7). He supposes that the apostle John is implying that Jesus, like Moses, removes his “face-veil” before returning to the presence of God. Unlike Jesus, however, Moses must constantly put his veil on and off again.¹¹⁷

Hamilton also notes other possible NT allusions like the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36) and Paul’s comments in 2 Corinthians 3. On the latter, Hamilton disagrees with the NIV translation that Moses’ face is somehow “fading” (*καταργέω*, 3:7b, 11a, 13b), and opts, rather, for a translation that Moses’ face is “transient” or “transitory” because it has forever been eclipsed by the glory of the ministry in the new covenant.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

¹¹⁶*Ibid.*, 589.

¹¹⁷*Ibid.*, 590. On this view, Hamilton references S. M. Schneiders, “The Face Veil: A Johannine Sign (John 20:1–10),” *BTB* 13, no. 3 (1983): 94–97.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 591.

New Testament Scholarship

Since one of the goals of this study is to determine how Exodus 34:29–35 was understood in the OT as well as the NT, the following overview will review two important works from NT scholars. Linda Belleville, in particular, spends a great deal of energy outlining the Jewish sources and concludes that they form the background of Paul’s argumentation in 2 Corinthians 3:7–18. In other words, Paul’s supposed reengineering of the meaning and function of Moses’ shining face and veil is well attested in Jewish literature, and is therefore nothing new for Jews hearing it in the Corinthian church.

Scott Hafemann makes a similar effort, although he departs from Belleville in that he begins with the OT context and argues that Paul’s understanding of Exodus 34:29–35 is grounded in the meaning of the Sinai pericope in Exodus 32–34 and not Jewish midrash. These works are summarized here in chronological order.

Linda L. Belleville (1991)

In both *Reflections of Glory: Paul’s Polemical Use of the Moses-Doxa Tradition in 2 Corinthians 3:1–18*¹¹⁹ and “Tradition or Creation? Paul’s Use of the Exodus 34 Tradition in 2 Corinthians 3:7–18,”¹²⁰ Linda Belleville first reviews various form-critical approaches to 2 Corinthians 3:7–18, and thereafter examines the extra-biblical usage of Exodus 34:28–35¹²¹ to determine if and where Paul makes use of Jewish

¹¹⁹Linda L. Belleville, *Reflections of Glory: Paul’s Polemical Use of the Moses-Doxa Tradition in 2 Corinthians 3:1–18*, JSNTSup 52 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

¹²⁰Linda L. Belleville, “Tradition or Creation? Paul’s Use of the Exodus 34 Tradition in 2 Corinthians 3:7–18,” in *Paul and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. Craig A. Evans and James A. Sanders, JSNTSup 83 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 165–86.

¹²¹Belleville does not provide a textual basis for why she includes v. 28 in her overall study of the descent from the mountain. Many include v. 27 as well.

interpretations, or perhaps when he offers his own. Her review on the form-critical approaches is relegated to a few pages in the article but is more substantive in the book. The bulk of her two studies provide an analysis of the source material behind 2 Corinthians 3.

From the outset, Belleville departs from Hays¹²² and others who argue that *καταργέω* in 2 Corinthians 3:7, 11, 13, and 14 means “nullify” or “bring to an end.” Rather, Belleville adopts the interpretation evident in the NIV and other English translations: the “shine” on Moses’ face was “fading away.”¹²³

On the Targumim, Belleville says that the tradition preserves the association of the giving of the law with the glory of Moses’ face. Yet the Targumim speak of the glory as increasing rather than “fading” or decreasing.¹²⁴ On Philo’s *De Vita Moses*, Belleville notes that there are a few parallels between Philo’s description of Moses’ descent from Sinai and Paul’s description. Both refer to the inability of the Israelites to continue to gaze at Moses’ face, both contrast coming before Yhwh openly with hiding the face or heart, both make a connection between the glory of Moses’ face and the office of lawgiver, and both admit the temporary nature of the glory.¹²⁵ Philo would likely not think of making a connection between the paling of the law’s glory with the glory of Moses’ face as Paul does, which is the main point of departure between the two.

Pseudo-Philo, which contains a commentary on Exodus 34:28–35, adds, like Paul, that the veiling is an effort to prevent the gazing, and that the veil has a negative

¹²²Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 130–42.

¹²³Belleville, “Tradition or Creation?,” 165n2.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, 171; *idem*, *Reflections of Glory*, 28–30.

¹²⁵Belleville, “Tradition or Creation?,” 173; *idem*, *Reflections of Glory*, 31–35.

connotation due to the sin of the golden calf (Philo), or for “dulling of perceptions” (Paul). Yet *Pseudo-Philo* does not link the veil with the need to conceal “fading” as Paul does, nor does he make a further connection with the fading of the glory and the fading of the law. *Pseudo-Philo* adds, however, that the glory on Moses’ face was reinstated at his death.¹²⁶

The most notable correlation between the Qumran scrolls and 2 Corinthians 3 is that the “prophet and the law are intimately linked in both, so that the hiding of the prophet’s glory results in the hiding of the law and the cessation of the prophet’s light is equivalent to the cessation of the Torah.”¹²⁷ While this effect is permanent in Paul, the cessation of the law’s light is temporary in the Scrolls.

Similar parallels exist in both the Samaritan documents and in Rabbinic literature. In the former, however, the veil of Moses is of heavenly origin and serves to enhance rather than hide the glory.¹²⁸ On the latter, there is no reference to the veiling of Moses as an act of concealing the fading glory as there is in Paul.¹²⁹

Lastly, the *Zohar*—a document “commonly grouped with the *Kabbalah* (the Jewish mystical writings)” and “essentially a reshaping of ancient traditional material”¹³⁰—reveals that, like Paul, the Israelites could not gaze on Moses’ face because of the glory. Further, the glory was evidently deteriorating, although the glory validated Moses’ role as covenant mediator.¹³¹

¹²⁶Belleville, “Tradition or Creation?,” 174; idem, *Reflections of Glory*, 40–43.

¹²⁷Belleville, “Tradition or Creation?,” 176; idem, *Reflections of Glory*, 44–47.

¹²⁸Belleville, “Tradition or Creation?,” 178; idem, *Reflections of Glory*, 48–52.

¹²⁹Belleville, “Tradition or Creation?,” 182; idem, *Reflections of Glory*, 63–72.

¹³⁰Belleville, “Tradition or Creation?,” 183.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, 184; idem, *Reflections of Glory*, 73–76.

In sum, Belleville's article and book show that there is a substantial amount of background material that Paul could have drawn from when formulating his thoughts in 2 Corinthians 3. Belleville concludes that the similarities listed above prove that many of Paul's points regarding the glory and the veil of Moses were widely known. Paul alone, however, links the fading of Moses' glory with the waning of the covenant,¹³² which was veiled so that the Israelites could not see that the law was coming to an end. But for Belleville, this simply means,

. . . there is no real uniqueness to the Moses-*doxa* material in 2 Cor. 3.7–18. Parallels clearly exist for what is commonly attributed to Pauline creativity. It is, rather, in the application of these traditions to the Mosaic covenant itself and to his contemporary situation that Paul's original contribution is made.¹³³

Perhaps the most intriguing point of Belleville study is that she depends on the assumption that Paul's ideology and terminology can be solely accounted for as Septuagintal and extrabiblical dependence.¹³⁴ Thus, she does not begin with the OT as Dumbrell,¹³⁵ Moberly and Hafemann begin their respective works.

Scott J. Hafemann (1994, 1995)

Hafemann's contribution is twofold.¹³⁶ First, Hafemann provides a detailed

¹³²Belleville, "Tradition or Creation?," 185.

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴Ibid., 168.

¹³⁵William J. Dumbrell, "Paul's Use of Exodus 34 in 2 Corinthians 3," in *God Who is Rich in Mercy: Essays Presented to Dr. D. B. Knox*, ed. David Peterson and Peter O'Brien (Homebush, Australia: Lancer Books, 1986), 179–94.

¹³⁶While this dissertation will engage formally with Scott J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3*, WUNT 1, Reihe 81 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), his other works are also pertinent, namely, idem, *Suffering and the Spirit: An Exegetical Study of II Cor. 2:14–3:3 Within the Context of the Corinthian Correspondence*, WUNT 2, Reihe 19 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986); idem, "The 'Temple of the Spirit' as the Inaugural Fulfillment of the New Covenant Within the Corinthian Correspondence," *ExAud* 12 (1996): 29–42; idem, "The Glory and Veil of Moses in 2 Cor 3:7–14: An Example of Paul's Contextual Exegesis of the OT—A

exegesis of Exodus 32–34 and its theological implications. This exegesis, secondly, forms the backbone of his analysis of 2 Corinthians 3.

Hafemann generally follows Moberly in his exegesis of Exodus.¹³⁷ He approaches the text from a literary standpoint, rejecting the typical source methodology of Exodus 32–34 in favor of the plain meaning of the text in its historical context. Hafemann does not take this point lightly, however, and goes through pains to make it clear that he does not reject the documentary hypothesis or the typical E character to Exodus 32–34, and the P character of 34:29–35, on a presuppositional basis. Rather, he attempts to draw conclusions from the text itself, which, like Moberly, leads him to abandon source criticism. He opts for “a straightforward reading of the text.”¹³⁸

Also like Moberly, Hafemann argues for a polemical connection between the golden calf and Moses, and that the “horned” image (קַרְן) on Moses’ face is an emblem of wrath that presumably would have judged the unspiritual Israelites had Moses not covered his face with a veil.¹³⁹ Thus, the veil is construed as an act of mercy in the midst of judgment since the people would have been destroyed if the “glory” was not behind the veil.

On the second part, Hafemann’s exegesis of Exodus 34:29–35 leads him reject *καταργέω* as “fading away” in favor of “abolished,” “brought to an end,” or

Proposal,” in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Text: Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 295–309; idem, *2 Corinthians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

¹³⁷Indeed, he admits this much when he writes that Moberly “has contributed significantly to my understanding of this passage.” Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 195n21. See also 193n15.

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 21–25; so also G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 81.

“inoperative.” Accordingly, “the veil of Moses brought the glory of God to an end in terms of that which it would have accomplished if not veiled, that is, the judgment and destruction of Israel.” Moreover, Hafemann asserts that his interpretation “corresponds exactly to what we find in the Exodus narrative.”¹⁴⁰

Summary of Research

The history of modern research on Exodus 34:29–35 reveals two distinct sets of interpretations. The first group of scholars considers as a presupposition that the book of Exodus is the result of an amalgamation of the J, E, and P sources. The narrative of Moses’ shining face is representative of a composite of E and P, two sources with two separate goals in presenting Moses. Within this interpretation is the desire to explain Moses’ face and his veil as the natural outworking of religious traditions in the ANE. Nothing in the text is extraordinary because it can be explained by parallel religious accounts. Moses’ face is an expression created by the E source to present him as the sole authority of the people group. Moses alone communes with God, and thus he is god-like and presented as such. Moses veil is an obvious attempt on the part of the P source to depict Moses as similar to ANE priests who used “masks” in their cultic activity and for various purposes.

The second group of researchers generally reject the source-critical view in favor of a literary-theological understanding of Exodus 34:29–35. These scholars present the Exodus material—the golden calf narrative in particular—as historical and literary; that is, Exodus 32–34 is a literary whole, which is demonstrable on exegetical and grammatical-historical grounds. The goal of this group is to synthesize the contents of Exodus 34:29–35 within the context of chapters 32–34, and thus Moses’ shining face

¹⁴⁰Hafemann, “The Glory and Veil of Moses in 2 Cor 3,” 306.

represents an actual occurrence at Sinai with Yhwh, although its meaning and function is not entirely clear. The same can be said of Moses' veil, which this group has generally agreed is not a mask but an actual veil. The function of the veil, theological or otherwise, is disputed.

Methodology

In order to arrive at a confident conclusion this dissertation will take up the following questions: (1) What is the meaning of קָרַן עוֹר פְּנָיו and how does the phrase function in the context of Exodus 32–34? (2) What, if anything, does the “veil” (מִסְפָּוָה) contribute to this passage? (3) How is a “shining face” understood theologically in the OT and ANE? And (4) what are the implications for understanding allusions/quotations in NT texts such as Matthew 17:1–8, John 1:1–18, and 2 Corinthians 3:7–18? These questions will be considered against the backdrop of the whole Sinaitic event of Exodus 32–34, and within the confines of ANE *Sitz im Leben*. Only against the background of Exodus 32–34 is it possible to probe the exegetical discussion in later interpretations.¹⁴¹

Further, this study will take up questions related to canonical and post-canonical traditions. Aside from Exodus 34:29–35, no other text in the Hebrew OT mentions Moses' shining face and his veil via citation. Thus, one must rely on allusions and echoes to determine how later authors interpreted the passage. But even here one must enter subjective territory, which is not the intent of this dissertation. The aforementioned allusions to the brightened/shining face of God (e.g. Num 6:24–26), or to the “light” of the countenance, however, are helpful in understanding how the metaphor of God's shining face communicates his grace and compassion. This dissertation will

¹⁴¹A point well-made by Dumbrell, “Paul's Use of Exodus 34 in 2 Corinthians 3,” 180; Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 189ff.

consider these texts within the framework of biblical theology.

Additionally, the LXX tradition provides a reliable translation, and hence interpretation, of the Hebrew OT during Second Temple Judaism.¹⁴² Considering the influence of the LXX on the Apostles and on Paul in particular,¹⁴³ this study has strong implications for the interpretation the NT,¹⁴⁴ which will likewise be treated in context both retrospectively (i.e., with a view from Exodus 32–34) and prospectively (i.e., with a view toward Christian theology).

¹⁴²For the view that Paul's OT citations generally follow the LXX over the MT with very few variations, see the persuasive discussion from Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, xi. For a more detailed study, see Dietrich-Alex Koch, *Die Schrift als Zeuge des Evangeliums: Untersuchungen zur Verwendung und zum Verständnis der Schrift bei Paulus*, BHT 69 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986).

¹⁴³See, e.g., Karen H. Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 183–205.

¹⁴⁴For further studies on the implications of the NT use of the LXX in citations and allusions, see Charles H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Collins, 1965); E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003); Barnabas Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961); Christopher D. Stanley, *Paul and the Language of Scripture: Citation Technique in the Pauline Epistles and Contemporary Literature*, SNTSMS 69 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

CHAPTER 2

THE SIN AT SINAI: AN ANALYSIS OF EXODUS 32–34

Introduction

The question of the meaning and function of Exodus 34:29–35 must be probed against the background of the full events at Mt. Sinai. While these events include all of Exodus 19–40, the discussion here will focus primarily on the context of the passage at hand, and therefore will dwell strictly on chapters 32–34. It should be clear from the outset, however, that Exodus 32–34 presupposes chapters 19–24, which is demonstrated thematically in the expectation for visible signs of Yhwh’s covenant with the Israelites (symbolized in the tablets of the testimony) and his presence among them (symbolized in the portable shrine). Indeed, both symbols are central concerns not only to the present passage, but also to the entire OT.¹

The main focus here will be on the *narrative* character of golden calf story rather than the prehistory of the text. As indicated above in the historical overview, the latter approach neglects the literary value of biblical stories in favor of their redaction. But for the purposes in this study it is assumed that there is no distinction between the stated meaning of Exodus 32–34 and its historical referent.² Moses is the author and the

¹On this point see Samuel L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), who organizes the entire Bible around the theme of the presence of God. See also Thomas W. Mann, *Divine Presence and Guidance in Israelite Traditions: The Typology of Exaltation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); Dale R. Davis, “Rebellion, Presence, and Covenant: A Study in Exodus 32-34,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 44, no. 1 (1982): 71–87.

²This type of reading is how Hans Frei argues that the NT authors understand the OT narratives. In his words, a “figural reading” depends upon a prior literal understanding of the OT narratives:

main character of these events.³ As with biblical narratives in general, attention is given to setting, plot, rising tension, climax, and resolution.⁴ With these characteristics in mind it is clear that Exodus 32–34 comprises, on the whole, a story of human sin and

“In a precritical era, in which literal explicative sense was identical with actual historical reference, literal and figurative readings, far from contradicting each other, belonged together by family resemblance and by need for mutual supplementation.” See Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 28. Cf. Scott J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3*, WUNT 1, Reihe 81 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 192.

³I understand Exod 32–34 to be the work of one author constituting a literary unit, framed within the immediate context of the instruction/construction of the tabernacle (Exod 25–31, 35–39) and the broader context of the Sinai episode (Exod 19–40). Scholars who agree include, among others, R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34*, JSOTSup 22 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1983); Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (repr., Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2005); Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006); Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013); William J. Dumbrell, “Paul’s Use of Exodus 34 in 2 Corinthians 3,” in *God Who is Rich in Mercy: Essays Presented to Dr. D. B. Knox*, ed. David Peterson and Peter O’Brien (Homebush, Australia: Lancer Books, 1986), 179–94; Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011); This list could easily include Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), given the type of commentary he has produced. But unfortunately Sarna makes almost no comments on the historical or literary background of the Sinai pericope. Cassuto admittedly holds to the middle ground: he dismisses the traditional J, E, P delineation, arguing that an ancient poem formed the backbone of the book of Exodus. But his primary concern is with the text as it stands. In his view, Exod 32–34 is a literary unity. Edward G. Newing, “Up and Down—In and Out: Moses on Mount Sinai. The Literary Unity of Exodus 32–34,” *ABR* 41 (1993): 18–34, argues that these chapters form the “pivot,” so to speak, in the Hexateuch (Gen–Josh), which is demonstrated in a highly organized and schematized pattern. See also with Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 191–95; Davis, “Rebellion, Presence, and Covenant.” Somewhat similarly to Cassuto, Herbert Brichto, “The Worship of the Golden Calf: A Literary Analysis of a Fable on Idolatry,” *HUCA* 54 (1983): 1–44, describes Exod 32–34 as a single narrative with a single author and a single theme. Although Brichto’s conclusions may differ from mine as proposed here, this argument is certainly profound in that a modern, contemporary literary critic recognizes the unity of Exod 32–34 contrary to the consensus source critical viewpoint.

⁴Robert Alter is the seminal scholar in the field of biblical literary analysis. See his influential work, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 23, where he argues for the primacy of reading OT narratives literarily: “Attention to such features [i.e., literary syntactical features] leads not to a more ‘imaginative’ reading of biblical narrative but to a more precise one; and since all these features are linked to discernible details in the Hebrew text, the literary approach is actually a good deal *less* conjectural than the historical scholarship that asks of a verse whether it contains possible Akkadian loanwords, whether it reflects Sumerian kinship practices, [or] whether it may have been corrupted by scribal error.”

restoration,⁵ which is built on a plot that has a beginning, middle, and end. A short synopsis is necessary to illustrate its literary character. The stage begins when the people arrive at Sinai in Exodus 19, the setting for all the events. There, Yhwh tells Moses that Israel will be his “treasured possession” (19:5), and then offers to make a covenant with them. The people accept God’s covenant (19:8—“All that Yhwh has spoken we will do.”), and Moses receives the Ten Words and the Book of the Covenant (Exod 20–23). The covenant is then ratified (Exod 24), and the people confirm their desire to enter into the agreement (24:3—“All the words that Yhwh has spoken we will do.”). Moses ascends Sinai in 24:13 having, therefore, a twofold purpose: to get the covenant documents and to receive instructions for the tabernacle of God’s presence (Exod 25–31).

After just forty days with Moses atop the mountain, the Israelites violate the covenant by engaging in idolatry and paganism (32:1–6), thus introducing tension in the plot.⁶ Yhwh then expresses to Moses his intent to destroy the Israelites because of their sin and start anew with Moses, and the tension rises. Moses, however, dissuades him (32:7–14). Moses then descends from Sinai and brings justice to the deplorable, rebellious state of affairs before ascending back up the mountain for another forty-day stint⁷ and to plead for Yhwh change his mind. Due to Israel’s idolatry, Yhwh says that he will not accompany them to Canaan but will send an angel in his place (33:1–3), although

⁵Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 279, proposes that Exod 32–34 is parallel to Gen 3 in that it likely functions as the fall story for Israel given the strong connections to creation traditions in Exodus: “Israel’s own history is seen to parallel the experience of all humankind.”

⁶Hafemann (*Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 196) points out that each of Moses’ descents functions to bring about a shift in scene: see Exod 19:7, 14, 25; 24:3; 32:15.

⁷The number 40 is symbolic in the Old Testament, often associated with the purging of sin or with purification. See Gen 7:4, 12, 17; 8:6; 50:3; Num 13:25; 14:33; Josh 5:6; 1 Kgs 19:8; Ezek 4:6; 29:11–13; Ps 95:10. For the tradition of Moses’ forty days on Sinai, see Exod 24:18; Deut 9:9, 11, 18, 25; 10:10. See also Sarna, *Exodus*, 262n21.

he relents from his initial plan to destroy them. Moses again intercedes and implores Yhwh not to abandon the people (33:12–16), and the plot reaches a climax. Yhwh agrees because Moses finds favor in his sight (33:17), and then renews the covenant (34:1–27). Previous tensions are then resolved in Exodus 34:29–35, which is presented as the conclusion or resolution to the golden calf narrative.⁸ Afterward, Moses makes his final descent from Sinai to continue work on the construction of the tabernacle (Exod 35–40).

Although various proposals have been suggested as to the structure of Exodus 32–34, it will be clear that the texts concerning Moses’ role as mediator provide the narrative framework (32:11–13; 31–32; 33:12–18). But with little variation the analysis below will follow generally the section divisions as noted by ם and ם in the MT. Exodus 34:29–35 will be reserved for the next chapter for a fuller treatment.

32:1–6: The Apostasy of the People

In 1983 Herbert Brichto argued that Exodus 32–34 makes up a carefully crafted narrative “in the service of a single theme” and “a single author” in order to weave “a tapestry-like presentation of a theological principle,” that *principle* being the presence of God.⁹ Although the question of authorship is not necessary for this study, Brichto’s statement about the presence of God as the chief theme of Exodus 32–34 is confirmed in the narrative. The heart of the question in Exodus 32–34 is that in light of Israel’s sin, will Yhwh’s *presence* go with them into Canaan?¹⁰ This is articulated clearly

⁸Several important themes from former texts are woven together at the conclusion of the narrative, which stress the unity of Exod 32–34. For example, Moses descends from the mountain in 34:29 as he did in 32:15ff., both of which follow a forty-day period of time (32:1; 34:28). Note also the *inclusio* around the verb “to know” (32:1; 34:29), and the contrast in the response of the people (apostasy in 32:7; fear and awe in 34:30). For more points of contact, see Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 106.

⁹Brichto, “The Worship of the Golden Calf,” 4.

¹⁰John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 417–18, also accepts “presence” as the main theme in Exod 32–34, and sets the contrast nicely: “The special treasure-people

by Moses after he sees Yhwh’s glory, the climactic moment in the story: “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please, *let the Lord go in the midst of us*, . . . and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance” (34:9). But before that moment, the theme confronts the reader in the initial verses of chapter 32: Yhwh and Moses have been silent for forty days. The people observe (ראה) that Moses has delayed (בוש)¹¹ his coming down from Sinai (or, מִן־הַהָר). Initially, the reader is not told the reason for why Moses is tarrying, although 24:14 presumes that he informed the elders of Israel that Yhwh recalled him in order “to give you tablets of stone with the law and the commandment” (24:12).

While the reason for Moses’ delay is uncertain, the result of it is clear in that the people demand that Aaron, the one left in charge (see 24:14), make for them “gods” (אֱלֹהִים) to “go before us” (יֵלְכוּ לְפָנֵינוּ).¹² That the text mentions the people gathering *over/against* Aaron (וַיִּקְהַל הָעָם עַל־אַהֲרֹן) indicates that this is no ordinary request, which

whose identity has been established by the arrival in their midst of the Presence of Yahweh himself are suddenly in danger of becoming a people with no identity at all, a non-people and a non-group fragmented by the centrifugal forces of their own selfish rebellion and left without hope in a land the more empty because it has been so full of Yahweh’s own Presence.”

¹¹This is a rare instance of בוש, appearing in the Polel stem followed by a ל plus the infinitive. Thomas B. Dozeman (*Commentary on Exodus*, ECC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 701) confusingly says that it is in the Pilpel stem, which is certainly wrong given the vowel structure (פִּי־בִשָּׁשׁ). The entire phrase in 32:1 carries the meaning “to tarry” or “to delay,” which appears in this precise construction in only one other place in the OT, Judg 5:28b: “Why is his chariot delayed (בִּשָּׁשׁ) in coming? Why do the hoofbeats of his chariot tarry (אֶהְרִי)?”

¹²One of the central motifs of Exod 32–34 is present in this first verse in the key word, פָּנִים. Literally, the Israelites are demanding gods to “go before our face” (לְפָנֵינוּ). While לְפָנֵינוּ primarily carries the normal translation “before us,” there is a greater theological meaning behind the word, especially if the central theme to the golden calf narrative is the issue of Yhwh’s *presence*. Previously, Yhwh promised that an angel would go before the Israelites (23:20, 23), which is later confirmed in the context of judgment (33:2). A complete understanding of this word, however, cannot be read into 32:1. From a purely verbal perspective, that פָּנִים is used here in the first verse anticipates or foreshadows the later “face to face” comments between Yhwh and Moses (33:1) and the presence of Yhwh’s goodness on Moses’ “face” when he descends the mountain (34:29–35). See also on this point, Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 48.

would likely require שאל instead of קהל. Rather, the use of קהל betrays their wicked intent.¹³ The denominative verb, appearing in only the Niphal and Hiphil stems, is frequently associated with large assemblies congregating for battle and often coupled with the על preposition.¹⁴ The people, therefore, are prevailing upon Aaron and demanding that he make gods for them. The reason for the demand is because “this Moses,” the one who led them out of Egypt, is indisposed.¹⁵ They do not know (ידע) what has become of him.¹⁶

The request for “gods” (אֱלֹהִים) to “go before us” could either be a request to replace/represent Yhwh or Moses, or both. Although the people specifically demand אֱלֹהִים, God’s absence in this scene is not in question as much as Moses’.¹⁷ There is no reason to suppose that the glory of God is not still visible on the mountain, even as the idol is being made. In 19:16ff. the mountain exudes Yhwh’s “devouring fire” in visible and fear-inspiring ways (thick cloud, smoke, trumpet blasts, etc.). It would be odd, then, that the Israelites would make a request for a replacement of Yhwh in the form of a golden calf when the mountain trembles with his very presence. From the Israelite

¹³Cassuto says the word describes “a spirit of contention and rebellion” (*A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 411). So also Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 46.

¹⁴Cf. for instance, the noun in Judg 20:2; 21:5, 8; 2 Chr 28:14; 1 Sam 17:47; Ezek 17:17; 23:14; 32:3; 38:4, 15; Jer 50:9 (see also Gen 49:6). The verb appears with על in Num 16:3 (“they assembled against Moses”); 16:42 (“they assembled against Moses and Aaron”); 20:2 (“And they assembled against Moses and against Aaron”); and in Ezek 38:7 of a group assembled for the purpose of being on guard against enemies.

¹⁵On the construction of זֶה מֹשֶׁה (“this Moses”) see Jan Joosten, “The Syntax of *zeh Mōšeh*,” *ZAW* 103 (1991): 412–17.

¹⁶The use of ידע here is structural. It occurs here in 32:1 as well as 34:29, thus bracketing chapters 32–34, and clarifying, among other reasons, that the three chapters should be considered a unit.

¹⁷אֱלֹהִים as a singular instead of a plural generally refers to God with little exception, especially in the Pentateuch. Cf. Gen 1:1; 2:2, 21; 8:1; 9:1; 17:3, 7; Exod 2:23; 3:1, 14; 4:5; 20:1–3; 32:16, 11; Deut 4:7; 2 Sam 7:23; Neh 9:18.

perspective, Moses—the one who is not Yhwh but who *represents* Yhwh to the people—is the one “delaying.” The request, then, is not initially for another Yhwh, but for an image *representing* Yhwh in the place of Moses.¹⁸ In other words, the calf is a symbol of divine presence in much the same way that tabernacle is a symbol of divine presence.¹⁹ The use of חַג לַיהוָה (“a feast to Yhwh”) in verse 5 and the calf’s continued designation as אֱלֹהִים (vv. 1, 4, 8) clarifies this point. This is confirmed additionally in verse 4, which corresponds to verse 1. Once the idol is made the people declare that it “brought you up

¹⁸A sampling of those who also say that the calf was to replace Moses and represent Yhwh are Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 411; George W. Coats, *Moses: Heroic Man, Man of God*, JSOTSup 57 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 190. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 46, “the calf is a challenge to Moses’ leadership; it is a rival means of mediating Yahweh’s presence to the people.” Brevard S. Childs (*The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, OTL [Louisville: Westminster Press, 1974], 566–67) is right in stating that “Yahweh was not being replaced, but represented,” but his lens of interpretation (the “prehistory” of the text) is Jeroboam’s apostasy in 1 Kgs 12, and thus he fails to recognize that Moses is the one being replaced by the calf in Exod 32. In a similar vein, William H. C. Propp, (*Exodus 19–40: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB, vol. 2A [New York: Doubleday, 2006], 583) conflates the Jeroboam story with Exod 32 and proposes three options: (1) The calf represents a deity other than Yhwh, (2) the calf represents Yhwh himself, or (3) the calf represents Yhwh’s mount or throne-support. There is ANE support for all three options according to Propp, although he leaves it open for multiple interpretations. Propp’s throne-support view is in line with Frank Moore Cross (*Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973], 73n117), who writes, “The young bulls were no doubt conceived as pedestals for the same god in the two national shrines [of Dan and Bethel]. However, there were, we suspect, grounds for the accusation in Exodus 32:4 = 1 Kings 12:28 that the bulls of Dan and Bethel were worshipped. A god and his animal ‘participate in each other,’ and while the god may be conceived as enthroned or standing on the bull in Canaanite mythology and iconography, he also is immanent in his animal so that the two may be confused.” Sarna, *Exodus*, 203–4, follows the same interpretation and suggests that the calf served as a pedestal on which Yhwh would stand.

¹⁹Fretheim (*Exodus*, 281), on the other hand, notes that the phrase “go before” is never used with Moses elsewhere in Exodus, nor with an “unmediated Yahweh. It is used only of God’s messenger (14:19; 23:23; 32:34; cf. 23:20; 33:2) or God in the pillar (13:19), identified with the messenger in 14:19. This suggests that the people are requesting *an image of the messenger of God* (not a substitute).” Fretheim’s point is well taken, but it assumes that the עלה in 32:1 has a fundamentally different meaning from יצא in 32:11, 12. But in the text the words seem interchangeable. Herbert C. Brichto (*Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics: Tales of the Prophets* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1992], 271) believes that the change in verb is due to the fact that עלה can be used of the exodus with any subject (e.g. Yhwh, calf, Moses), while the Hiphil of יצא can only be used of God. This is probably correct for Exod 32:11, 12. However, in Deut 9:12 God uses the Hiphil of יצא for Moses’ “bringing out” the people from Egypt. See also Hamilton, *Exodus*, 536–37.

out of the land of Egypt” (v. 4) to replace “this man Moses, who brought us up out of the land of Egypt” (v. 1). Thus, the idol is an affront to Moses and challenges his leadership directly.

In sum, the golden calf has a dual emphasis: it is meant to represent God’s presence to the people, and to replace Moses as the mediator of that presence. This twofold purpose “establish[es] a continuity between the people’s past experience and this new representation of the deity. The [idol] does not represent any new god, but is identical with the one, that is Yahweh.”²⁰

Having received the formal request for gods in verse 1, Aaron devises a plan for constructing the god with gold from the earrings of wives, sons and daughters (32:2–3). Aaron receives the gold and fashions a “molten calf” (עֲגֹל מִסִּכָּה)²¹ with an engraving tool (חֲרָט). The choice of a calf is not unusual given the widespread iconographic imagery of calf-gods in the ANE.²² After the calf is molded, Aaron’s role diminishes slightly and the Israelites take control (וַיִּצֶר אֹתוֹ בְּחָרָט). The following line switches to a plural verb to show the result: “so he made (וַיַּעֲשֶׂהוּ) a golden calf, and *they said* (וַיֹּאמְרוּ) ‘These are your gods!’” This switch implies that the people have taken over the situation. Although the presence of the plural demonstrative אֵלֶּה may reflect that more than one god was crafted, later references to the “golden calf” in the singular seem to confirm that

²⁰Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 47.

²¹Psalms 106:19ff. references this passage using עֲגֹל and שׁוֹר in parallelism, perhaps suggesting that “ox” or “bull” is in view instead of “calf.”

²²In Ugaritic mythology and in Canaanite iconography, the calf was usually associated with Baal. For an overview, see Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 155–57; Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978), 86–87. Hess writes, “Calf worship here and throughout the Old Testament is not a fertility rite but instead describes a military figure who leads the people into battle” (156–57).

only one image was made (cf. 32:19, 20, 24, and 35; Deut 9:16; Neh 9:18).²³

When Aaron sees what has taken place,²⁴ he constructs an altar before the calf and announces that “a feast to Yhwh” will take place on the morrow (32:5). Aaron’s active role in the proceedings removes any doubt that he is apostatizing along with the others. The people obey Aaron’s orders in 32:6 and bring offerings. When they are finished, they partake in the feast, and rise “to laugh.”²⁵ Thus, Aaron becomes one with the idolaters. In 32:1 the people “see” that Moses delays and then make an idol. In 32:6 Aaron “sees” the idolatry and partakes in it.

²³The recounting of the story in Neh 9:18 even goes so far as to change the language to the singular: “*This* is your *god* that brought you out of Egypt” (זֶה אֱלֹהֵיךָ אֲשֶׁר הֵעֲלֶיךָ מִמִּצְרָיִם). Other texts often associate a plural verb with אֱלֹהִים to convey a pagan understanding of deity. In 1 Sam 4:8, for instance, the Philistines speak of Yhwh in the same way: “These are the gods (אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱלֹהִים) who struck the Egyptians” (See also Gen 20:13). Moberly (*At the Mountain of God*, 48) comments rightly that in several of the contexts where אֱלֹהִים is used pagan implications would be out of place (e.g., Gen 35:7; Deut 4:7; 2 Sam 7:23), “but in the present context the intention is clear. When the present phrase is used without polemical intent, as in Neh. 9:18, it can be used with an ordinary singular verb. This pagan implication is best conveyed in English by the rendering ‘god.’ For it is not plurality of gods but a false conception of the one God that the writer is conveying.”

²⁴The Syriac translates וַיִּרֵא (“and he feared”) instead of וַיִּרְא (“and he saw”), which would perhaps exonerate Aaron from the mass paganism. The overwhelming textual evidence is to the contrary. Further, the verbal clause is most likely successive and in progress: “When Aaron saw” is a better rendering.

²⁵The frequentative verbs suggest repeated or durative action. The rituals are ongoing. The verb צחק, here construed as a Piel infinitive construct, is fairly rare in the OT and typically associated with laughing, joking, mocking, and playing, although one instance may be a sexual reference (Gen 26:8). Gerald J. Janzen describes these actions as celebrations of military victories in “The Character of the Calf and Its Cult,” *CBQ* 52, no. 4 (1990): 597–607. Jack M. Sasson (“The Worship of the Golden Calf,” in *Orient and Occident: Essays Presented to Cyrus H. Gordon on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Harry Angier Hoffner, AOAT 22 [Kevelaer, Germany: Butzon und Bercker, 1973], 152) takes a different perspective: “Rather than wild abandoned acts, the scene that unfolds before the calf was probably an orderly ritual that followed practices well known to the ancient Near East, festivals that consisted of a (ritual) banquet followed by sports, miming, and antiphonal singing to honor the gods.” See also Daniel E. Fleming, “If El is a Bull, Who is a Calf? Reflections on Religion in Second-Millennium Syria-Palestine,” *ErIsr* 26 (1999): 23–27. In the NT, the Apostle Paul is explicit in saying that sexual acts were taking place. Exod 32:6 is quoted verbatim in 1 Cor 10:7–8 as Paul references not only the sexual immortality of the Israelites but also their judgment by hand of the Levites: “Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, ‘the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.’ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.”

32:7–14: Moses' First Intercession

The scene switches in 32:7–10 from the base of Sinai to the apex, a juxtaposition presenting a stark contrast in the story and a thickening of the plot.²⁶ In verses 7–8 Yhwh recounts the events of the previous paragraph, while in verses 9–10 Yhwh announces what he will do in response to those events. In verses 11–14 Moses intercedes before Yhwh on behalf of Israel.

Yhwh Reveals the Apostasy (32:7–8)

At the apex of the mountain the divine perspective is revealed. Yhwh is speaking with Moses, the two main characters, and with knowledge of the situation below immediately instructs Moses to descend the mountain. The reason is that at the foot of the mountain “your people” have become “corrupt” (כִּי שִׁחָתוּ עַמָּךְ);²⁷ that is, their sin and weakness is on full display. That Yhwh calls them “your (i.e., Moses’) people” and those whom “you (i.e., Moses) brought up from the land of Egypt” seems to shift the responsibility of the golden calf incident to Moses.²⁸ This shift is in contrast to Yhwh’s previous statement at the beginning of the Decalogue in 20:2—“I am Yhwh your God *who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*” Whatever the reason for the change in subject, Moses’ role is here emphasized. Later, the role in

²⁶Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 562, presents this contrast nicely. He writes, “Chapter 31 ends the period of forty days of divine instruction with Moses receiving the tablets. But down below the long period is described from the people’s perspective as a long ‘delay.’ On the summit an architectonic calm reigns, below in the valley a restlessness which erupts into frenzied activity and boisterous noise.”

²⁷The connotation of the verb is most likely reflexive: the people have “corrupted themselves” by their idolatry.

²⁸The phrase “to bring up” is found frequently in the OT and in various combinations, mostly referring to the exodus from Egypt even if the nation is not mentioned. E.g., Exod 3:8; 32:1, 4, 7, 8, 23; 33:1; Lev 11:45; Num 16:13; 1 Kgs 12:28; 2 Kgs 17:7, 36; Jer 2:6; 7:22; Amos 2:10; 3:1; 9:7; Mic 6:4; Ps 81:10 [Eng 81:11]; etc. See Russell T. Fuller, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, forthcoming) for a definition of *explicative apposition*, which is in use here.

making the situation right is also Moses' responsibility. In the coming verses Moses intercedes for the people and reminds Yhwh of his promise to the Patriarchs. Perhaps the reason for why Yhwh makes Moses responsible for the Israelite sin, then, is to prompt him into new leadership territory, that of intercessor.²⁹

The construction and worship of the golden calf of 32:1–6 is reiterated and described by Yhwh in 32:8. The people are bowing down to the calf (וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ-לוֹ) and are sacrificing to it (וַיִּזְבְּחוּ-לוֹ). Moreover they are saying that “these, your gods” (אֱלֹהֵי אֲלֹהֵיךָ) deserve the true credit for bringing them out of Egypt. This diatribe is summed up in 32:8a: “they have hastened to turn aside from the way (דֶּרֶךְ) which I commanded them.” The “way” of Yhwh in the OT is characteristically described as his commands and his will, which communicate, as in this instance, a way of life for the people. In context the “way” refers to the commands already given at Sinai: the Decalogue and the Book of the Covenant. More specifically, it refers to the first two commandments of having no other god but Yhwh (20:3) and of the prohibition of idol worship (20:4–5).³⁰ By their idolatry, the Israelites have shown that they “hate” Yhwh (20:5).³¹

²⁹Brichto, “The Worship of the Golden Calf,” 9, also has this reason in mind, which he says is typical among the prophetic literature: “God tells His servant what it is that his people deserves, so that His servant may fulfill his role as intercessor.” Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 567, notes “a profound paradox” in these verses “which runs through the Bible. . . . God vows the severest punishment imaginable, but then suddenly he conditions it, as it were, on Moses’ agreement. . . . The effect is that God himself leaves the door open for intercession. He allows himself to be persuaded.” So also Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 554: “God is virtually inviting Moses to intercede on the people’s behalf.”

³⁰Stephen A. Kaufman shows via Deut 6–11 that the first two laws of the Decalogue are closely connected in *The Structure of the Deuteronomical Law* (Santa Monica, CA: Western Academic Press, 1979), 121, 145. In Kaufman’s view, the first two commandments are inseparable.

³¹So also Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 199. Fretheim (*Exodus*, 281) says that fundamentally the problem for the Israelites is not disobedience to the law code, but rather “unfaithfulness to the God who had bound himself to a people. Israel has violated the established relationship.”

Yhwh Pronounces Judgment (32:9–10)

Verse 9 elaborates on previous texts. In 32:1, when the people of Israel “see” that Moses delayed in coming back to them, Yhwh “sees this people” (רָאִיתִי אֶת־הָעָם) in 32:9 and concludes that they are “stiff-necked” (cf. 33:3, 4; 34:9). From the divine perspective, the real travesty (and therefore, the real target of judgment) is the sin of the people, not the calf per se.³² This conclusion forms the basis for Yhwh’s judgment in 32:10.³³ He wishes to be “left alone” (הִנְיָחָה לִּי),³⁴ to burn hot with anger (וַיִּחַר־אַפִּי בָהֶם), and consume the Israelites (וַאֲכַלֵם), all the while making a new and great nation with Moses.

Moses’ First Intercession and Yhwh’s Response (32:11–14)

Such judgment induces Moses to make his first intercessory plea before Yhwh in 32:11–13, which serves as the basis for his later intercessions. The paragraph begins with a verbal introductory clause signaled by חלה (“he implored”) followed by two questions and two requests. The first request (שוב) corresponds to the first question, just as the second request (זכר) corresponds to the second question. The paragraph is bracketed by narrative material yielding the following structure:

a – 32:11a – וַיַּחַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת־פָּנָיו יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו –

b – 32:11b – לָמָּה יְהוָה יַחַרֶּה אַפָּךְ בְּעַמֶּךָ –

c – 32:12 – לָמָּה יֹאמְרוּ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר...הוֹצִיאָם לְהַרְגֵם אֹתָם... –

וּלְכַלְתֵם מֵעַל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה

³²Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 706.

³³Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 49.

³⁴When Moses recounts this scene in Deut 9:14, he quotes Yhwh as saying, הֲרִף מִמֶּנִּי, “Loose yourself from me!”

b' – 32:12b – שׁוּב מִחֲרוֹן אַפָּי וְהִנַּחֵם...לְעַמֶּךָ

c' – 32:13 – זָכֵר...עֲבָדֶיךָ...וְתִדְבַר אֱלֹהִים אֲרָבָה אֶת־זִרְעֶכֶם

כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת...

a' – 32:14 – וַיִּנָּחֵם יְהוָה עַל־הֲרָעָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּר לַעֲשׂוֹת לְעַמּוֹ

Moses ignores both God's command to leave him alone and his offer to make a new nation out of Moses. Instead, he pleads אֶת־פָּנַי יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו. This initial prose seems softened, perhaps to communicate a special caressing on the part of Moses. He begins with an interrogative למה, asking why it is that Yhwh is so angry at the Israelites since *he* is the one who “brought them up” (יֵצֵא) from the land of Egypt with “great strength and a mighty hand.” This counterargument is a bold move since it directly contradicts Yhwh's previous statement in verse 7, that Moses is the one who brought the people out of Egypt. Moses' use of בְּכַח גָּדוֹל וּבְיַד חֲזָקָה at the end of the verse is especially tactful, and shows the difference between verse 7 and verse 11, for it highlights the role of Yhwh's “hand” in the exodus narrative generally³⁵ and in the crossing of the Red Sea specifically.³⁶ It is Yhwh alone who brought the people out of Egypt. Moses' second question, which begins 32:12, references the hypothetical mocking of the Egyptians that would certainly take place if Yhwh reneges on his promise.

Thus, Moses makes his first request in verse 12b, that Yhwh would “turn away” (שׁוּב) from his anger and “relent” (נָחֵם) of his disastrous plans to destroy the people, which responds directly to the first question dealing with Yhwh's anger. Moses requests, secondly, that Yhwh would “remember (זָכֵר) . . . your servants” the Patriarchs, who were recipients of an oath (“you swore,” נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ) and to whom Yhwh said that he

³⁵See Exod 3:19, 20; 6:1; 7:4, 5; 9:3; 13:3, 9, 14, 16.

³⁶See, for instance, Exod 15:6: מִיְמִנֶךָ יְהוָה נֹאדָרִי בְּכַח יְמִינֶךָ יְהוָה תִּרְעַץ אוֹיֵב: (“Your right hand, O Yhwh, glorious in strength! Your right hand, O Yhwh, shatters the enemy!”)

would multiply their “seed” (זרע) and “give . . . all this land” (וְכָל-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת . . . אֶתֶּן) as an eternal inheritance. This historical move addresses Moses’ second question about the mockery of the Egyptians, who, if Yhwh chooses not to relent, would conclude that Yhwh’s purpose was to dispel the Israelites from the land as opposed to giving it to them to possess forever. Moses’ intercession is effective (v. 14), and Yhwh indeed relents (נחם) from his plan to destroy the Israelites because of their sin, corresponding to Moses’ first request via the key word נחם.³⁷ The outcome of Moses’ intercession is clear to the final word. Yhwh decides not to destroy “his people.”³⁸

A key point about Moses’ first intercession is that it is not accusatory. Moses does not accuse Yhwh of heinous acts of unkindness against the Israelites. He accepts Yhwh’s analysis of the sin and Yhwh’s righteous anger, and he does not excuse the idolatry. Instead, Moses appeals to Yhwh’s promise as the basis for his intercession.³⁹ At issue is Yhwh’s own character: “From Moses’ perspective, it is not primarily Israel’s future which is now at stake, but the future of God’s purpose to reveal his glory to Egypt and the nations through the Exodus in fulfillment of his own covenant promises.”⁴⁰ Thus, *Yhwh’s faithfulness as the basis for his mercy to Israel* is introduced as a theological

³⁷Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 416, notes the wordplay between הַנִּיחָה לִּי (“let me alone”) in 32:10 and הִנָּחַם (“relent”) in 32:12, 14.

³⁸Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 50, also notes that the promise made to Moses in 32:10 (וְאֶעֱשֶׂה לְגוֹי אֹתָךְ לְגוֹי גְדוֹל) is almost identical in wording to the one given to Abraham in Gen 12:2 (וְאֶעֱשֶׂה לְגוֹי לְגוֹי גְדוֹל). He concludes, “Yahweh’s faithfulness to his promise, to which Moses appeals in v. 13, becomes the reason why Yahweh spares the people; and this theme of promise is introduced by Yahweh himself” (50). Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 567, suggests that in alluding to Gen 12:2, God himself actually gives to Moses the strongest argument by which he may counter the threat.

³⁹George W. Coats deems this a “loyal opposition” in “The King’s Loyal Opposition: Obedience and Authority in Exodus 32–34,” in *Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology*, ed. Burke O. Long and George W. Coats (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 91.

⁴⁰Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 200.

theme. In other words, God’s mercy is dependent on God’s faithfulness to his word and to his promises. The juxtaposition of God’s grace and the people’s apostasy is, additionally, the paradigm through which the following judgment-texts should be read.

32:15–29: Moses Judges the Israelites

Once Moses receives Yhwh’s confirmation that he will not destroy the people en masse, the scene switches as he descends the mountain to confront the people. The tension in the story rises substantially at this point. The covenant, ratified approximately forty days prior, has been effectively annulled, and Israel’s status as Yhwh’s “treasured possession among all peoples” (Exod 19:5) is now in jeopardy.

Moses’ Descent and Confrontation (32:15–19)

The move in verse 15 to “turn” (פָּנָה) and “go down” (יָרַד) is in obedience to Yhwh’s command in verse 7, לְיָרֵד.⁴¹ Verses 15–16 highlight the tablets of stone. Moses descends the mountain here with two tablets in his hand, which is repeated in 34:29 after the covenant is renewed and he descends with a shining face. The key points in the text are that there are two tablets specifically, that there is writing on both sides (v. 15b), that the tablets are the workmanship of God (v. 16a, מְעִשֵׂה אֱלֹהִים הָמָּה), that the writing is God’s (v. 16b), and that the words are engraved (v. 16c). This last point is more emphatic when taken in relation to 32:4. There, the people break the covenant by making an idol

⁴¹Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 244–45, 248–49, argues that v. 15 flows directly from v. 6 because vv. 18–19 present Moses as discovering the idolatry for the first time. Thus, vv. 7–14 is an interpolation. In my view, the contrast between the divine and human perspective in vv. 7–14 advances the story thematically and literarily, and thus an interpolation is out of place and segments the narrative arbitrarily. Further, Moses’ intention on the mountain is to quell the anger of Yhwh and appeal to his faithfulness to the promise (see above). When Moses sees the idolatry in vv. 15–29, his own anger is kindled in much the same way that Yhwh’s was kindled (cf. v. 10 and v. 19). On this rejoinder, see also Durham, *Exodus*, 428 (“a deliberately repetitive mosaic of reaction to the sin of the calf”); cf. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 567–68.

“with an engraving tool” (from חרט). In 32:16, the very covenant document is engraved (חרת) by God’s own hand. The similar vocabulary is to highlight perhaps the difference between the man-made idol and the God-made tablets of the covenant.

The story introduces a new character in 32:17, Joshua, who is keeping watch and who hears what sounds like “a cry of battle in the camp.” Moses assures him, however, using a wordplay on ענה, that the “cry” is not one of victory or defeat, but of singing. The metrical cola in verse 18 shows that Moses understands the real significance of the sound in the camp. The staccato-like repetition of ענה raises the level of suspense as the reader awaits the actual confrontation between Moses and the Israelites: they do not hear victory shouts, nor sounds of defeat, but singing.⁴² Upon seeing the calf and the dancing, Moses, like Yhwh in 32:10, allows his “anger to burn hot” against the people. His first reaction is a violent one, and he “casts down” (שלך) the tablets from his hand and “shatters” them (שבר) at the base of the mountain. The two verbs in 32:19 form a theological word pair. Moses’ shattering of the tablets of the testimony signifies in violent terms that the covenant between Yhwh and Israel has been shattered. This point is substantiated literarily by the use of the same verb that describes Moses casting down the tablets (שלך) as with Aaron casting the gold into the fire to make the calf in verse 24.⁴³ With the covenant documents now in ruin, the question at hand is whether or not Israel can continue to be Yhwh’s people if the covenant is nullified.

Moses’ Judgment (32:20–29)

Two acts of judgment follow. The first is mentioned in 32:20 where Moses’

⁴²The emphasis is only the final line of 32:18 is placed in the final two words: אָנְכִי שֹׁמֵעַ. This is signaled both by the lack of a contrastive waw, as well as the moving of the subject and only verb in the clause to the very end of the sentence. Cf. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 54.

⁴³Brichto, “The Worship of the Golden Calf,” 13; Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 202.

actions are described in five successive wayyiqtol verbs: Moses takes (לקח) the calf; he burns it (שרף) in the fire; he grinds it (טחן) into dust; he scatters it (זרה) over the water; and he causes the Israelites to drink it (שקה). There is much speculation as to the meaning of this verse and to how exactly gold can be grinded into dust, which will not be treated here.⁴⁴ That the Israelites presumably are forced to drink either the calf itself or the two tablets expresses the extent of their idolatry.⁴⁵ Garrett notes,

Just as Israel's making of the calf is the paradigm example of Israel's besetting tendency toward idolatry, so Moses' thorough pulverization of the calf is a paradigm for how the Israelites ought to deal with idols: they should burn them, break them apart, grind them to pieces, and trample them into the dust (Exod. 34:13; Deut. 7:5; 12:3).⁴⁶

Literarily, the crushing of the tablets and the subsequent bloodbath together serve as omens for Israel's future apostasy.

The second act of judgment occurs in 32:26–29 in a particularly gruesome event. Moses stands at the gate of the camp and gathers together those who are still devoted to Yhwh. Although others no doubt gathered there too, “all the sons of Levi” are noted, perhaps in deference to one of their fellow kinsman (Exod 2:1), or perhaps prefiguring their role as ministers and protectors of the tabernacle and later temple.⁴⁷

Either way, the Levites are characterized as לִיִּהוּה,⁴⁸ which is particularly striking when

⁴⁴In Deut 9:21 Moses says, “I took the sinful thing, the calf that you made, and burned it with fire, and I crushed it, grinding it very small, until it was as fine as dust. And I threw its dust into the brook that ran down from the mountain.”

⁴⁵For an overview of this question, see Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 694–99.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 697–98. The treatment of idols described here foreshadows Moses' instructions to the Israelites in Deut 12.

⁴⁷Although it is unlikely that there is an allusion here to the Levi/Simeon slaughter of the family of Shechem in Gen 34:25–31, the contrast between Jacob's cursing of that event in Gen 49:5–7 and Moses' blessing of the present slaughter is notable. Jacob's curse, however, reveals that Levi's violence was fueled by anger, whereas their violence in Exod 32 is fueled by devotion to Yhwh.

⁴⁸Martin Ravndal Hauge (*The Descent from the Mountain: Narrative Patterns in Exodus 19–*

juxtaposed with Moses’ indictment of Aaron—the father and representative head of the Levites—in verses 21–25. The task is given in verse 27 in what later amounts to a prophetic utterance (בַּהֲאָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל).⁴⁹ The Levites are to go about the camp with swords and kill their brothers, friends, and neighbors, which they execute with stunning results as three thousand Israelites perish.⁵⁰ Thus, the prophetic phrase, “thus says Yhwh,” precedes an act of judgment in much the same way that the phrase preceded the plagues in Exodus 5–11. Death is the result of unfaithfulness in 32:28. Conversely, blessing is the reward for obedience in verse 29. Indeed, life-or-death faithfulness to Yhwh is the key to understanding this brief passage, a theme that occurs again in Exodus 34:11ff.⁵¹

At this point in the narrative the tension barely recedes. The future relationship between Yhwh, Moses and Israel remains unsettled and ambiguous. The judgment

40, JSOTSup 323 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001], 68–70) attempts to show that the Levirate slaughter is parallel to the sacrifices offered in Exod 24: “According to v. 29, the murder is presented as a sacrificial act. Comparable to the connection of sacrifices and ascent in ch. 24, the terrible scene of slaughter in 32.25–29 is followed by the ascent of Moses.” Furthermore, Hauge argues that the “hand-filling” of the Levites in 32:29 (מִלְאֵי יָדָם) implies the official sanctification of the Levites for priestly service: “The reference to the rite of priestly sanctification implies that through their terrible act the Levites become priests. The metaphorical application of both sacrificial and priestly categories for the slaughter relates this scene to the corresponding scene of priestly substitutes in the sacrificial scene of ch. 24. The ‘young men’ performing sacrifices followed by the Levites performing such terrible sacrifices of sanctification must be related to the narrative line that is concluded by the proper sanctification of the Aaronite priests” (68). The dual motifs in both Exod 24 and 32 suggests some connection between these two scenes (which bracket the first tabernacle episode in Exod 25–31). Correspondence between Exod 32:26–29 and the official cleansing of the Levites in Num 8:5–26—which may have occurred prior to the Israelites leaving Sinai (cf. Num 10:11–12)—also makes Hauge’s thesis particularly attractive.

⁴⁹The introductory formula, בַּהֲאָמַר יְהוָה (“Thus says Yhwh”), appears nearly 300 times in the OT, mostly in prophetic contexts.

⁵⁰The Levites’ allegiance to Yhwh is again singled out in the Song of Moses in Deut 33:9. It was Levi “who said of his father and mother, ‘I regard them not’; he disowned his brothers and ignored his children. For they observed your word and kept your covenant.”

⁵¹Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 55.

heretofore has focused on the work of Moses (vv. 26–29). He initiates the actions of the Levites and pronounces the outcome (v. 29), which is startling since Exodus 32 is the only place in the wilderness narratives where Yhwh does not punish the Israelites directly via plagues, fire, serpents, etc. Rather, Moses inflicts the punishment.⁵² Although the killing is prompted by “thus says Yhwh” in verse 27, the acts are in accordance with “the word of Moses” in verse 28. Thus, the people are painfully aware of Moses’ analysis of their sin, but they are at an impasse since Yhwh has yet to reveal his resultant purposes. What will Yhwh do when *he* descends the mountain as Moses’ had done?

The direness of Israel’s covenant predicament should not be overlooked. Yet if there is any lingering hope in Exodus 32:15–29, it is that a remnant remains faithful to Yhwh—the Levites.⁵³ While there is a general indictment of “your people” in 32:7, 11, 14, 21, it is unclear whether the Levites killed only those from their own tribe (“brother,” “friend,” “neighbor,” in v. 27), that is, priests who would have inculcated and enacted the idol worship, or simply any Israelite who actively participated.⁵⁴ If the Levirate judgment

⁵²See Num 11:1–3 of judgment by fire; Num 16:41–49 of the Korahite rebellion and judgment by plague (also Exod 32:35); and Num 21:4–9 of judgment by fiery serpents. I owe this insight to Michael Walzer, “Exodus 32 and the Theory of Holy War: The History of a Citation,” *HTR* 61, no. 1 (1968): 2; See also Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 203.

⁵³On the function of the remnant theme in the OT see the published dissertation of Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1974).

⁵⁴Some commentators maintain that drinking in 32:20 was meant to determine who had been unfaithful to Yhwh. Brichto, “The Worship of the Golden Calf,” 17, for instance, argues that the punishment was specifically on instigators and ringleaders. This is demonstrable via “resumptive-technique,” in Brichto’s terms. The clue for Brichto lies in Num 5:11–31, when a woman who is accused of adultery is asked to drink some water from a priest. If she is guilty then she will be cursed (with poison) and will die. If not, she will live. Thus, “now the meaning of Moses’ action in verse 20 becomes clear. He reduced the golden bull to a lump, pulverized it, sprinkled the dust upon water, and administered the portion to ‘all the Israelites.’ The resumption is clear that only the ringleaders were affected by the drink.” This analysis would explain the problem if it was not conjectural. In the law in Num 5, the adulteress, if guilty, is not put to death by the sword. Rather, the curse or plague (which gives her bitter pain) will eventually run its course and take her life *if she is guilty*. In Exod 32 the Levites kill the offenders presumably based on their knowledge of the prior events of the golden calf. Nothing in the narrative

was specific only to those who took part in the idolatry, then it is clear a remnant was not guilty. Regardless, the Levites themselves comprise a remnant, whose devotion, perhaps, provides the motivation Moses needs for his second intercession in the following verses.

32:30–35: Moses' Second Intercession

In the final unit of chapter 32, Moses determines that he will ascend the mountain “on the morrow” (מִמָּחָרֶת), presumably the day after the Levirate slaughter, in order to “perhaps make atonement” (אוּלַי אֶכַפְרֶה) since the people “have sinned a great sin” (חַטָּאתָם חַטָּאה גְדֹלָה). The move back up the mountain introduces Moses' second intercessory attempt, which begins with an open confession on behalf of the people. Verse 31 indicates that Moses returned אֶל־יְהוָה, who remains at Sinai even after witnessing the paganism below. Moses provides an analysis of the sin. As he did in verse 30, he characterizes the actions of the Israelites as a חַטָּאה גְדֹלָה, specifically that the people have made for themselves אֱלֹהֵי זָהָב.⁵⁵ Moses' frustration with the sin is clear from his use of אָנָּה (“Alas!”) at the beginning of the sentence, meaning that he knows the consequences of such actions. Such consequences stimulate the urgency of his second plea before Yhwh on behalf of the people.

The reader is not informed in 32:30 of the type of “atonement” Moses has in mind, but it is abundantly clear in verse 32. In a difficult verse syntactically, Moses chooses to offer his life in the place of the Israelites. If Yhwh would “forgive their sin” (אִם־תִּשְׁחַטְּא חַטָּאתָם)⁵⁶ then the covenant would remain and the people would proceed to

indicates that the Moses' purpose in 32:20 was to weed out the guilty from the innocent.

⁵⁵The plural “gods” matches the same plural used in 32:1, and although the calf is typically described as מִטְּכָה, or “molten, cast metal,” Moses uses זָהָב, perhaps referring to the golden earrings (הַזָּהָב) that were donated from the Israelites to make the calf in 32:2. The gold would also allude to the plundering of the Egyptians in Exod 12:35–36, which is the gold likely used to construct the calf.

⁵⁶Brichto says that the usual translation of “bear of the offense,” or “forgive their sin” is

Canaan. “But if not” (or, “but if it is not to be,” וְאִם־אֵין), Moses offers to “wipe me out [or, completely erase, מַחָה], please, from your book which you have written.” Given the emphasis in Exodus 24 on the “book of the covenant” (סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית, 24:7) in which are recorded “all the words of Yhwh” (כָּל־דְּבָרֵי יְהוָה, 24:4), and the emphasis in Exodus 32 on the tablets that God transcribed (וְהִמְכָּתֵב מִכְּתָב אֱלֹהִים, 32:16), the conclusion is that Moses is offering nothing less than to be removed from the covenant promises altogether in exchange for forgiveness of the Israelite sins.

Although in Moses’ first intercession Yhwh capitulated and decided not to destroy the Israelites (32:14), in 32:33 Yhwh seemingly disregards Moses’ offer altogether and only confirms that whoever sins against him, “I will blot out of my book” (אֶמְחֶנּוּ מִסֵּפֶרִי). Moreover, in verse 34 Yhwh commands Moses to go and “lead” the people onward, promising once again to send his “angel/messenger” before them to prepare the way. Perhaps this somewhat positive statement is in response to Moses’ attempt to sacrifice himself on behalf of the people, but more likely it is a response to Moses’ first intercession, that Yhwh remember his promise to the Patriarchs (cf., 33:1). And even though Moses enacted judgment on the people already, Yhwh infers that more justice is needed, as he will “surely visit their sin upon them” (פָּקְדֵי וּפְקֻדָּתַי עֲלֵיהֶם) (חֲטֹאתָם). Verse 35 speaks to the fulfillment of Yhwh’s justice as he “plagues” (נִגַּף) the people because of what they made (i.e., the calf). This point is clarified finally as “the calf which Aaron made,” removing any doubt of Aaron’s role in the idolatry. The irony here is poignant: at Sinai the Israelites have become like the Egyptians, recipients of God’s righteous judgment in the form of plagues for their hard hearts and rejection of

inadequate. Rather, “it means to withhold punishment, to carry the debit on the books, to refrain from foreclosing. Moses is only asking that his people be granted another chance” (“The Worship of the Golden Calf,” 18).

worshiping him alone.

33:1–11: Yhwh’s Decree and the Tent of Meeting

Chapter 33 follows seamlessly from the narrative begun in chapter 32 and is broken up into two sections. The first six verses continue the conversation between Moses and Yhwh and concerns Yhwh’s judgment on the people and his plans for their departure to Canaan. Verses 7–11 interject details about the tent of meeting, its purpose and function.⁵⁷

Decree and Response (33:1–6)

Yhwh commands Moses in 33:1 to leave Sinai and go to the land that he swore to give to the Patriarchs. This command repeats Yhwh’s statement to “go” and “lead” in 32:34. Moses, therefore, bears the burden of leading the people to Canaan instead of God. This change is clear given the emphatic use of **הָיָא** and a second instance of Yhwh saying that Moses “brought [the people] up from the land of Egypt” (32:7). But Yhwh proves that he himself has not backtracked from his previous commitments either. Instead of commanding Moses to go to “the place about which I spoke to you” (32:34), the expansion in 33:1 expresses something more. This time Yhwh commands Moses to go to the land that was promised to “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” This addition means that Yhwh has agreed to Moses’ initial plea 32:13 to “remember” the covenant previously made.

However promising Yhwh’s instruction may be, the caveat is that instead of accompanying the Israelites himself, Yhwh is sending his “angel/messenger” ahead of them to drive out all the Canaanite nations (32:2). Thus, Yhwh’s involvement is

⁵⁷Garrett notes two cycles of decree and response, one in 33:1–4 and a second in 33:5–6. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 709.

qualified. He will *not* go up “in your midst” because the people are “stiff-necked” (עִם־קָשֵׁה־עֲרָף), which suggests the possibility that he might “consume you along the way.”⁵⁸ Likely, the angel envisioned here is a vanguard for Israel’s entrance in the land, which suggests the kind of safety and security that was offered via an “angel” in Exodus 23:20–30.⁵⁹ But this angel cannot be the same one because this angel lacks, principally, Yhwh’s name (cf. 23:21, “my name is in him”), which, in 23:22 means that he will be “an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.” The difference raises the question of whether the angel here is a representation of Yhwh’s presence, much like the “angel of Yhwh” in previous texts, namely, Exodus 3:2. But such an interpretation is also unlikely since Yhwh says explicitly in verse 3 that he will not go up in the midst of the people.⁶⁰ This demurrer is confirmed in 33:12 below, where Moses understands Yhwh to be saying that this angel is much different than the one he previously commissioned. The greater point in 33:1 is clear: Yhwh will keep his covenant commitments and the people will be allowed to proceed to Canaan. But his *presence* has halted at Sinai. Indeed, there is no mention of the pillar of cloud and fire accompanying or leading the people. “An angel” will go with the Israelites instead. Not even the “terror” and “hornets” Yhwh promised in 23:27–30 is reiterated in Exodus 33:1.

The whole scene is ironic. At Sinai, the mountain of God, Yhwh dwells in the

⁵⁸The syntax latter half of v. 3 highlights in particular the plight of the people as sinfully “stiff-necked” in that the compound genitive phrase (attributive position) is fronted for emphasis.

⁵⁹Similarly, Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus*, 426, surmises that an appropriate epithet for the angel is “My Protection.”

⁶⁰Contra Fretheim, *Exodus*, 293, who says that the messenger (i.e., angel) is God himself and that there is no essential difference between the angel in Exod 23 and the one in Exod 33. His explanation for how the angel can still be God’s “*general presence*” without God’s “*intensified presence*” actually going in their midst lacks biblical and contextual support. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 60, sees divine guidance and assistance in the form of the angel. Hamilton, *Exodus*, 558, calls the angel “a surrogate for an absent, infuriated Yahweh who has dwelled ‘among’ them.”

midst of the people, while at the same time he says he cannot dwell with them. Moreover, he will bring the people into the promised land through the work of his angel, (highlighting his mercy), but he rescinds his own intimate presence (highlighting his justice). In doing so, Yhwh's grace and his judgment are both clearly visible.⁶¹

Thus, the very expression of blessing—God's presence—has now become the instrument of Israel's judgment. Israel's hardened, "stiff-necked" resolve further highlights the conditionality of the covenant promises in Exodus 19–24. If the Israelites sin, then the covenant is broken. However, the mercy of God is also highlighted. God says in 33:3 that if he did not judge the people by removing his presence ("lest I consume you on the way") then they would be annihilated. Paradoxically, God's *mercy in removing his presence* is the means by which the Israelites can continue to be a nation.⁶²

As the people hear the words in verse 4 they are beset with mourning and refrain from any celebration of their departure. Even more, Yhwh commands them to take off their ornaments and adornments in verse 5 as he prepares to decide what he will ultimately do to them. The people dutifully obey in verse 6. Again they are like the Egyptians before them (cf. 3:22; 12:26), plundered for their disobedience and hardened condition.⁶³

⁶¹Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 207. Cf. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 588, "God plans to withdraw his presence as a sign of judgment." So also Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 722: "The present indefinite reference [to an angel] indicates separation from Yahweh and perhaps a closer identification with Moses. The central point of the opening speech, however, is the divine retreat from the people. God will remain faithful to the ancestral promises, but the people have become incompatible with divine holiness." Against the view articulated here would be the thesis that the angel in 33:2 "drives out" the nations just as the angel does in Exod 23. But as Dozeman observes, the angel in the latter text is distinctive. That angel is explicitly called "my angel" (23:23) which has "my name in him (23:21)." The angel in 33:2 is indefinite, "an angel," although there is no need to associate the angel with Moses as Dozeman does. Its function may be Moses-like, but its source is divine.

⁶²Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 208.

⁶³Brichto, "The Worship of the Golden Calf," 22; Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 61. Hafemann (*Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 208) writes, "The long-term implications of her idolatry

In spite of this hardened condition, Yhwh leaves the door open for Israel, not simply in sending his angel before them, but in giving them time: “take off your ornaments, so that I may know what to do with you” (33:5b). Yhwh hints here that the Israelites may still have a second chance. Further deliberation is required until she learns of her ultimate fate.

The Tent of Meeting (33:7–11)

The hope of the Israelites now lies solely in the mediation of Moses, whose access to the divine continues unabated. The tent of meeting (33:7–11) again highlights God’s mercy, a mercy extended to Moses, the human counterpart to God’s judgment of the Israelites. This judgment, then, is tempered by mercy in that a tent exists where God’s presence resides, and where their representative leader speaks on their behalf.⁶⁴

The shift from wayyiqtol to wəqatal verbs in 33:7 reveals that the following is offline material. There are no temporal indicators as to when Moses began the practice of using the tent of meeting (אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד). The text simply states that he called it thus and that he utilized it whenever he sought out Yhwh.⁶⁵ The designation that Moses planted the

have become apparent to the people. Israel will leave Mt. Sinai stripped of her former glory, both the glory of YHWH’s presence and the glories of her previous triumph over the Egyptians as God’s people. Those who arrived at the mountain in victory now leave in defeat and under the judgment of God.”

⁶⁴The composition of 33:7–11 and its location in the narrative is outside the scope and purpose of this chapter. Fretheim, *Exodus*, 295, thinks the verses function as a retrospective. In other words, “this is how things have been in the recent past.” Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 150, says that “there is a sense in which the tradition of Exodus 32–34 as a *Sinai tradition*, functions aetiologically.” Mark D. Wessner, “Toward a Literary Understanding of Moses and the Lord ‘Face to Face’ (פְּנִים אֶל-פְּנִים) in Exodus 33:7–11,” *ResQ* 44, no. 2 (2002): 109–16, writes that the passage has a twofold purpose, functioning as a theophany (due to the appearance of Yhwh) and an etiology (due to the habitual nature of events). The “tent of meeting” is later identified with the tabernacle: Exod 38:21; 39:32, 40; 40:2, 6, 29; Num 1:50, 53; 9:15; 10:11; 17:23; 18:2; 1 Chr 6:17; etc. The absence of the cultic activities lends credence to the assumption that the tent as described in Exod 33:7–11 was not the tabernacle.

⁶⁵Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 713, notes that the imperfect verbs of this section imply that the tent was already in existence before the sin of the golden calf.

tent “outside of the camp, a good distance from the camp” (מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה הַרְחֵק מִזֶּה־הַמַּחֲנֶה), is perhaps in response to Yhwh’s warning that he would consume the people if he was in their midst (33:3). Thus, the people do not follow Moses to the tent, but rather rise up when he makes his way out, standing at the entrance of their personal tents (33:8) and falling down to worship (33:10) once the “pillar of smoke” (עַמּוּד הָעָנָן) descends and stations itself at the entrance (33:9). This latter movement signals Yhwh’s presence in conference with Moses, for וַדַּבֵּר עִם־מֹשֶׁה (v. 9).⁶⁶ The posture of the people signals their desperation and heightens the tension in the narrative. The whole existence of Israel as a nation rests on the man who is still able to meet with God and live.

The designation Moses receives in 33:11 is unparalleled in OT: Yhwh speaks with Moses “face to face,” (פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים) as a man speaks to his friend (cf. Deut 34:10; Num 12:8).⁶⁷ More on “face” will be discussed below, though at this moment this designation is truly startling. In the midst of rampant idolatry, Moses’ intimacy with Yhwh is singled out. Far more than a description of physical proximity (although Moses is certainly nearer to Yhwh than anyone else), the “face to face” characteristic is defined in the b-line as “friendship,” a friendship which in 34:29–35 is made all the more poignant. There, Moses’ “face” is radiant and glowing as a reflection of his relationship

⁶⁶Wessner shows that 33:7–11 has a chiasmic structure, with v. 9b at its center: וַדַּבֵּר עִם־מֹשֶׁה. The structure likely means that the main thrust of the passage has to do with Yhwh speaking with Moses. For details of the chiasm See “Toward a Literary Understanding of Moses and the Lord ‘Face to Face’ in Exodus 33,” 112.

⁶⁷Moses is the second biblical figure to experience a פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים encounter, after Jacob in Gen 32:31. The phrase occurs 5 times in the OT: Gen 32:31; Exod 33:11; Deut 34:10 (also of Moses); Judg 6:22 (Gideon); and Ezek 20:35 (of the people of Israel). Interestingly, the LXX has πρόσωπον πρὸς/κατὰ πρόσωπον in 4 of these instances, while translating ἐνώπιος ἐνώπιω in Exod 33:11 alone. The latter translation probably reflects an attempt to resolve the apparent contradiction of Yhwh knowing Moses “face to face” while Moses cannot see his face in 33:20. That phrase is not used elsewhere in the LXX. Likewise, Targum Onqelos replaces “face to face” in 33:11 with “literally,” and Targum Neofiti changes it with “speech to speech.” Thus, the Targumim try to remove any doubt as to the nature of the communication—it was real and not a vision.

to Yhwh.⁶⁸

In the final line of verse 11 Joshua is noted as the one who stands ready to “minister” to Moses upon his return to the camp. This point is important given Joshua’s later role as successor to Moses, and also since he receives some of the “glory” (הוֹד) of Moses in Numbers 27:20.

Literarily, Exodus 33:7–11 functions not as a digression from the main subject of the discourse,⁶⁹ but as an integral part of the narrative whole. Although a clear distinction is made in verse 7 separating it semantically from the surrounding prose, it is intricately woven into the fabric of Exodus 32–34. Three factors should be highlighted to note the integration. First, the theme of God’s judgment over Israel comes to a fitting conclusion. God is not dwelling in Israel’s midst, but must separate from them outside the camp as a visible representation of their predicament—the loss of Yhwh’s presence, which is the key theme of the narrative.⁷⁰ The Israelites can only stand at the entrances of their tents and watch as Moses enters the cloud. Second, Moses’ role as God’s mediator is highlighted once more but to a greater degree. In spite of rampant apostasy, God continues to speak his will to Moses face to face, which forms the basis for Moses’ authority and representation of the people.⁷¹ In other words, Moses is the only link

⁶⁸See for more on this topic, Ian Douglas Wilson, “‘Face to Face’ with God: Another Look,” *ResQ* 51, no. 2 (2009): 107–14, who argues that the narrator reveals a shift in Moses’ character after his “face to face” encounter with Yhwh. In particular, it empowers him, giving him life for the tasks ahead, namely, vitality as a mediator (111–12). Moreover, the encounter establishes Moses as the premier Israelite prophet (See Deut 34:10–12; Num 12:1–9). See also Mark D. Wessner, “Toward a Literary Understanding of Moses and the Lord ‘Face to Face’,” 109–16.

⁶⁹Contra Brichto, “The Worship of the Golden Calf,” 23.

⁷⁰See Davis, “Rebellion, Presence, and Covenant,” 80. Davis contends that the primary function of 33:7–11 is “as a judgment motif in the face of Israel’s forfeiture of Yahweh’s presence.”

⁷¹On the distinction of the tent of meeting as a place for Yhwh to communicate his divine will, rather than a permanent place of divine presence, see Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into Biblical Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School*

between Israel and her God.⁷² Third, the intimacy that Moses experiences with Yhwh opens up the possibility for a final and decisive intercessory attempt in 33:12–34:9, the climax of the narrative.

33:12–34:9: Moses' Third Intercession and the Glory of Yhwh

The continuity of Exodus 32–33 is maintained by Moses' pleas for his people. Along the way, the basis for each of Moses' intercessions is his concern for the glory of Yhwh and his presence in the midst of the people. In 32:11–13 Moses is able to dissuade Yhwh's wrath because his central concern is for Yhwh's reputation among the nations and his prior commitments to the Patriarchs. In 32:30–32 Moses is completely forthright with Yhwh about the gravity of the Israelite rebellion and the immensity of their sin. Nevertheless, he seeks forgiveness on their behalf. Grace is not granted in full, but Moses secures/retains a vanguard for the people in the form of an angel, as well as God's pledge to give them the land in 33:1–3. Although God's presence will no longer go with the people, Moses must lead them as a mediator through the use of the tent of meeting (33:7–11). Even still, the narrative continues in a crescendo-like fashion without the reader knowing God's ultimate verdict. *How* will God resolve the problem of his presence while maintaining the integrity of his glory? Or, will he resolve it at all? Moses' mediatorial work lacks a word of open repentance from the people. We can only conclude that they remain hardened and stiff-necked. In this the final intercessory plea, Moses beckons God for his continual presence based on the stipulations of the Sinai covenant itself (19:5–9). At each stage of the narrative the tension rises substantially. It is only fitting that the

(Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 263–69.

⁷²Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 209.

climax and resolution of Israel's apostasy and breaking of the covenant proceed in an unexpected way, and as a result of this final intercession.

The narrative is reintroduced at verse 12 with a wayyiqtol, which begins Moses' third intercession and extends to 34:9.⁷³ For the purposes here the passage will be broken up into three sections: Moses' intercession (33:12–16), Yhwh's response (33:17–23), and Yhwh's glory (34:1–9).⁷⁴

Moses' Intercession (33:12–16)

Moses intercedes in two phases in verses 12–23, the first introduced with the imperative, הִצַּדֵּךְ (v. 12a, 13e), reinforcing the immediacy of his plea.⁷⁵ Moses' strategy in the first cycle is to use Yhwh's noted confidence in him as the basis for ensuring Yhwh's

⁷³Due to the frequentative nature of 33:7–11, many scholars differ as to the exact placement of vv. 12–16 in the overall narrative. Hauge, *The Descent from the Mountain*, 82, says that “a passage centered around the dialogue of the divine and human actors set after a theophanic episode represents the normal order.” Durham, *Exodus*, 445, however, understands vv. 12–17 to be the continuation of a narrative that ended in v. 6. John Van Seters, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus–Numbers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 321, thinks that vv. 12–17 picks up the intercession that ended in v. 3. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 66, sees the tent of meeting pericope as the setting for the dialogue in vv. 12–17. Brichto's analysis (“The Worship of the Golden Calf,” 25) is somewhat convoluted in terms of his explanation for the chronology of the events in general. Yet essentially he maintains the integrity of the narrative as presented, although, as seen above, he understands the “episodes” to be independent units strewn together via “resumptive technique” to comprise one narrative.

⁷⁴There is, admittedly, little logical consistency in the following passage, which scholars such as Muilenburg and Terrien attempt to solve rhetorically (James Muilenburg, “The Intercession of the Covenant Mediator,” in *Words and Meanings: Essays Presented to David Winton Thomas on His Retirement from the Regius Professorship of Hebrew in the University of Cambridge, 1968*, ed. D. Winton Thomas, Peter R Ackroyd, and Barnabas Lindars [London: Cambridge University Press, 1968], 162–81; Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, 138–52). But Moses is not trying to make rational judgments, but rather passionate pleas. Childs rightly notes, “Perhaps the logical consistency of the dialogue should not be overworked. There is an emotional tone of the highest intensity throughout the conversation as Moses seeks unswervingly to wrest from God a further concession” (*The Book of Exodus*, 594). See also Durham, *Exodus*, 445.

⁷⁵In all three intercessory petitions Moses is the initiator of the dialogue (32:11, 31; 33:12), although 32:11 is debatable. Hauge asserts that this human-divine order of speech means that “the divine actor [is] set in the subordinate position of having to respond” (*The Descent from the Mountain*, 83).

lasting presence. Although the dialogue is couched in elusive terms, it is fairly clear that a tangible image of Yhwh’s presence—that is, a movable shrine or tabernacle—is envisaged.⁷⁶ It is understood from verses 18ff., however, that Moses intends even more. He appeals to the favor he has found in the eyes of Yhwh,⁷⁷ and because he knows him by name. We can deduce from 33:11 that these characteristics have already been communicated to Moses in some way, even though the same designation lacks support in the book of Exodus. Although Moses understands what these special attributes mean, Yhwh has yet to tell Moses who will go “with” him.⁷⁸ The actual plea in this first cycle comes in verse 13. The sentence begins with an emphatic adversative, *וְעַתָּה*, and the conditional, *אִם-נָא*:

Protasis: *אִם-נָא נָא מָצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ* (“if I have found favor in your eyes”)
 Apodosis: *הוֹדַעְנִי נָא אֶת-דְּרָכֶיךָ וְאֶדְעֶךָ* ([then] “let me please know your ways that I may know you”)
 לְמַעַן אֶמְצָא-חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ (“so that I might find favor in your eyes”)⁷⁹

⁷⁶So also Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 67–68.

⁷⁷The use of *חֵן* (“favor”) as a theological term will be discussed below. The term itself is widespread in the OT. The most notable usage of the nominative includes making a petition to one who is assumed to have a kindly disposition (e.g., Gen 30:27). The plea for God to “be gracious/merciful” is especially prevalent in the Psalms: 4:2; 6:3; 25:16; 26:11; 27:7; 30:11; 31:10; 51:3; 56:2; 119:132; etc. Like Exod 33:12–13, the term is also used elsewhere as a basis for petitions to Yhwh, e.g., Gen 18:3; Judg 6:17; Ps 119:58. See Willem VanGemeren, ed., *NIDOTTE* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), s.v. *חֵן*, by Terence E. Fretheim.

⁷⁸The use of *עִמָּךְ* here is reminiscent of Exod 3, where Yhwh commissions Moses for the task of bringing the Israelites out of Egypt and where he promised in 3:12, *כִּי-אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ* (“For I will be with you.”) This implies personal contact rather than a substitute angel. Moberly writes, “Nothing less than the immediate and close presence of God . . . will suffice. . . . [In 33:14] he promises to ‘go’ but the precise nature of this going is still unclear; no preposition is used to distinguish whether Yahweh will go ahead of or amongst the people. So Moses prays further that Yahweh will not only go (v. 15), but will go ‘with us.’ It is this extra factor . . . which is then finally granted” (Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 69).

⁷⁹The secondary basis for the appeal is in the final line: *וְרָאָה כִּי עַמָּךְ הֵגוּי הַזֶּה* (“And look, this nation is your people!”)

Thus, Moses' plea in the first cycle is personal—he desires to know (יָדַע) Yhwh. This likely means that Moses is inquiring about Yhwh's ultimate plan.⁸⁰ In practical terms Moses is saying, “Teach me your ways!”⁸¹ This expression also implicates the Israelites at the end of verse 13 (“this nation,” “your people”). The purpose of Moses' plea, that is, the purpose of his desire to “find favor,” is *so that* Yhwh might extend that favor to the Israelites as well. Indeed, the expression, “to find favor,” is the main point of verses 12–17, appearing five times and bracketing the passage in verse 12 and verse 17. The first instance in verse 12 (corresponding with v. 17) is the most important since it is the basis of all others.⁸² Like Noah in Genesis 6:8, who “found favor in the eyes of Yhwh” (מָצָא חֵן) (בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה) and was elected for a special, divine task, so also Moses “finds favor” with Yhwh and is given his own divine responsibility, that of mediator.

Yhwh's response follows in verse 14, that his “face” (פָּנִים) will go with the Israelites,⁸³ and that he will give them “rest.”⁸⁴ The second cycle builds upon the first and

⁸⁰In fact, יָדַע is often associated with the concept of election in the OT. Cf. Gen 18:19; Amos 3:2; Hos 13:5; Jer 1:5. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 716–17, draws a parallel with Isa 55:8 (“For my plans are not your plans, and my ways are not your ways.”) to better understand Moses' thinking. Thus, Moses is asserting that although he knows God will ultimately bring this defunct situation to a close, he is unclear as to what it is or how it may happen: “‘Show me your ways’ means something like, ‘What do you have in mind here? I am bewildered.’” This type of colloquial communication highlights the face-to-face and friend-to-friend relationship that exists between Moses and Yhwh (33:11). The phrase “by name” is meant to highlight Yhwh's knowledge of the close, intimate character of Moses. Indeed, “And I know you by name” (וְיָדַעְתִּיךָ בְּשֵׁם), where יָדַע and שֵׁם are combined, is without parallel in the OT (Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 70).

⁸¹Cf. Ps 103:7: “He [i.e., God] made know his ways (דַּרְכָיו) to Moses, his deeds to the sons of Israel.” As noted above, God's דָרַךְ often denotes the character of an individual (cf. Deut 32:4; Isa 55:8; 58:18).

⁸²The “favor” implied in this verse may have the same meaning in all 5 occurrences, although there is a fair amount of nuance in מָצָא חֵן in the OT. See, e.g., showing favor in deference to an individual, goodwill or approval, or an appeal to good favor in a specific petition: Gen 18:3; 30:27; 32:5; 33:8, 10, 15; 34:11; 47:25, 29; 50:4; Exod 33:12, 13, 16, 17; 34:9; Num 11:11, 15; 32:5; Deut 24:1; Judg 6:17; 1 Sam 16:22; 20:3, 29; 27:5; 2 Sam 14:22; 15:25; 16:4; Jer 31:2; Prov 3:4; Ruth 2:2, 10, 13; Esth 5:8; 7:3; 8:5.

⁸³Or “presence” (ESV, KJV, NASB). On פָּנִים see A. R. Johnson, “Aspects of the Use of the Term *panim* in the Old Testament,” in *Festschrift Otto Eissfeldt zum 60*, ed. Johann Fück, *Geburtstage* 1

is also built as a conditional:

Protasis: אִם-אֵינְךָ פֹּנֵי הַלְכִים (“if your face is not going [with us]”)

Apodosis: אַל-תֵּעָלֵנוּ מִזֶּה (“[then] do not bring us up from here”)

Moses’ response is curious given that Yhwh just promised that his face would go with the Israelites. The grounds for Moses’ reasoning is offered in two questions: If Yhwh’s presence (his “face”) does not go with Moses *and the people*, then how will it be known that he has found favor in Yhwh’s sight (v. 16a)? Further, is it not Yhwh’s presence—his “going with us”—the reason for Israel’s distinction (פִּלְה) from all other peoples on the face of the earth (v. 16b)? Two times in verse 16 Moses associates himself with his kinsman: אֲנִי וְעַמִּי. Although Yhwh singles Moses out as greatest among the Israelites in 33:11–12, Moses realizes that his security is bound up only with his people. He has committed his life to bringing them into Canaan, and the only way to continue that task is to make a plea based on his own exemplary reputation before Yhwh.

Yhwh’s Response (33:17–23)

Yhwh accepts Moses’ request in verse 17, agreeing to do “this thing” (אֶת-הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה). The antecedent of דָּבָר is likely the second cycle in verse 15, the plea that Yhwh’s “face” would go with the people, which is also bound up in Moses’ request that Yhwh

(Halle an der Saale: M. Niemeyer, 1947). In Exod 33:14 the “face” of God is the subject of a specific action. See Deut 4:37, where God is said to have brought the people out of Egypt בְּפָנָיו (“with his face”). Cf. Isa 63:9; Lam 4:16. More on the subject of God’s “face” is explored below.

⁸⁴The suffix of the “rest” envisaged here is singular (לְךָ), implying rest for Moses, but could also be collective, implying rest for the whole nation. The land of Canaan is promised to the nation in Exod 15:13, 17. Additionally, there are later references to “rest from enemies” that the whole nation receives, e.g., in Deut 12:10 and 25:19. Therefore, it is more likely that Yhwh promises his “presence” and “rest” both to Moses and the Israelites. See also Josh 1:13–15; 22:4; 23:1. On the perspective that לְךָ refers to Moses alone, see Walter Brueggemann, “Exodus,” in *NIB: Genesis to Leviticus*, ed. Terence E. Fretheim, Jr., Walter C. Kaiser, and Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 939; Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 594–95.

not forget “this nation” in verse 13. This means no less than that the covenant will be reestablished.⁸⁵ The reason given for Yhwh’s seeming change of heart is, again, that Moses has found favor in his eyes, and because Yhwh knows him by name (v. 17b). The verb *יָדַע* actually inverts the argument. Moses wants to “know” Yhwh in verse 12, but now he is “known” by him in verse 17.⁸⁶ And while it may appear at this point that the narrative has reached its climax, the question of the *means* of restoration must still be addressed.⁸⁷ As noted above, the affirmations Yhwh has granted heretofore are not enough. The sinfulness of the people still remains and thus Yhwh’s glory will destroy them if they proceed.

Moses requests, then, that Yhwh would make himself known in an even fuller sense than he has previously. In making such a request, Moses now becomes the passive recipient instead of the initiator of the dialogue. Yhwh takes over the dialogue, for “when God prepares to show himself, Moses’ role is suddenly transformed from daring interlocutor to receptive servant.”⁸⁸ Therefore, in a bold move, Moses makes one final petition in verse 18. And it is in this third petition that the narrative comes to its timely resolution. He asks, “Please show me your glory” (*הֲרֹאֵנִי נָא אֶת־כְּבוֹדְךָ*). This request arises

⁸⁵Against Walter Brueggemann, “The Crisis and Promise of Presence in Israel,” *HBT* 1, no. 1 (1979): 50, who maintains that nothing is affirmed or promised in vv. 12–16. That is, he argues that Yhwh promises not his “static presence” but his “dynamic presence.” This thesis is based, however, on Brueggemann’s opinion that vv. 12–17 and 18–23 are originally from different sources, which in my view is not substantiated in the text. On the contrary, Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 594, notes, “When Moses again takes up his intercession, he continues to pray for what has already been granted.” In other words, the flow of dialogue builds upon each request, culminating in v. 17, which would not make sense if the previous requests were not affirmed. See below, too, how Moses’ final petition in v. 18 presupposes a positive answer from Yhwh in v. 17.

⁸⁶Brueggemann, “Exodus,” 939.

⁸⁷Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 214.

⁸⁸Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 76.

out of the desire for confirmation, and the personal nature of the question cannot be missed. Moses *himself* wants to see the solution to the problem—Yhwh’s *presence*. Previously, Yhwh revealed himself to Moses in tangible ways before he accomplishes something extraordinary or in moments of crisis. In Exodus 3 Yhwh calls Moses from the burning bush and commissions him to extract the people from Egypt. At Sinai in Exodus 19–24 Yhwh makes his glory visible as he procures the covenant (cf. also Exod 16:1–12). Now again, as the people prepare to go to Canaan, Moses requests a tangible sign—albeit a private theophany—of Yhwh’s commitment to forgive and accompany them to their destination.

Yhwh responds in verse 19, defining his “glory” as “all my goodness” (כָּל־טוֹבֵי), which will pass before Moses’ face, notably in a way that has never happened previously. Moreover, Yhwh says that his “name” will accompany his glory, which is defined in terms of “grace” and “compassion.” This reminds the reader of the angel promised in Exodus 23, the one of whom Yhwh says, “my name is in him” (23:21). Only this time, instead of an angel bearing the name of Yhwh, Yhwh himself will declare his own name. A warning is imposed in verse 20. Although Moses alone knows Yhwh “face to face” (v. 11), when his glory passes Moses will be unable to see Yhwh’s face, for לֹא־יִרְאֶנִי הָאָדָם וְחָי (“no man can see [my face] and live”). The location for the glorious appearance is “with/by me” (אִתִּי), where nearby Moses will stand and wait (v. 21). Yhwh will protect Moses, though, by placing him “in the cleft of the rock” (בְּגִקְרַת הַצּוּר) and by covering him with “my hand” until his glory passes. The covering of the hand emphasizes the magnitude of the revelation.⁸⁹ The euphemisms here are put in terms

⁸⁹Menahem Haran notes here how the divine presence within the cult (both here and in the ANE) motivates and develops the faith for present/future generations (“Divine Presence in the Israelite Cult and the Cultic Institutions,” *Bib* 50, no. 2 [1969]: 251–67).

understandable to both ancient and modern ears. And the point is reiterated in verse 23. Yhwh will remove his hand so that Moses may see “what is left” (יָרָחֵק יְהוָה). But his face “will not be seen” (לֹא יֵרָאֶה).⁹⁰

Yhwh Reveals His Glory (34:1–9)

As the narrative progresses to a climax, the heightened sense of Moses’ relationship with Yhwh is brought into the foreground. Unlike the previous covenant ratifying ceremony in Exodus 19, where all Israelites witness the events and partake in the ritual (19:9, 11, 17, 18, 20, 22), Moses alone is the witness of the renewed covenant in Exodus 34. His role as leader and mediator for the people is thus confirmed in the clearest possible sense. Only Moses can endure the glory of God.⁹¹

The first paragraph of Exodus 34 is broken up into three sections: preparation for Yhwh’s revelation (34:1–5), a song about Yhwh’s name (34:5–7), and Moses’ final intercession (34:8–9). Before proceeding with showing Moses his glory, Yhwh tasks Moses in 34:1 to chisel (פָּסַל) new tablets of stone like the first ones that Moses destroyed, and to bring them to Yhwh so that he can rewrite the words of the covenant. The primary difference between the description of the tablets in 32:15–16 and here is that the tablets in 32:16 are “the work of God” (מַעֲשֵׂה אֱלֹהִים), whereas in 34:1 Moses is the one who chisels the stone. This seemingly ancillary note perhaps underscores Moses’ central role as the mediator of the renewed covenant.⁹² In both cases, however, God is the

⁹⁰Jack R. Lundbom shows that the structure of vv. 18–23 utilizes a rhetorical literary device used to terminate a conversation (“God’s Use of the *idem per idem* to Terminate Debate,” *HTR* 71 [1978]: 193–201).

⁹¹Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 216; Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 84; Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 597.

⁹²So also Brichto, “The Worship of the Golden Calf,” 30. The theme of the tablets of stone are an essential component of Paul’s argumentation in 2 Cor 3, which will be analyzed below.

one doing the writing, which, against the backdrop of the breaking of the tablets in 32:15–19, means that the covenant is being restored.⁹³ Yhwh instructs Moses in verse 2 to be ready in the morning to venture to the top of Mt. Sinai, and moreover, to ensure that no flocks or herds nor man come up with him in verse 3, perhaps highlighting the holy nature of what is to come. Moses is obedient in verse 4, and we can presume that Joshua is nearby as in the first instance of his 40 days atop Sinai. Thus, the command that no “man” come with Moses includes Joshua, and the command that flocks and herds refrain suggests that Joshua descended the mountain to communicate the details. Moses likely did not descend the mountain himself since 34:28 makes clear that he stayed on the mountain for forty days and nights. Thus, the request for Moses to “come up in the morning to Sinai” probably means that Moses had to climb a little higher to reach the place where Yhwh would reveal his glory to him.

Verses 5–7 record the signature event. Yhwh descends in a cloud in verse 5 and proclaims his “name,” which is defined in verses 6–7.⁹⁴ Since the song is highly stylized a few points about its structure are in order. The opening, “Yhwh! Yhwh!,” serves as a title or heading for the whole song. The next two lines (or strophes) both begin with **⌘** followed by two lines beginning with **⌚**. These first four lines speak to Yhwh’s grace. The **⌚** in the middle of verse 7 marks an adversative shift. The following lines speak to the conditions of Yhwh’s grace, and consist of a primary statement about his justice (“visiting the iniquity of the fathers”) followed by two lines beginning with **⌚**:

⁹³Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 216.

⁹⁴Exodus 34:6–7 is a programmatic text for the rest of the OT. Commonly called the “Yhwh creed,” the initial two lines are almost ubiquitous, whereas the rest of the song is assumed in later texts. Cf. Num 14:18; 2 Chr 30:9; Neh 9:17; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 116:5; 145:8; Joel 2:13.

Yhwh's Name:	יְהוָה יְהוָה (v. 6b)
Yhwh's Grace:	אֶל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן (v. 6c)
	אָרְךָ אַפִּים וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְאַמֶּת (v. 6d)
	נִצֵּר חֶסֶד לְאַלְפִים (v. 7a)
	נִשָּׂא עֵוֹן וּפְשָׁע וְחַטָּאָה (v. 7b)
Yhwh's Justice:	וְנִקְהָ לֹא יִנְקָה (v. 7c)
	פִּקֵּד עֵוֹן אָבוֹת (v. 7d)
	עַל־בָּנִים וְעַל־בָּנֵי בָנִים (v. 7e)
	עַל־שִׁלְשִׁים וְעַל־רִבְעִים (v. 7f)

Much can be said about the Yhwh creed, and indeed much has been discussed even in recent scholarship.⁹⁵ Sufficient for our purposes is that the Yhwh creed is the highest moment of Exodus 32–34. Up to this point the focus has been on the sin of the Israelites and on Moses' intercession. It is clear that the covenant has been broken, but it is not clear if Yhwh will forgive and renew the covenant. There is no certainty until this event. And although Yhwh's justice is upheld in the creed, *the primary emphasis is on his grace and compassion and not on his judgment*. Fully nine words or phrases are used in these verses to describe that Yhwh forgives and extends his grace and mercy in the face of human sinfulness. Verse 7c–7f simply qualifies that grace to show that he does not offer blanket amnesty. It is thus a qualification and not the primary lesson.⁹⁶

⁹⁵Thomas B. Dozeman, "Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Yahweh's Gracious and Compassionate Character," *JBL* 108, no. 2 (1989): 207–23; Nathan C. Lane, *The Compassionate, but Punishing God: A Canonical Analysis of Exodus 34:6–7* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010). Davis, "Rebellion, Presence, and Covenant"; David Paul Latoundji, "God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East," *JETS* 42, no. 1 (1999): 97–99; Jeffrey Niehaus, *God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East*, SOBT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); Mark Yelder, "The Appearance of Yhwh and Its Literary and Theological Significance in Exodus 19–34" (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2008).

⁹⁶The term "blanket amnesty" is found in Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 708n12. Garrett's assessment is that the typical rendering of וְנִקְהָ לֹא יִנְקָה as "who will by no means clear the guilty" (ESV) is

Moses' response to the glorious theophany is natural. In 34:8 he quickly bows to the earth and worships. He then musters the courage to plead for Yhwh's mercy once more. Verse 9 serves as a summary statement for the events of the golden calf narrative up to this point: (1) Moses has found favor in the sight of Yhwh, (2) and Yhwh's presence in their midst is requested (3) even though the people are sinful and stiff-necked, (4) thus, they need forgiveness, and (5) reassurance that Yhwh will remain faithful to his promise to make them an inheritance.

In light of Israel's obstinate and "stiff-necked" nature, it is striking that the renewal here takes place. The law is at odds with the rebellious people, but even in spite of this condition the law is lovingly re-given. But unlike the previous ceremony in Exodus 19–24, Israel must now receive the covenant via Moses, the one who operates as their mediator. Childs rightly concludes,

The covenant pattern which emerges in Ex. 34 is distinct from that found in chs. 19–24 and appears to reflect a different form of the Mosaic office. . . . Thus, Moses alone ascends the mountain and God reveals himself in his name with a theophany (34.5ff.). Then Yahweh announces that he will make a covenant (v. 10) on the basis of his words (chs. 19–23), which he does. Moses writes down the words of the covenant (vv. 27b–28a). Whereas in chs. 10–24 Moses acts as covenant mediator who seals the covenant between God and the people in a ritual of ratification, in ch. 34 God makes his covenant alone with Moses without any covenant ceremony. Moreover, it is indicative that the chapter concludes with the tradition of Moses' ongoing function of communicating to the people God's will (34.29–34; cf. 33.7ff.).⁹⁷

insufficient, which I find persuasive. נקה appears in the Niphal stem, which normally carries the meaning of being free of guilt or punishment (cf. Exod 21:19; Prov 11:19). In the Piel stem as in Exod 34:7, נקה means to release a *person* from punishment or imprisonment (indicated by a direct personal object). An example is found in Exod 20:7, where Yhwh "will not hold guiltless" (לֹא יִנְקֶה יְהוָה), "the one taking his name in vain" (אֵת אִשְׁרֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-שְׁמוֹ לְשׁוֹן); cf. 1 Kgs 2:9; Jer 30:11; 46:28; Ps 19:13 [ET 19:12]; Job 9:28; 10:14). There is no direct object in Exod 34:7 as in the other uses of the Piel, and thus it is unlikely that "to clear a guilty *person*" is intended. The direct object is an addition in many of the English translations, probably as an attempt to smooth over the difficult phrase into better English. When נקה is used absolutely, it means "grant amnesty." Moreover, the cognate infinitive absolute construction in Exod 34:7 requires that the phrase be given a complete and absolute connotation. Hence, Yhwh will not grant "blanket amnesty" is a better rendering.

⁹⁷Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 607.

Therefore, as far as the covenant stipulations are concerned with respect to Israel’s sinful state, nothing has changed in 34:9. Left to themselves, they are still unable to continue with God’s blessing and presence, that is, without Moses. But the key to understanding the renewal of the covenant—at least from the Israelite perspective—is only through Moses. The text makes plain that Moses alone must experience Yhwh’s awesome revelation and receive the new tablets both *because of* and *in spite of* Israel’s sinful state. In other words, “God’s presence among Israel will be restored, but as an expression of YHWH’s grace *and* righteous judgment it must remain a *mediated* presence.”⁹⁸

34:10–28: The Covenant Renewed

Yhwh moves to renew the covenant in verse 10 (הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי בֹרֵאת בְּרִית, “Behold, I am making a covenant”), which will ensure that the requests Moses has made will be granted: Yhwh will indeed forgive, be true to his promise, and go in their midst. This is the first time in Exod 32–34 that the technical term for “covenant” is used—בְּרִית. The reason for its absence can only be speculated, but there is an overarching emphasis in these chapters on the *relationship* to Yhwh as the substance of the covenant as opposed to adherence to the law. God’s presence among his subjects, as I have argued here, is

⁹⁸The argumentation (and quote) here follow Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 217. James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 104, likewise understands the primary emphasis of the renewed covenant as a display of God’s glory through his judgment on the Israelites. Writing on 34:6–7, Hamilton observes, “In this revelation of the glory of Yahweh, Yahweh makes known his character by proclaiming his name. Yahweh’s goodness is first explained in the declaration that he is merciful and gracious. This mercy and grace is shown in the way that Yahweh is patient, loves with steadfast extravagance, and forgives. The declaration that he does not give the guilty a free pass also explains Yahweh’s goodness. He is just, and he punishes iniquity for generations. In this declaration of his name, Yahweh announces his mercy and his justice: this is his glory, and this glory of Yahweh is reflected all through the Old and New Testaments.” Although I would not agree with Hamilton that the whole OT is *about* God’s glory in salvation through judgment (e.g., problems with Hamilton’s theme in the Wisdom Literature), Hamilton correctly emphasizes that salvation through judgment is the main theme of the book of Exodus, especially if one equates the manifestation of God’s glory with his presence in chaps. 32–34.

paramount to all other themes in the narrative. And the divine-human relationship is only cultivated when Yhwh (the divine) is near to Israel (the human), that is, in a tabernacle, and when the people observe holiness by obeying his laws. Thus, “God’s words in 34:10 bring these two together, for that Israel should have God’s presence (34:9a) and his laws (34:11ff.) means that they are in a covenant relationship. When God grants these, he thereby renews the covenant.”⁹⁹

What Yhwh promises to do is described as his “work” (עשה) which has not been created before (ברא), it is awesome/fearful (ירא) and full of marvels (פלא). These terms speak about the restoration of Israel as a new type of God’s creation.¹⁰⁰ And all of this Yhwh will do “before all your people” (נִגַּד כָּל-עַמֶּךָ) and “in its midst” (בְּקִרְבוֹ), just as Moses had asked. In so doing the tension is released from the story, a tension which has held since 32:7–10 where Yhwh makes Moses aware of Israel’s sin of the golden calf and his intention to destroy them. The tension rises through three episodes of intercession leading to an ultimate climax in 34:6–7. At the apex of Sinai the reader finally knows how Yhwh will deal with the Israelites—through grace and compassion.

The grace endowed by Yhwh to Moses is an outflow of Yhwh’s character—his name—which requires obedience to Yhwh’s laws.¹⁰¹ Therefore, just as the theophany

⁹⁹Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 93.

¹⁰⁰Many features in the Exodus narrative emphasize the people of Israel as a new creation of God, especially in chaps. 25–31 and 35–40, perhaps paralleling the seven days of creation. For instance, the phrase, “Yhwh said to Moses” appears 7 times in chaps. 25–31. Also, Exod 39:32 can be compared to Gen 2:2—“Thus all the work . . . was finished.” Additional parallels occur between Exod 39:43 and Gen 1:31; 2:2. For a fuller discussion of the finer points of contact both here and throughout the book of Exodus, see Peter J. Kearney, “Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Ex 25–40,” *ZAW* 89, no. 3 (1977): 375–87; Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988); Cornelius Houtman, *Exodus*, vol. 1 (Kampen: Kok Publishing House, 1993). See also Peter E. Enns, *Exodus*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) and Fretheim, *Exodus*, throughout in both commentaries.

¹⁰¹Hieronymous Horn has shown that the laws in 34:10–26 are presented categorically in reverse, with the promise of the land given before the feast instead of visa versa (“Traditionsschichten in

must be reiterated in the previous section, so must the laws. Verses 11–26 constitute a shortened version of the Ten Words and the Book of the Covenant from Exodus 20–23.¹⁰² This duplication is to reinforce the meaning that the covenant Yhwh is ratifying is the same covenant previously agreed upon—the Sinai covenant. Yhwh is truly gracious and compassionate (34:6). The people are commanded to “observe” the laws (שמר, 34:11), which comprise laws about devotion to Yhwh and laws about the way of life that the people must adhere to once they settle in the land.

At the conclusion of the list, Yhwh tells Moses that he must write the words once more as a testimony that he has made the covenant with the Israelites (v. 27). Verse 28 is another temporal marker. Just as Moses was on the mountain the first time for forty days and forty nights, so is he also this second time (v. 28a). Moses fasted as he was on the mountain, and proceeded to write on the new tablets, tablets which he chiseled himself, the words of the covenant, that is, the Ten Words.

Conclusion

The scene in Exodus 34:1–26 leaves little doubt that Yhwh has renewed the covenant with Israel. There remains, however, a lingering difference between this covenant and the previous one. Since the idolatry of the golden calf has significantly

Ex 23:10–33 und Ex 34:10–26,” *BZ* 15 [1971]: 209, 220). This presentation leads Hafemann to suggest that the reversal serves to highlight that the reestablishment of the covenant is solely a result of God’s grace (*Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 218).

¹⁰²The notion that the laws in 34:10ff. are a reiteration of the ones in Exod 23 is not universally accepted. However, strong evidence suggests that it is. Brichto, “The Worship of the Golden Calf,” 32–35, has shown that all but two or three of the commands in Exod 34 are found in 23:12–33. But what of the Decalogue? Given the emphasis on the stone tablets, it would seem natural that Exod 20 should be reiterated here instead of Exod 23. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 96, however, contends that all of the commands logically derive from the first two commands of the Decalogue. Similarly, Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 607, observes that in the laws in Exod 34:27, the covenant is made on the basis of “these words.” Thus, the laws in Exod 34:10ff. reflect elements of both the Book of the Covenant and the Decalogue. See also Horn, “Traditionsschichten in Ex 23:10–33 und Ex 34:10–26,” 210–20.

altered Israel's relationship with God, it becomes absolutely clear that a distinction now exists between Moses and the people, especially when 34:27 is taken into consideration. The covenant is no longer with the Israelites directly as in Exodus 19:8. Instead, "[Israel's] life as a people depends not only upon the mercy of God but also upon the intercession of God's chosen mediator."¹⁰³ Inasmuch as this is true, "the renewed covenant [is] not only mediated through, but in some sense necessarily dependent upon, Moses."¹⁰⁴ If Moberly is correct, this point is all the more emphatic when Moses descends from the mountain in 34:29–35 with a shining face.

¹⁰³Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 106.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 105.

CHAPTER 3

EXODUS 34:29–35 AND MOSES' SHINING FACE

Introduction

The story of the golden calf is fairly straightforward. In the beginning, the main actor, Moses, is providentially absent, which leads to the onset of doubt and impatience from the Israelites. A secondary actor, Aaron, assumes the leadership role but is presented as pathetic, easily persuaded and incompetent. The Israelites therefore rebel, engaging in false worship by creating a golden calf to replace Moses and represent Yhwh while still invoking his name. Upon hearing this, Moses angrily returns to the people, resulting in a bloody aftermath and plague. Their grievous sin thus forces God to threaten to destroy the Israelites and start a new nation with Moses, *all in agreement with the covenant previously ratified* (Exod 24).¹ Moses, however, pleads three times on the basis of God's promise to the Patriarchs (and not on the basis of the recently broken covenant) for God to save Israel instead of annihilating her. And because of this plea and in remembrance of his promise, at the pinnacle of the story God ultimately shows mercy and compassion to the people, which is demonstrated in him initiating a new covenant with a vision of his glory and new covenant documents.

The renewed covenant is not the end of the matter, however. As with biblical stories in general, the golden calf narrative is given an instructive balance and

¹Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 104.

presentation.² The climax of the events on Sinai—Yhwh’s glory revealed and the covenant ratified—lacks a scene of resolution. The episode of Moses’ shining face and descent is, therefore, presented as the conclusion to the whole Sinai event, where previous tensions are resolved and several important themes from former texts are woven together.³ Moses descends from the mountain in 34:29, which, at this juncture, is a stark contrast to Moses’ *initial* descent in 32:15ff. Both descents follow a forty-day period of time (32:1; 34:28).⁴ In the first instance, the people do not “know” (יָדַע) what has become of Moses (32:1). In the second instance, Moses does not “know” (יָדַע) that his face is shining (34:29).⁵ Each time Moses descends he has tablets in his hand. Yet whereas in the first instance Moses is confronted by the apostasy of the people (32:7), in the second instance he is confronted by fear and awe (אָרַר, 34:30). There is wordplay here also in the use of אָרַר and אָרַח found in both 34:6 and 34:29. Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God. The Israelites hide their faces in fear because they are afraid to look at Moses (Cf., 24:17). Key questions in 34:29–35 remain, such as, what is the meaning and function of Moses’ “shining face” and “veil” and how they operate within the context of the entire Sinai episode (Exod 19–40)? The difficulties in their meaning and function have led interpreters to propose a variety of theories and solutions, and thus

²A helpful description of this balance is provided by J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Exodus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 294.

³R. W. L. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34*, JSOTSup 22 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1983), 106.

⁴The number 40 is symbolic in the OT, often associated with the purging of sin or with purification. See Gen 7:4, 12, 17; 8:6; 50:3; Num 13:25; 14:33; Josh 5:6; 1 Kgs 19:8; Ezek 4:6; 29:11–13; Ps 95:10. For the tradition of Moses’ 40 days on Sinai, see Exod 24:18; Deut 9:9, 11, 18, 25; 10:10. See also Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 262n21.

⁵As noted above, the use of יָדַע is structural, functioning as an *inclusio* for chaps. 32–34 and substantiates verbally that the narrative should be considered a unit.

a consensus opinion remains elusive. The present chapter seeks to address these challenges.

Moses' Shining Face (Exod 34:29–32)

As an individual unit, Exodus 34:29–35 is primarily concerned with Moses' ongoing practice of communicating the word of Yhwh to the people as a mediator,⁶ a conclusion that is generally not disputed. In order to arrive at a confident conclusion as to its meaning, this chapter will take up two questions: (1) What is the meaning of קָרַן עוֹר פְּנֵי and how does the phrase function in context, and (2) What, if anything, does the “veil” contribute to this passage? Lastly, this chapter will deduce the overall contribution that Moses' shining face makes to the golden calf narrative.

Meaning of קָרַן

Exodus 34:29 indicates that upon his descent Moses is unaware that a transformation has taken place with regard to “the skin of his face” (עוֹר פְּנֵי). The common or standard interpretation is that Moses' face is “shining” (קָרַן). The meaning of the verb קָרַן has sparked a lively debate among scholars. The noun form, קָרָן, from which it most likely derives, is fairly widespread in the OT and means “horn” in nearly every instance, as in the horn of an ox or bull, or even the horns on the corners of the altar (e.g., Exod 27:2). The word also functions metaphorically to denote the strength and power of individuals.⁷ The trouble lies in that the *verb* appears only a handful of times in the OT:

⁶This is clear from the sevenfold use of דָּבַר, “to speak”—appearing in every verse but v. 30—in addition to Moses' “calling out” (קָרָא) to the people in v. 31 and his “commanding” (צִוָּה) them in vv. 32, 34.

⁷Cf. Deut 33:17; 2 Sam 22:3; Ps 18:2; Dan 8:20–21. The word is used in 2 Kgs 22:11 as a symbol of prophetic action. In certain instances the “lifting up” of a horn denotes arrogance (Ps 75:4–5). God grants strong horns—i.e., weapons of warfare—to those of his choosing (Deut 33:17). Hannah parallels her heart and “horn” as exalting in God (1 Sam 2:1, ESV “strength”). God destroys the horns of the wicked and exalts the horns of the righteous (Ps 75:10), which leads to victory and salvation (Pss 92:10;

here in Exodus 34:29, 30, 35 in the Qal stem and in Ps 69:32 (ET 69:31) as a Hiphil participle—“to bring forth horns” (cf. also Hab 3:4). Given the lexical evidence, it should be natural to interpret the Qal form in Exodus 34:29 as a denominative verb meaning “to display/sprout horns.” The text would therefore mean that Moses actually grew horns due to prolonged exposure to God’s presence. While this may seem contrived or fanciful, many scholars adopt such a view.⁸

There are four reasons, however, as to why this interpretation is implausible and why קָרַן should be translated “to shine” instead of “to display horns.” First, the subject of קָרַן is “the skin of his face,” not Moses’ head. According to Psalm 69:32, that which “sprouts horns” (מִקְרָן) is a bull’s head, not the skin of the face.⁹ It is hardly conceivable that Moses’ skin would be said to have horns when it is stated explicitly that Moses “did not know” that his face had even changed (34:29). Second, an idolatrous emblem like the horns of an ox is out of place given the indictment of the golden calf in Exodus 32–33.¹⁰ Third, it may seem that the connection between קָרַן and horns is more defensible than the connection of קָרַן with light/shining, but the instance of קָרַן in

132:17). God himself is the horn of salvation (2 Sam 22:3).

⁸E.g., William H. C. Propp, “The Skin of Moses’ Face—Transfigured or Disfigured?” *CBQ* 49, no. 3 (1987): 375–86, argues that Moses’ face became blistered as if from prolonged radiation, and thus gave the appearance of horns. See also idem, “Did Moses Have Horns?” *BRev* 4, no. 1 (1988): 30–37; Jack M. Sasson, “Bovine Symbolism in the Exodus Narrative,” *VT* 18, no. 3 (1968): 380–87; A. Jirku’s article on this topic, “Die Gesichtsmaske Des Mose,” *ZDPV* 67 (1944): 43–45, is critiqued at length by Menahem Haran, “The Shining of Moses’ Face: A Case Study in Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography,” in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature, in Honor of G. W. Ahlström*, ed. W. Barrick and John R. Spencer, *JSOTSup* 31 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 169n7. Jirku is one of the few who try to prove that קָרַן actually means “sprouted horns” instead of “to shine.” Additionally, Jirku argues that “the mask Moses wore was decorated with horns and that when he spoke to the people he put a veil over the *mask*, so that his audience should not be frightened” (emphasis mine).

⁹Haran, “The Shining of Moses’ Face,” 169n7.

¹⁰Contra G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 79.

Habakkuk 3:4 favors the latter. In that text, **וְנִגְהָ כְּאוֹר תְּהִיָּה** in the first line is obviously parallel to **קִרְנֵיִם** the second line, reaffirming the possibility that **קָרַן** can mean “light” as an extension of the normal meaning of “horn”:¹¹

Hab 3:4a—**וְנִגְהָ כְּאוֹר תְּהִיָּה** “And his brightness is as the light”

Hab 3:4b—**קִרְנֵיִם מִיָּדוֹ לֹא** “Rays of light come from his hand”

As with Exodus 34:29, **קָרַן** is used in Habakkuk 3:4 as a developed meaning of the root and does not mean “to sprout horns.”¹² Fourth, all major versions with the exception of the Vulgate translate **קָרַן** as meaning “to shine” in Exodus 34:29. Jerome’s translation deviates from all ancient versions (including the Targumim) with a more literal rendering—*et ignorabat quod cornuta esset facies* (“and he knew not that his face was horned”)—which led to many artists depicting Moses as having horns. The most famous of these is Michelangelo’s statue of Moses in the church of San Pietro, Rome.¹³ It is misleading to conclude, however, that Jerome intended his readers to understand Moses having actual horns. Although it is somewhat jarring that Jerome chooses *cornuta* as the

¹¹Contra G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *TDOT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), s.v., “קָרַן,” by B. Kedar-Kopfstein (esp. on 174); Sasson, “Bovine Symbolism in the Exodus Narrative,” 386.

¹²The details of this text are discussed in the next chapter. Most translations of Hab 3:4 have “rays” for the second line (ESV, NASB, RSV, NIV, etc.) with the exception of the KJV, which has “horns.” W. F. Albright rejects this notion in his analysis of Habakkuk: “There is no real basis for the usual rendering ‘rays’ instead of ‘horns,’ which is deduced from this one passage and does not appear in any early version; the word *keren* in Ex. Xxxiv. 29ff. may most naturally be interpreted as meaning simply ‘horny,’ whatever its vocalization” (“The Psalm of Habakkuk,” in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy, Presented to Professor Theodore H. Robinson by the Society of Old Testament Study on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday, August 9th, 1946*, ed. H. H. Rowley [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1950], 14). Albright, however, relies on precedents in this conclusion, and seems to have missed the overall context of Hab 3. In 3:11, Habakkuk writes, “The sun and moon stood still in their place at the light of your arrows as they sped, at the flash of your glittering spear” (ESV).

¹³Cf. Ruth Mellinkoff’s work on this subject in *The Horned Moses in Medieval Art and Thought*, California Studies in the History of Art 14 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), and idem, “More about Horned Moses,” *Jewish Art* 12–13 (1993): 184–98.

Latin translation of קָרַן, Jerome, like Aquila, had the tendency to translate Hebrew etymologically rather than the accepted sense of peculiar passages like Exodus

34:29–35.¹⁴ Kedar summarizes Jerome’s technique as follows:

As is well known, Jerome derived the verb *qrn* (Exod 34:29) not from *qeren* ‘a ray,’ but from *qeren* ‘horn,’ and thus aided in creating the image of a ‘horned’ Moses: his face was horned (*cornuta*). This, however, is not a haphazard rendering: Jerome could have copied the LXX (‘glorified’), had he wanted it. Yet his way of translating is a replica of Aquila’s etymologizing rendition and was meant as a glorification of Moses: horns are the insignia of might and majesty.¹⁵

Specific statements in Jerome’s commentaries indicate that he likely meant *cornuta esset facies* to be rendered metaphorically, as a reference to glorification or strength.¹⁶ The

LXX has δεδόξασται ἢ τοῦ χρώματος τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ (“the appearance of the color of his face was glorified”), with the choice of δοξάζω as a reference to the “glory” (δόξα) that Moses requested from Yhwh in 33:18 and which passed before Moses in 34:6. The idea is clearly radiant glory. Similarly, in the first century Philo wrote,

He [Moses] went down and his appearance was far more beautiful than when he had gone up, so that those who saw him were filled with awe and amazement; their eyes could not continue to stand the brightness that flashed from him like the brilliance of the sun.¹⁷

¹⁴Many scholars argue that this tendency is a mistake by Jerome. But Kedar, who has written perhaps the best analysis of Jerome’s use of Hebrew, suggest that “most of the so-called mistakes, if not all, commonly adduced are definitely not blunders but conscientiously chosen renderings in agreement with philological notions current in his times” (Benjamin Kedar, “The Latin Translations,” in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading, and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Martin Jan Mulder, CRINT 2, vol. 1 [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990], 317). Kedar goes on to admit, however, that Jerome still made mistakes, which he was apt to correct in his commentaries.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Jerome’s explanations in his commentaries are cited in Bena Elisha Medjuck, “Exodus 34:29–35: Moses’ ‘Horns’ in Early Bible Translations and Interpretations” (M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1998), 100–105.

¹⁷Philo, *Philo Volume*, vol. 6: *On Abraham. On Joseph. On Moses.*, trans. F. H. Colson, LCL 289 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 2.70.

Therefore, whereas the lexical evidence favors a rigid, denominative understanding of קָרַן, the context of Exodus 34 demands that the translator opt for a thematic development from the root, meaning “to shine.”¹⁸ Moreover, the latter part of verse 29 makes clear that Moses’ face was shining “because he had been talking with God.” God’s presence is often associated with light and/or fire in the OT. The seventy elders of Israel in Exodus 24:10, for instance, saw God, and “there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness” (ESV). Later in 24:17 the “glory of Yhwh” is described as “a devouring fire.” Ezekiel saw Yhwh’s appearance and that “there was brightness around him” (Ezek 1:27, 28). The psalmist similarly describes Yhwh as covered “with light as with a garment” (Ps 104:2).¹⁹ Given Moses’ experience with Yhwh’s glory in Exodus 34:1–9, it would make sense that Moses emanates light—a “shining”—to the Israelites.²⁰

¹⁸There is an additional question regarding *why* the author chose קָרַן instead of the usual אָוֹר to communicate a “display of light.” The normal suggestion among commentators is a link between “horns” and the golden calf idolatry in Exod 32; that is, the author used קָרַן as a subtle indictment on the idolatrous acts of the people. For this interpretation see Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 312; Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 109; Sarna, *Exodus*, 221; Martin Ravndal Hauge, *The Descent from the Mountain: Narrative Patterns in Exodus 19–40*, JSOTSup 323 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 168–74. Benjamin E. Scolnic, “Moses and the Horns of Power,” *Judaism* 40 (1991): 569–79, tries to connect the episode with the Egyptian fixation on a calf as god-like: “Once we see the story in its context, and add some images from the culture that the people have lived in for centuries, we begin to wonder if Moses is not ‘horned’ as a Divine response to the idolatry of the Golden Calf incident. The Golden Calf is the sun-god, the child of the sky-goddess who was a cow. The Golden Calf had horns. Now Moses is horned as well, horned with a radiance that mocks the physical horns of animal idolatry.” Sasson, (“Bovine Symbolism in the Exodus Narrative,” 387) argues that Exod 34:29–35 is a fragment of an older pagan text recounting the worship of the moon god Sin, which is also represented by a bull. The bull is symbolized in Moses, who now relinquishes his previous god-like status as Yhwh asserts his dominance. But Sasson’s interpretation clearly misunderstands both the purpose of Exodus and the passage hand. In my view, the use of קָרַן arises from both ancient and modern imagery of light emanating from a radiant body like the sun, which is usually depicted with pointed, horn-like projections. A good illustration is the Statue of Liberty, whose horned crown is meant to convey that her head is glowing.

¹⁹Frequently, the psalmists make allusions to the light of Yhwh’s face (Pss 4:7; 44:4; 89:16) and describe Yhwh as the source of light (Pss 30:10; 60:19–20; cf. Isa 2:5). Haran, “The Shining of Moses’ Face,” 166.

²⁰Duane A. Garrett, “Veiled Hearts: The Translation and Interpretation of 2 Corinthians 3,”

Thus, the point of 34:29 is one of contrast. Of all the times Moses had been in the presence of God, his face did not shine as a result. In his final descent from Sinai, however, it does. The shining of Moses' face is no doubt the result of his unique experience with Yhwh's glory in 34:1–9,²¹ for this is the only difference in terms of exposure to Yhwh between his first stint on Sinai and his second one. This “glory” Moses bears back with him as he returns to the camp of Israel.²²

Function of קָרַן in Context

To summarize, the emphasis on Moses as the covenant mediator between Yhwh and the people, coupled with the emphasis on the people's reaction (34:30, that they were afraid to come near him), and an explicit reference to the subject of the verb being “the skin of [Moses'] face,” demands that קָרַן be rendered “to shine” in the present context. Yet certain features in this text help emphasize not just the meaning of קָרַן, but also how the word (or phrase) is *functioning* in the broader context of chapters 32–34.

From the outset, קָרַן provides the reason for Israel's fear in 34:30. The text says that when the people see the face of Moses they are “afraid to come near him.” The text does not say that the people are blinded by Moses' face, only that they were terrified at what they saw. Indeed, they would not even approach him in verse 30c. The reason is

JETS 53, no. 4 (2010): 734n16.

²¹The closest anthropological parallel is the Mesopotamian concept of *melammu*, having the meaning of “radiant light,” which came from the heads of the gods. See the discussion in Haran, “The Shining of Moses' Face,” 167–68; For an extended analysis, see A. L. Oppenheim, “Akkadian Pul(u)ḥ(t)u and Melammu,” *JOAS* 63, no. 1 (1943): 31–34. Also see below, “Ancient Near Eastern Parallels.” It is unlikely, however, that the author of Exodus would borrow from ANE source material about other gods given the strong indictment on the worship of other gods in the Decalogue and in the previous two chapters. See also Seth L. Sanders, “Old Light on Moses' Shining Face,” *VT* 52, no. 3 (2002): 403, and Scolnic, “Moses and the Horns of Power,” 569–79.

²²Scott J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3*, WUNT 1, Reihe 81 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 221–22.

signaled by the emphatic particle הִנֵּה: “For *behold*, the skin of his face shone.” The response here of the Israelites recalls a similar episode. In 19:12 the people are warned not to come near the mountain when God settles on it with earthquake, fire, and smoke. At that point the people similarly tremble at God’s presence and also “stand far away” (20:18). The same glory that dwelt on Sinai is now expressed in Moses’ face, which again evokes fear and creates distance. Thus, the first function of Moses’ shining face is as a reminder or extension of Yhwh’s presence on Sinai.

Second, Moses’ shining face functions to distinguish Moses in terms of status. Moses exclusively knows Yhwh “face to face,” that is, “as a man speaks to his friend” (33:11).²³ The theme of “face”²⁴ echoed in 34:29–35 no doubt alludes to 33:11–23. In the latter text Moses pleads that Yhwh’s “face” might go with the people into Canaan, and that he might see Yhwh’s glory. Yhwh grants both, although only partially. Yhwh agrees to go with the people (33:17), and Moses gets a glimpse of Yhwh’s glory (i.e., his “goodness,” 33:19) in 34:6. He is not able to see Yhwh’s full divine majesty—that is, his “face”—but only his “back” (33:20). And, just as Moses was not able fully to see the face of Yhwh (33:20), so the Israelites can hardly endure to look on the face of Moses.²⁵ Thus,

²³One could, perhaps, take the image of Moses with “horns” as prefiguring the later kings of Israel and Judah, where the horn (קַרְנָן) as a symbol of power is primarily associated with kingship. God gives the קַרְנָן to the king and exalts him. Like Hannah’s prayer in 1 Sam 2, Yhwh shatters the king’s enemies, gives him strength, and exalts the horn of his anointed. In this way, Moses’ shining face is paradigmatic: he is the precursor of the “anointed” future kings of Israel. Some authors make the suggestion that, given the scant evidence of קַרְנָן meaning “to shine,” that an emphatic statement that it was Moses’ skin that is “horned-like” in form suggests horns as a symbol of majestic power. Jerome, commenting on Isaiah 5:1, writes, “The horn signifies kingship and power.” But such a move would attribute kingly notions to Moses that are not explicit in the text. Moses certainly receives a sense of divine *presence* that is unparalleled, but he is not told to be king over the people. That role remains with Yhwh.

²⁴Heb., פָּנֵה in 33:14–15. Most English versions translate the word as “presence” (ESV, NASB, NET, ASV, KJV, NIV, etc.), but given the strong emphasis on “face” in 33:11–23, I would favor the more literal rendering, even though the same idea is being communicated.

²⁵Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 106.

Moses receives a distinction that neither his forebears nor his successors experience: unparalleled friendship with Yhwh and a view of his glory that is reflected in his face.²⁶ Moses' life is certainly unique, but even more so after his experience with God's glory on Sinai.²⁷

Third, Moses' shining face functions to communicate God's essential "goodness" to the people. Although the people fear Moses when they see his face, as he calls to them and communicates God's will for them, they "return to him" (34:31). This raises the question of what exactly Yhwh displayed to Moses when he passed before him in 34:1–9. But that text is clear enough. When Moses makes the request that Yhwh show him his "glory," Yhwh defines that glory as "all my goodness" (33:19a, כָּל-טוֹבִי) and his "name," which, among other things, means, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (33:19b). This description sheds light on Exodus 34:29–35. Moses' shining face is emblematic of Yhwh's "goodness." At its core, Yhwh's glory in Exodus 32–34 communicates his love, mercy and compassion. In spite of Israel's idolatry, Yhwh reassures them of his gracious

²⁶The view that Moses' face serves to distinguish him from all other Israelites has led some to argue that the main thrust of Exod 34:29–35 is to establish his authority. But at this point in the narrative, Moses' authority is not in question. Even the initial stages of the rebellion in 32:1 have nothing to do with Moses' authority. Rather, the people are simply impatient that Moses delays in coming back to them and so they take matters into their own hands. See Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, ECC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 751; John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987); Peter E. Enns, *Exodus*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 586; Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC, vol. 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 735–36.

²⁷Other scholars argue that Moses' shining face means that he took on divine status: Sanders, "Old Light on Moses' Shining Face," 400–406, contends that what the Israelites see in Moses is indeed light, and even provides evidence to support this claim, but goes on to say that after his experience on Sinai Moses is no longer human but divine in some sense, which is a conclusion not supported in the text. See also Julian Morgenstern, "Moses with the Shining Face," *HUCA* 2 (1925): 27, who considers Exod 34:29–35 to be Jewish "legend" and says that "Moses is no longer a mere mortal; he has become almost a demi-god."

character in the form of Moses' shining face—that he is “slow to anger,” keeps “steadfast love for thousands,” and “forgives iniquity” (34:6–7).²⁸

Fourth, Moses' shining face functions as a conclusion to the Sinai story and as a fitting transition to the continued construction of the tabernacle.²⁹ The glory of Yhwh is one way in which Yhwh discloses himself to Israel. This glory is reflected in Moses' face—seemingly for an indefinite period of time³⁰—and will transition from Sinai to the tabernacle by Exodus 40. Now that the Israelites are reassured of Yhwh's forgiveness and mercy via Moses' face, they can renew their initial task of building the tabernacle.

Moses' Veil (Exod 34:33–35)

Not only is Moses' shining face the reason for the people's fear, it also

²⁸Some evangelical scholars assert that Moses' shining face was primarily a negative image, implying God's wrath and judgment against the people. See, for instance, Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 79. Beale argues that Exod 34:29–35 echoes the calf idol and that “the function of the echo was perhaps to mock Israel's trust in the calf as the mediator of divine presence, which they wanted to be near, to be identified with and believed would guarantee their security. The only reality of the calf-like divine presence that they would experience, however, was through Moses, whose horned appearance (perhaps suggesting goring) represented God's wrath against the people. While the people had become as stubborn as their calf idol, Moses' experience in the immediate presence of the true God and his reverence of him resulted in Moses resembling the attribute of this God's wrath against sinful people.” Beale seems to be following Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*. The problem with this view is that it strictly neglects the reason that Moses' face is shining. The only significant difference between Moses' first 40 days on Sinai and his second is that in the second God's “goodness”—not his raw power or wrath—passes before Moses while he is in the cleft of the rock. This passing, in turn, causes his face to glow. More on this below in n35.

²⁹Walter Brueggemann, “Exodus,” in *NIB: Genesis to Leviticus*, ed. Terence E. Fretheim, Jr., Walter C. Kaiser, and Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 954, adds, “Our text stands as the midway between two other texts concerning God's glory. It looks back to 24:15–18, where Moses enters the cloud and communes with God's glory, and forward to 40:34–38, God's glory as presence in the tabernacle. . . . The glory moves from the mountain to the tabernacle via Moses. . . . [And thus] Moses' descent from the mountain is a device for the awesome coming of heavenly glory to dwell in the midst of Israel.”

³⁰The frequentative verbs in 34:34–35 imply a repetition of events, meaning that Moses' face remained “glorified,” as it were, from the time he descended Sinai to the time of his death. Additionally, v. 34 opens with ׀ preposition plus the infinitive, “whenever Moses went . . . ,” which certainly implies ongoing action instead of a singular event.

expresses the reason for his use of a veil in 34:33. When Moses comes down from Sinai, he calls the leaders and the whole congregation to him (v. 31) and explains what Yhwh has commanded him (v. 32), that is, the details of the renewed covenant. After finishing his speech Moses “put a veil over his face” (v. 33). The rest of the passage explains what became Moses’ general practice with regard to the veil. When he goes before Yhwh to receive his commands he removes the veil (v. 34a). He keeps the veil off as he communicates Yhwh’s word to the people as their mediator (v. 34b), so that “the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining” (v. 35a). Only when Moses completes his task as mediator does he then place the veil back over his face until he goes up to speak with Yhwh once more (v. 35b).

As with the previous verses about Moses’ shining face, this passage raises the same two questions regarding the veil: (1) its meaning, and (2) its function in context. For the first question, the word for veil—מִסְוָה—is *hapax legomenon* and has caused several scholars to offer a variety of meanings and interpretations for its usage in this passage. While the majority of exegetes argue that מִסְוָה simply means “veil” (i.e., a head-scarf of sorts),³¹ some regard it as a kind of mask ancient priests were accustomed to wearing during cultic rituals, similar to the mask with horns envisaged by Jirku in his conjecture.³²

³¹A sampling of these would be Stuart, *Exodus*, 740; Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (repr., Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2005), 450; R. Alan Cole, *Exodus*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 243; Sarna, *Exodus*, 221; Durham, *Exodus*, 468; Enns, *Exodus*, 587; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 311; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Exodus*, rev. ed., in vol. 1 of *EBC*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 549.

³²Jirku, “Die Gesichtsmaske Des Mose.” Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster Press, 1974), 619, maintains that the veil is a “mask,” which conforms to the ANE practice of the “shaman.” Cf. Ronald E. Clements, *Exodus*, CBC (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 226; Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 754–55, argues that “the veil of Moses is a mask of concealment intended to set him apart from the Israelites in their social interactions, giving him the social authority that was promised of God.” Dozeman is following the threefold function of the veil in the ANE as argued by K. van der Toorn, “The Significance of the Veil in the Ancient Near East,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. Jacob Milgrom et al. (Winona Lake, IN:

But this is certainly wrong, and the purported difficulties in the narrative which some use to substantiate a mask-interpretation are negligible.³³ Three points are worth considering with regard to the function of the veil and which help in understanding its meaning.

First, *מִסְוָה* means “a covering” or “robe.” Its rare use makes it difficult to argue for anything further, and the word is never used as a cultic “mask” in the OT.³⁴

Second, it is hard to conceive of anything other than a simple translation of “veil/scarf” for *מִסְוָה*, for its purpose is to conceal Moses’ face. Any other purpose is conjecture.³⁵ A mask may also conceal one’s face, but in contrast to a veil, a mask must always have a specific function; that is, a mask does not just cover but operates as a representation of something else (for example, the use of masks in a masquerade, as a tool for impersonation, or as a disguise by an actor). The text, however, seems only to present the veil as concealing Moses’ face and nothing more. Consequently, those who maintain that the veil was a precursor or foretaste to the veil of the tabernacle and

Eisenbrauns, 1995), 327–39.

³³See especially the extended discussion in Haran (“The Shining of Moses’ Face,” 163–65), who spars with a number of literary critics who try to reconstruct the source material behind Exod 34:29–35, namely Hugo Gressmann, *Mose und seine Zeit: Ein Kommentar zu den Mose-Sagen*, FRLANT 18 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 249–51.

³⁴Nearly every lexicon says that *מִסְוָה* derives from *סוּה* or *סוּהָ*, also *hapax legomenon* in Gen 49:11, where it refers to a “robe.”

³⁵See Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 221–25, who argues for a polemical connection between the golden calf and Moses and that the horn image on Moses’ face was an emblem of judgment, which presumably would have judged the unspiritual Israelites had Moses not covered his face with a veil. So also Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 81. Thus, the veil is construed as an act of mercy in the midst of judgment since the people would have been destroyed if the “glory” was not behind the veil. This interpretation, however, misses some key factors in the text, not the least of which is the fact that the people indeed saw Moses *unveiled* in 34:30 and continued to see him unveiled at the times when Moses operated as mediator of God’s commands. The text does not say that the Israelites were harmed or under pain when they see Moses’ face, only that they were afraid and would not dare to approach him, that is, until he calls out to them in 34:31. Moreover, Moses himself saw God’s glory directly (that is, he saw God’s “back” instead of his full divine majesty) in 34:1–9 and lived to tell the tale. Against Hafemann, see Garrett, “Veiled Hearts,” 755n63, 762n82.

subsequent temple during Israel’s monarchy take the analogy too far.³⁶ מִסְכָּה is not the same word used in the tabernacle narrative of the curtain that separates the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place—the פְּרֻכָּת. If the author expected his reader to make that connection (in the same context and book, no less) we can presume that he would have used the same word, which he does not use. So, one should be hesitant to do so.³⁷

Third, the text clearly implies that Moses used the veil as a response to the reaction of the people when they see his shining face, not as a ritual mask. No cultic indications are present. The people are simply disturbed at what they see and are afraid to approach Moses. Their fear is quelled not when Moses dons the veil, as in a common cultic act with which they would be familiar, but only after he calls out to them in 34:31 and gives them Yhwh’s commands (vv. 34–35). Moreover, a pagan ritual practice is out of place given the heavy emphasis in chapters 32–34 on Yhwh’s glory and worship of him alone.

Thus, the function of the veil is a very simple one: it is worn as a response to the Israelites’ fear in 34:30 and used by Moses to conceal his face when not operating as a mediator. The plain meaning of the text suggests that the people are not prevented from seeing Moses’ shining face—the radiant “goodness” of Yhwh himself—as long as he is communicating to them the word of Yhwh. Haran comments appropriately, “[Moses’ radiance] serves as a kind of optical and tangible confirmation of the fact that it is God’s

³⁶The analogy that the veil may also serve more theologically to foreshadow the “veiledness” of God’s glory in the tabernacle is simply that—an analogy, and no more. The connection cannot be made exegetically because the words for “veil” are different. For those who attempt to make this connection, see Brueggemann, “Exodus,” 954; Enns, *Exodus*, 587; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 312; Gerald J. Janzen, *Exodus*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 262–63.

³⁷Additionally, the “veil”—as nearly every English translation renders the word—is an archaic term and likely stems from the longstanding KJV tradition, which is probably the reason that many make the correlation with the veil in the tabernacle/temple. A better option would be to render the term *scarf*, which would update the language and avoid confusion with the “veil” in the tabernacle/temple.

word that is being spoken to them when they see the light radiating from Moses' face."³⁸ The "veil" is not, therefore, a ritual mask, nor does it have any cultic function, but the exact opposite. Moses dons the veil only when he is not communicating Yhwh's word, that is, only when he is acting as a regular, individual Israelite, unoccupied with the role of mediator. Therefore, it should be clear it is Moses' shining face, not the veil, which is the main point of Exodus 34:29–35.³⁹

Ancient Near Eastern Parallels

In his commentary on the book of Exodus, Brevard Childs notes that with regard to Exodus 34:29–35, "a much more primitive tradition, not at home in Israel, lay at the root of the story."⁴⁰ If true, this quote suggests that divine-to-human radiance has its origin outside of Israel, which is argued by many scholars, principally Julian Morgenstern⁴¹ and Menahem Haran.⁴² It is necessary, therefore, to investigate the comparative literature of the ANE for notable historical and typological parallels.⁴³ Two examples in particular relate to the concept of divine light on a human or angelic face, as well as one relating to the use of a veil.

³⁸Haran, "The Shining of Moses' Face," 162. Against Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 267, who argues that the story was meant to explain the veil.

³⁹Haran, "The Shining of Moses' Face," 163.

⁴⁰Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 609.

⁴¹Morgenstern, "Moses with the Shining Face."

⁴²Haran, "The Shining of Moses' Face."

⁴³For an attempt at drawing upon Egyptian literature as the background to Exod 34:29–35 see Scolnic, "Moses and the Horns of Power," 569–79. Since Scolnic's study has not gained wide acceptance, it will not be treated here. Scolnic concludes, in the end, that קֶרֶן does mean "horn-like radiance," but only because of its association to the Egyptian infatuation with animal horns (like that of a bull) and the power and radiance of Egyptian solar and animal gods. This correlation seems unlikely given the strong indictment on Egypt within Exod 32–34. God is not countering the Israelites' golden calf with Moses' golden face, as Scolnic would argue (577). Moses' face simply reflects God's glory from Exod 34:6–7.

The Mesopotamian *Melammu*

Melammu is a Sumerian term and is one of the oldest and enduring concepts in cuneiform culture, and probably the closest anthropological parallel to Moses' shining face. Along with its Akkadian equivalent, *puluḥtu*, it is generally translated "radiance" or "splendor."⁴⁴ The *melammu* is specifically associated with strength and power from the second millennium onward. In his masterful study on this topic, *The Unbeatable Light*, Shawn Aster proposes the following definition: the *melammu* is "the covering, outer layer, or appearance of a person, being, or object, or the rays emanating from a being, which perceptibly demonstrates the irresistible or supreme power of that person, being, or object."⁴⁵ The *melammu* is thus tangible and concrete. The *Enūma Elish*, for instance, in tablet I, lines 67–68 describes the end of the battle between Ea and Apsu: "He [Ea] loosed his [Apsu's] sashes, tore away his crown, carried off his *melammu*, himself he did clothe [in it]."⁴⁶

As it relates to Exodus 34:29–35, there are four similarities between Moses' radiance and the *melammu* that are notable from the comparative literature, which may or may not demonstrate literary borrowing:⁴⁷

1. Just as Moses' face exudes radiant light, so does the *melammu* emit a similar radiance.

⁴⁴The only exhaustive study of the *melammu* and its relation to biblical texts is the recent work by Shawn Zelig Aster, *The Unbeatable Light: Melammu and Its Biblical Parallels*, AOAT 384 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2012). See also A. L. Oppenheim, "Akkadian Pul(u)ḥ(t)u and Melammu," *JOAS* 63, no. 1 (1943): 31–34.

⁴⁵Aster, *The Unbeatable Light*, 51.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 35, Aster's translation. Aster concludes that the *melammu* in this story is revealed as an alienable object, "but one tightly connected to the power of its possessor." Moreover, "it seems that the *melammu* can only exist when it is worn by an individual. It gradually loses its effectiveness or power when it is not worn" (35).

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 346. Aster notes these similarities.

2. Just as Moses' radiance derives from a divine source, so does the *melammu* also find its source in deities or divine personages.
3. Just as Moses' face terrified the Israelites in 34:30, so is the *melammu* thought to terrify its viewers as well.
4. The primary distinction of the *melammu* lies in that it usually provides superhuman strength to an individual, as the definition above reveals. There is no such distinction with Moses. However, Deuteronomy 34:7 describes how at the end of his life Moses' "eye was undimmed and his vigor unabated," which simply refers to the extraordinary energy and vigor Moses still possessed even at 120 years old. Moreover, Exodus 34:29–35 specifically says nothing of superior strength in Moses, but conceptually, the glory on Moses' face may explain Moses' extraordinary long and vigorous life. *Radiance* and *strength*, after all, are related terms.⁴⁸

There are, however, key differences between the radiance on Moses' face and the *melammu*:

1. Although the *melammu* has its source in a deity and thus strengthens or makes a person sovereign or superior, Moses is singled out because of his proximity to Yhwh's glory, which is reflected on his face, not because of his supposed superiority.⁴⁹
2. Central to the Mesopotamian concept of *melammu* is its conferral on a king or military leader by a god as part of ritual ceremony.⁵⁰ Aster notes on this point, "texts from the Neo-Assyrian period speak of a formal conferral of royal *melammu* upon the king by a god. The *melammu* which the king receives from the gods gives him a special status above subservient kings (related to his superior military power) and legitimacy as king. The conferral of royal *melammu* upon the king was re-enacted in rituals at coronation and at *akitu* festivals."⁵¹ By contrast, in the biblical account there is not an act of conferral. Exodus 34:1–26 may be regarded as a cultic ceremony, with all the elements of covenant renewal in place (see chapter 2 above), yet the text is

⁴⁸Contra Aster, *The Unbeatable Light*, 346.

⁴⁹Ibid., 347.

⁵⁰Ibid., 75–80, 231–36.

⁵¹Aster elaborates on this point by further noting the contrast: "The granting of the *melammu* is both ceremonial and institutional: in a specific ceremony, the divinity confers legitimacy upon someone who fills a specific institutional role, that of king" (Ibid., 347). This is obviously different from Moses' role. His legitimacy derives from ongoing contact with Yhwh and communicating his commands to the Israelites, not from receiving an institutional role, like that of a king.

silent about how Moses acquired his radiance. The text simply emphasizes his contact with God.

3. While Exodus 34:34–35 highlights the permanence of Moses’ shining face and the need for his veil, the *melammu* is a removable object that can be taken on or off.⁵²
4. Lastly, while it is true that both Moses’ face and the *melammu* terrifies their onlookers, this similarity could simply be a natural reaction to a luminous person. There is, additionally, a unique distinction in the nature of the reaction to the *melammu* which is lacking in the Exodus account. Aster notes that when someone beholds a *melammu*-possessor, that person (or group of people) is expected to submit servilely.⁵³ This type of submission is entirely absent in Exodus 34:29–35.

In sum, the ANE concept of *melammu* resembles Moses’ shining face in Exodus 34:29–35 in general terms: they both communicate visual radiance, both derive from a divine source, and both are terrifying. But the differences highlighted above demonstrate from a historical perspective that they are generally unconnected conceptually, except in Deuteronomy 34:7. As argued above, the light on Moses’ face is the result of his contact with Yhwh in Exodus 34:6–7, who emits light on numerous occasions (Gen 15; Exod 3; 19; 24), and clothes his emissaries in light or fire (Exod 3:2; Judg 13:20; 2 Kgs 2). Although it is unique, this radiance of Moses’ face, therefore, is a development of a biblical concept, not the borrowing of a Mesopotamian one that has similar features.

The *Enūma Anu Enlil*

In an attempt to resolve the problem noted above about the connection of קרן with “light,” Seth Sanders writes that “the conceptual connection between horns and light was in fact a common feature in the international Near Eastern cuneiform high culture of the early first millennium BCE.”⁵⁴ Sanders goes on to illustrate his point from the

⁵²Ibid., 75–80, 348.

⁵³Ibid., 80–98, 349. The exception to this type of reaction occurs with heroes like Gilgamesh, who is brave enough to challenge a *melammu*-possessor.

⁵⁴Sanders, “Old Light on Moses’ Shining Face,” 403.

Babylonian astronomical series *Enūma Anu Enlil*, a text that contains a commentary telling the reader how to think about what he is reading. The text explains that what the reader or astronomer will sometimes see in the sky is an eclipse, described by the Sumerian word **si**:

If the sun's horn (**si**) fades and the moon is dark, there will be deaths. [*explanation*]
In the evening watch, the moon is having an eclipse [and in this context], **si** means "horn," **si** means "shine". . .

In a more explicit way than Exodus 34:29, the commentary here makes plain that the word **si** means "horn" and "shining." Moreover, the Akkadian in this passage has *qarnu* for "horn," the cognate to the Hebrew קַרְן. Another commentary adds the following:

si means "horn," **si** means "to daze," **si** means "to mask," **si** means "shining," **si** means "radiance," **si** means "light."⁵⁵

Thus, "after reading the commentary, the person who sees the thin shining rim of the sun should think of it as both a horn and as light," a notion not unlike the description of Moses' face as קַרְן.⁵⁶ It is important to note that the *Enūma Anu Enlil*, therefore, provides a *conceptual* connection between horns and light similarly to Exodus 34:29.

The *Zukru* Festival and Dagan's Veil

One particular thirteenth-century BC festival, the *zukru*, from the northern-Syrian city of Emar, offers an interesting parallel, which Richard Hess documents in his *Israelite Religions*.⁵⁷ Emar 373 records that on the seventh day of the festival, the statue

⁵⁵Also cited in Sanders' "Old Light on Moses' Shining Face." Sanders goes on to say one consequence of his Sumerian parallel is that it is the first step "in building a picture of the Torah as *parallel* to the later apocalypses in the account it gives of its origins and mediator: the Torah is transmitted to Israel by Moses, a sage who ascends like Enoch to behold God (Ex. xxiv), writes down a revelation (Ex. xxxiv 27-8) as does Enoch, and becomes angel-like, imbued with a terrifying supernatural light" (404).

⁵⁶Ibid. Propp also notes this parallel in "The Skin of Moses' Face—Transfigured or Disfigured?," 381.

⁵⁷Richard S. Hess, *Israelite Religions: An Archeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 114–18. Cf. Daniel E. Fleming, *Time at Emar: The Cultic Calendar and the Rituals from the*

of the deity Dagan emerges with his face covered by a veil. Apparently, Dagan was veiled for the entire journey from the city to the festival. But once the statue reaches the central ceremony of the festival—that is, at “the place of the stones”—his face is uncovered and his full glory is revealed. Daniel Flemming notes that it is Dagan’s “face” specifically that is veiled, which “muted the full glory of the god.” The timing of the unveiling in Emar 373 shows that the ultimate audience for beholding the glory of Dagan was not the people but the festival stones, since Dagan’s glory is shielded on his journey. Thus, Dagan’s unveiled passage through the stones makes that location the ritual center of the *zukru* festival. And only then, at the time of the ritual, is his glory fully manifest. This parallel is similar to my argument here about the veil and Moses, who is veiled in the presence of the Israelites but remains unveiled in times of communion with God.⁵⁸

In sum, there are a few ANE documents and concepts providing notable historical and typological parallels to Moses’ shining face and his use of the veil. These parallels, however, do not confirm that Moses’ usage in Exodus 34 derives from ANE practices. Rather, as in contemporary times, the literature of the ANE confirms that the emitting of light from an object or individual is often described in creative terms as a protrusion of horns.

The Theological Significance of Exodus 34:29–34

Within the parameters of the exegetical framework above, the focus will now turn to examine the biblical-theological dimension of Exodus 34:29–35, namely, the themes of God’s *presence*, God’s *glory* (veiled/unveiled), his *grace* when it is communicated in a shining face/countenance and its corollaries of *light* and *life*, and

Diviner’s Archive, Mesopotamian Civilizations 11 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 92–93.

⁵⁸Fleming, *Time at Emar*, 92–93.

finally, God's *name*. It is important at the outset to place these themes in context before approaching the later biblical material. What follows is a short summary of each theme and how it is developed within Exodus 32–34, culminating in the shining face episode in 34:29–35. A more specific analysis of later OT allusions will follow in the next chapter.

God's Presence

The theology of Exodus 34:29–35 begins fundamentally with God's *presence*, which as we have seen is the driving theological principle of the entire golden calf narrative. Many scholars note that *presence* is the main idea of chapter 33, but the inception of this theme can be traced to the beginning of Exodus. Indeed, it is crucial throughout the book and not limited to chapters 32–34. Initially, the success of the deliverance from the Egyptians was due to the fulfillment of Yhwh's promise to Moses that "I am with you" (3:12). In times of great distress, God promised lasting presence and fruitfulness in the land (6:6–8). As the narrative progresses it is clear that "Israel's confidence, and ultimately her ability to walk out of bondage into freedom, comes in knowing that the Lord is with her."⁵⁹ The discipline that the Israelites receive in the wilderness in Exodus 15–18 was corrective and instructive in that they would learn to depend on Yhwh as protector and provider. Further, as Blackburn has shown, two of the most important theological statements in the tabernacle narrative have to do with Yhwh's presence:

And let them make for me a sanctuary, in order that I might dwell in their midst (25:8).

And I will dwell in the midst of the people Israel, and I will be their God. And they will know that I am Yhwh their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, in order that I might dwell in their midst. I am Yhwh their God (29:45–46).

⁵⁹W. Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 201.

These verses indicate both Yhwh's intention to dwell among his people and the means to do so.⁶⁰

Israel's desire for a substitute to *Moses' presence* motivates the sin of the golden calf in the first place (32:1–6). From there, Moses receives the sentence of judgment from God on the Israelites (32:7–10), which includes the removal of *God's presence* among the people and the indictment that he will destroy them as a result of their sin. At this threat Moses intercedes three times in an effort to secure God's presence going forward (32:11–14, 31–34; 33:12–23). During these intercessions Moses is uniquely given an audience with God, and in particular the divine revelation of the Tent of Meeting—the place to mediate God's presence among the people (33:7–11). In the climactic scene, Moses experiences the glorious theophany of God's presence at the apex of Sinai (34:5–7) as the covenant is renewed (34:10–28). Theologically, Moses' authoritative role as intermediary, a role first articulated in Exodus 19:9 and 20:19, is affirmed in that he alone experiences God's glory at such a large scale, and now stands as the sole recipient of divine presence.⁶¹

It is clear, therefore, that God's presence among the Israelites is a necessity. The problem, as noted above, is how God's presence can now abide with a sinful and “stiff-necked” people. The original intent of the covenant is for God to dwell in their midst (Exod 19:5ff.; 24:9ff.; 25:8; 29:45ff.; cf. Lev 26:9, 11–13),⁶² but this intent has

⁶⁰Ibid., 199–200.

⁶¹George W. Coats, *Moses: Heroic Man, Man of God*, JSOTSup 57 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 135, remarks, “Both the heroic man with his own personal authority calling for belief of the people in him and the mediator for God with the authority of God to call for obedience from the people to God constitute the shape of the Moses image in the Pentateuch.”

⁶²Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 295–98; R. E. Clements, *God and Temple: The Idea of the Divine Presence in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 113–17.

been abandoned.⁶³ From God's perspective, his intention to make Israel his people and to bring them into their own land comes to an effective end without his presence. As Moberly has shown, the unmediated presence of God will only mean judgment. While the initial "visit" from Yhwh to Israel was to bless the people (Exod 3:16; 4:31; 13:19), he later visits only to judge them (Exod 32:34; 33:3, 5).⁶⁴ The solution lies in the conclusion of the narrative and, literally, on Moses' face. As Hafemann notes, "Moses himself becomes the final resolution of the tension within the narrative. Moses not only brings about the renewal of the covenant through his intercessions, but also becomes the mediator of God's presence in fulfillment of the covenant promises."⁶⁵ This mediation looks differently in the final instance than in the previous ones. Israel's position before God at the renewal of the covenant in Exodus 34 is not the same as it was in Exodus 19–24. Now, the presence of God must be mediated through his messenger (34:34–35), whose shining face depicts visually the splendor of God's glory and the enduring nature of the covenant in anticipation of its later resting place in the tabernacle.⁶⁶

⁶³This point is developed at length by Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 226.

⁶⁴See Moberly, *At the Mountain of God*, 58, and the wordplay on פקד in 32:34. So also Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 226.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶It is important to note here that although Moses' face depicts God's presence visually, it is not God's presence per se, contra Hafemann (Ibid., 227). Hafemann argues that "the repeated need for the veil itself, within the narrative logic of Exod. 32–34, demonstrates that the veil is both a sign *and* a threat, and that what is threatening is, in fact, the presence of God." This means that if Moses' face is not veiled he would inadvertently destroy or injure the Israelites, which Hafemann states explicitly on pg. 231. But this argument is conjectural and lacks evidence. As demonstrated above, there is nothing inherently threatening about Moses' face, and the natural, fearful response of the Israelites to this odd phenomenon is what prompts Moses' use of the veil. Nothing in the text indicates that God's glory/presence on Moses' face is somehow actively injuring/judging the Israelites as an extension of his holy wrath. God's presence is indeed threatening, which is made abundantly clear in 33:20. But Moses' face is not God's presence, which remains on Sinai. It is, rather, a visual sign or representation of God's presence, and functions to communicate, ultimately, his grace in that in spite of their sin he has renewed the covenant and will continue his project in accompanying them to Canaan.

God's Glory

The golden calf narrative closes with the *presence* of God depicted in Moses' shining face. His presence also *includes* the concomitant and equally significant theme of God's *glory*, a glory set within the context of a mountain theophany.

In biblical theology, the merging of "presence" and "glory" in Exodus 34 often forms the basis of definitions of God's glory. In a recent essay Schreiner, for example, defines the glory of God as "the beauty, majesty, and greatness of who he is; therefore, in all he does, whether in salvation or in judgment, the greatness of his being is demonstrated."⁶⁷ Hamilton suggests likewise that "that the glory of God is the weight of the majestic goodness of who God is, and the resulting name, or reputation, that he gains from his revelation of himself as Creator, Sustainer, Judge, and Redeemer, perfect in justice and mercy, loving-kindness and truth."⁶⁸ These definitions obviously echo the language of Exodus 34 and God's passing "goodness" before Moses. In the theology of the book of Exodus, God's *presence* involves a visual representation in some form, while his *glory* includes his manifold theological attributes.⁶⁹ The relationship between Exodus 34:6–7 and 34:29–35 in the context of the Sinai theophany shows that both concepts are being communicated in Moses' face.

This idea is clearer if the three main theophanies of Exodus are compared: Exodus 3 and the burning bush, the covenant ratification ceremony in Exodus 19–24, and the final private theophany in Exodus 33–34. These theophanies play an important role in

⁶⁷Thomas R. Schreiner, "A Biblical Theology of the Glory of God," in *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*, ed. C. Samuel Storms and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 216.

⁶⁸James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 56.

⁶⁹Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 206.

the book of Exodus as well as to its structure,⁷⁰ and their interrelationship offers insight into the theme of God’s glory. For example, all three theophanies include the elements of fire, fear, mediation, and a focus on Moses’ relationship to the Israelites. In addition, each theophany takes place “at the mountain of God,” that is, at Sinai. The last theophany in Exodus 34 operates as a parenthesis with Exodus 3. Moses’ initial response to Yhwh in 3:6 is fear to look at his face, while in 33:19–23 this is his very request, which Yhwh denies for the sake of Moses’ life. And whereas Moses sought to avoid Yhwh’s service in Exodus 3, he is much more outspoken before Yhwh in Exodus 32–34 with his insistence that Yhwh honor the covenant with Abraham and continue to accompany the people. The intervening theophany in chapters 19–24 is explicit in its description of the Israelites’ fear of hearing Yhwh’s voice, a key motif in the other theophanies as well. These elements, taken together, demonstrate the numinous and deadly nature of God’s glory, the impossibility of a direct divine encounter, and the need for mediation.⁷¹ Moreover, in the presentation of God’s glory, all three theophanies contain the proclamation of Yhwh’s name. Exodus 3:14 and 33:19 again mirror one another in the aforementioned *idem per idem* formulations (אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה and וַיִּחַנְתִּי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אֶחֱזַק) pointed out by Lundbom⁷² and

⁷⁰See F. Polak, “Theophany and Mediator,” in *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction, Reception, Interpretation*, ed. Marc Vervenne (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 113, 144–47. George W. Savran, *Encountering the Divine: Theophany in Biblical Narrative*, JSOTSup 420 (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 205n5, writes, “The three main sections of Exodus each feature theophany in a central way: Moses at the bush in Exod. 3 gives shape and direction to the exodus narrative of Exod. 1.1–15:21; the theophany at Sinai is obviously central to the desert/Sinai narrative in Exod. 15.22–24:18; and theophany in Exod. 33 stands at the center of the tabernacle narrative in Exod. 25–40. In addition, note the significance of the revelation of the name YHWH to Moses in Exod. 6; the appearance of *k’bod YHWH* to the people in Exod. 16; and the construction of the Tabernacle as a locus for the divine presence in Exod. 25–32; 35–40.”

⁷¹Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 205–06.

⁷²Jack R. Lundbom, “God’s Use of the *idem per idem* to Terminate Debate,” *HTR* 71 (1978): 193–201.

Polak,⁷³ each of which have grace and forgiveness as the main concern of that proclamation. Chapters 19–24 on the other hand, highlight the “jealousy” of God and his intent to destroy anyone who transgresses his law.⁷⁴

Each theophany indicates that God’s *presence* always includes the manifestation of his *glory*. On the one hand, these twin themes are inseparable. But they are also not conflated in the text. At a basic level Exodus depicts God’s presence on Sinai in cloudy, thunderous and fiery terms (Exod 19:16–19).⁷⁵ His glory, however, reflects his manifold character, especially as it relates to his covenant promises and his name (34:6–7, see below). This relationship is clearly seen, first, in God’s prior declarations concerning the *purpose* for which he acts on behalf of Israel in 9:16; 14:4, 17, 18 (i.e., for his glory and name), and their fulfillment in the subsequent events recorded in 14:25; 15:1, 6, 11, 21; 16:6–7, 10.⁷⁶

Secondly, it is seen in Moses’ intercessions. God made a promise to the Patriarchs, a promise nested in his gracious character and love for Abraham and for his offspring, compelling him to deliver the Israelites. The deliverance is threatened by God’s insistence on destroying the Israelites in 32:10 for their sin. But the promise to Abraham means that God has sovereignly identified himself with the Israelites, which has strong implications: the glory of God’s own name (3:13–15) is at stake if he decides to destroy them. Moses’ recounting of the Patriarchal promises in 32:11 ff. reflects his

⁷³Polak, “Theophany and Mediator,” 145.

⁷⁴E.g., Exod 20:5b—“For I, Yhwh your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me.” Cf. Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 206.

⁷⁵For the manifestations of God’s glory/presence in the cloud, see Exod 13:21–22; 14:19, 24; 16:10; 19:9, 16; 24:15–16, 18; 33:9; 34:5; 40:34.

⁷⁶See further on this point in Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 200.

understanding of this very point. God should not spare the Israelites because of love, but because to destroy them would defame his honor and the glory of his name. Viewed from this perspective, the purpose of the deliverance from Egypt is not primarily about Israel, but for God to preserve his honor and glory among the nations through his covenant promises.

Lastly, God's commitment to preserve his glory and honor is seen in the climax of the narrative in 33:17–34:9.⁷⁷ Moses asks specifically for a vision of God's "glory" (כְּבוֹד) in 33:18, which Yhwh defines in the next verse as "all my goodness" (כָּל-טוֹבֵי) and his "name" (שֵׁם), and explicitly his "glory" (כְּבוֹד) in 33:22. The "glory" is expanded to include God's gracious and merciful nature, again highlighting his character. When the event actually takes place in 34:5–7, the twin themes are brought together. Yhwh "descended in the cloud and stood with [Moses] there" and "passes by" in 34:5a, 6a (*presence*), while "proclaiming" his "name" in 34:5b, 6–7 (*glory*).⁷⁸ Thus, it is the glory of God and his presence that Moses sees, and which is later evidenced on his face when he descends Sinai.

The experience of seeing God's glory is depicted in Exodus at both the individual and communal level. The first theophany in Exodus 3 is clearly individual, while in 19–24 the group involvement is emphasized. Even in Moses' private conversations with Yhwh the Israelites are in view. Exodus 19:9, for instance, is private discourse which serves to validate Moses' role *among the people* ("that they may believe

⁷⁷For texts concerning God's allegiance to his name/honor/glory as developed in relation to Exod 33:19, cf. Pss 23:3; 31:1–3; 79:9; 143:1–2, 11; Dan 9:7, 13–19; Isa 43:6–7, 21, 24; 44:23; 46:13; Jer 13:11; 14:7, 9, 20–21; Ezek 16:59–63; 20:9, 14, 22, 44; etc. John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 55–101.

⁷⁸For an analysis and extensive interaction with the scholarly literature concerning כְּבוֹד יְהוָה, see the recent work by Benjamin D. Sommer, *Bodies of God in the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), especially 58–79.

you”) rather than to give Moses a private message. Exodus 33–34 also contains both private and public elements. The main concern of Moses’ intercession is, as shown above, God’s glory and his prior commitments to his covenant, even though Moses’ appeal in 33:12–17 is clearly for the benefit of the people. The following paragraph, however, seems entirely private as Moses requests for himself a glimpse of God’s glory. What Moses actually sees in 34:5–7 is private to him, although the implications of this experience relate to the people: God’s grace to the Israelites in renewing the covenant, new tablets of stone, and the guarantee of his lasting presence. As the passage progresses to 34:29–35, the external and public nature of Moses’ experience is made explicit to Israel when he descends Sinai with a shining face. The experience is entirely Moses’, but the theological intent of that experience is for further generations. God’s *presence* will continue with Israel, which is confirmed in the *glory* of his presence that is protruding from Moses’ face.

God’s Grace and Mercy

The distinction between *presence* and *glory* is helpful for the exegesis of 34:29–35. Just as God’s presence in 34:5–8 involves a visual sign (seeing him) and an audible declaration about his glory (hearing his name), so also Moses’ face involves something tangible (a shining visage) and theological (grace/mercy). Indeed, the appearance and speech of Yhwh are essential components of any theophanic scene in the OT.⁷⁹ The correlation between these texts emphasizes their relationship theologically. As

⁷⁹In addition to Exod 32–34, See Gen 28 (Jacob); Exod 3, 19 (Moses); Isa 6 (Isaiah), Ezek 2 (Ezekiel), and 1 Kgs 19 (Elijah). For a deeper analysis of these texts, see Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 16–18. Savran notes that the speech of God is generally heard after the visual component, but once the discourse begins there is no further reference to the visual. This confirms the interpretation above, that the *words* of Yhwh in Exod 34:6–7 are more important than what Moses *sees*. The same is confirmed in Exod 3. Once the dialogue begins, the burning bush ceases to be an object of reference. It is worth noting, additionally, that Deut 4:33 and 5:23–27 emphasize that it is the *voice of God* that is threatening and potentially lethal, not his “glory” per se. Savran later remarks, “Seeing YHWH is the ultimate experience in

argued previously, the “presence” and “glory” on Moses’ face functions to communicate primarily God’s *grace* and *mercy*.

That grace/mercy constitutes a theological notion here can be demonstrated in two ways. First, as shown above, the only substantive difference between Moses’ descent from Sinai after his first forty days, and his descent after his second forty days, is that in the latter he had just seen God’s essential “goodness” (טוב) pass over him, which he mediates to the Israelites via a shining face. The lexeme טוב involves much more than God’s superlative character, or his good actions in history, although it does involve these ideas. In context, טוב is a summary statement for all that Moses *sees* and *hears* as the glory passes by. He sees the cloud in 34:5, and the author does not elaborate on this point. What he hears—the *content* of God’s glory, as it were—is the more important point, that is, Yhwh’s name. The טוב is hinted at in 33:19 and even as far back as 3:14. When Moses first experienced Yhwh’s presence at the burning bush he originally heard from Yhwh, “I am/will be who I am/will be.” This constitutes Yhwh’s name (3:15). The name is expanded in 33:19 to “I will be *gracious* to whom I will be *gracious*, and will show *mercy* on whom I will show *mercy*.” When the glory finally passes before Moses in 34:6–7, Yhwh himself proclaims his “name” which includes a further expansion: “Yhwh! Yhwh! A God *merciful* and *gracious*, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.” The governing phrase of Yhwh’s “name” is clearly the idea of grace and mercy. Taken together with 3:14 and 33:19 in the context of a theophany, we can conclude that the word pair functions as a short definition of God’s character.⁸⁰

biblical theophany, but hearing YHWH will decode that experience and give it a transmittable form” (52).

⁸⁰On the use of the “grace formula” or Yhwh creed in the OT see Hermann Spieckermann, “God’s Steadfast Love: Towards a New Conception of Old Testament Theology,” *Bib* 81, no. 3 (January 1, 2000): 311n9: “The formula of grace occurs in Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Neh 9:17.

This experience has a profound effect on Moses' countenance. He descends the mountain in 34:29 with his face still teeming with the radiant goodness of God's grace and mercy. The Israelites, who are still living with the ramifications of their sin and with the knowledge that God has threatened to destroy them and remove his presence, likely associate Moses' radiance with God's glory. This radiance illustrates visually that they will not be destroyed *in toto*, and thus the theological point is made even though it is left unsaid. God is being gracious and merciful, and his presence will continue to guide them to Canaan. He will be true to his covenant with Abraham since God's mercy is grounded in the concern for his honor.⁸¹

Second, Moses' experience has a theological effect. Just as the presence of God on the mountain is accompanied by objective truth (i.e., the Ten Words, and declaring of Yhwh's "name"), so Moses' mediated presence is accompanied by words, as "he commanded them all that Yhwh had spoken with him on Mount Sinai" (34:32). The subsequent use of the veil in 34:33–35 demonstrates plainly that the mediated presence/glory of Yhwh is never without theological propositions, for its function is intricately tied to Moses' preaching the commands that he has received from God. This interrelationship between the "seeing" of Yhwh's presence and the "hearing" of the commands point to the gracious nature of God. Not only will Yhwh accompany the Israelites to Canaan and make his residence in their midst (tabernacle), he will continue

References of the enlarged formula or references presupposing the enlarged formula are to be found in Exod 34:6–7; 20:5–6=Deut 5:9–10; 7:9–10. Allusions to the formula can often be assumed by not always be proved, cf. Deut 4:31; Exod 33:19; Num 14:18; Isa 48:9; 54:7–8; 63:7; Jer 15:15; 32:18; Mic 7:18; Nah 1:2–3; Pss 78:38; 86:5; 99:8; 111:4 belonging together with 112:4; 116:5; Dan 9:4; Neh 1:5; 9:31–32; 2 Chr 30:9; Sir 2:11; 5:4–7 et al." See also in the NT, John 1:17; Jas 5:11.

⁸¹Deut 32:26–27; Ezek 20:8b–9; Josh 7:8–9; 1 Sam 12:22; Ps 25:11; Isa 43:25; 48:9–11; Dan 9:18–19.

to outline his will for them in the form of commands and laws. Thus, he is merciful and gracious, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.⁸²

Light and Life

Lastly, the book of Exodus expresses the physical and metaphorical mystery of divine presence in terms of “light.” In the OT as in ancient and biblical imagery, “light” has particular life-giving and protective qualities. This is illustrated in Exodus initially in the plague narratives, where darkness shrouds the Egyptians while the Israelites are safely illuminated in Goshen (Exod 10:23). As the Israelites leave Egypt they are guided by the pillar of fire by night, “to give them light, that they might travel” (13:21b).

In the sphere of Israel’s worship the function of light is given for spiritual realities: “You shall make seven lamps for it. And the lamps shall be set up so as to give light on the space in front of it” (25:37; cf., Lev 24:2; 1 Kgs 7:49; 2 Chr 4:20). Indeed, the tabernacle and later temple were constructed to face the east, which allowed the light of the sun to illuminate the place of worship as it rises.

The most notable feature about “light” in Exodus and in later texts has been already mentioned—the glory of God. In creation, light is called forth by God (Gen 1:3–4) prior to the establishment of the luminaries (1:14–18). Light, then, is tied inextricably to the presence of God and his activity as the ultimate source of creation.⁸³ The cloud that

⁸²Why is the theme of “judgment” not included here as well? At some level one must admit that “judgment,” while a significant theme in Exod 32–34, is not part of the theological implications in 34:29–35. While one might creatively attribute this idea to Moses’ use of the veil, the text is clear: Moses’ face does not judge the Israelites, and his veil is not an act of mercy as some have argued. Although I understand the passing of God’s glory in 34:5–7 to be reflected in Moses’ face, a glory that *includes* the notion of God’s justice (see the previous two chapters), the emphasis in that text and in 34:29–35 remains on his mercy and grace. It is hard to see any other notion of judgment/justice on Moses’ face, theological or otherwise, without doing an injustice to the text.

⁸³G. L. Borchert, “Light,” in *NDBT*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 644.

settles on Sinai in Exodus 24, and which passes by Moses' face in 34, is couched in terms of "light" and "shining." This light is associated with life (cf. Deut 32:47; Ps 27:1). As already noted, the removal of God's presence among the Israelites is a symbol of their death. Their survival is dependent on the presence of God's glory to guide them and to dwell among them. Everywhere, when God's presence is active and visible, it has life-giving effects. The burning bush is ablaze with the light of God's presence, which leads to the new birth of Israel. The fire on the mountain is ablaze with God's glory, as he guarantees his lasting presence for them in the covenant. Moses' face is ablaze with the after-effects of God's glory, which confirms for all those who see it that God's project with Israel will continue. The "shining light" on Moses' face confirms for Israel that she has been granted a second life and will continue as a nation with Yhwh at her helm. The light of Moses' face and the tablets in his hands (34:27–28) are the basis for the new existence of the people of God. Further, as I have argued above, the very existence of Israel is at stake in Exodus 32–34. Thus, for Moses to descend the mountain and tell them that the covenant is being renewed is to assure them that they will not be wholly destroyed. They are "saved," so to speak, through Moses' intercession. Where death was once proclaimed (32:10), they now receive life.

Conclusion

What is found in Exodus 34:29–35 is the literary resolution to the golden calf narrative, and, in Exodus, the culmination of the themes of God's presence, glory, grace/mercy, light and life. The tension leading up to Yhwh's grand theophany in 34:6–7 is resolved, and the covenant reestablished. This moment is confirmed most clearly in the commandments of 34:10–26, and in Moses descending from Sinai with the tablets in his hand and face inexplicably altered.

But as argued above, the verbal form of קרן is more in line with "to shine" or "emanate light/rays" as opposed to "had horns" or other interpretations. And the function

of the entire phrase—קָרַן עוֹר פְּנָיו—is fourfold: as a reminder or extension of Yhwh’s presence at Sinai, to distinguish Moses in terms of status, to communicate Yhwh’s “goodness,” and to transition from the rebellion narrative in chapters 32–34 to the building of the tabernacle in 35–40. Knowing the function of the phrase allows us to understand the concomitant matter of Moses’ veil (מִסְוָה), which is more akin to a scarf instead of a mask, and which functions simply to hide Moses’ face when he is uninvolved with his role as mediator because his face was frightening and disturbing to the Israelites.

Even still, if Moses’ shining face signifies God’s “goodness” before the people, the veil signifies the inability of the people to grasp that goodness. To be part of the covenant is to “know God.” Thus, that the glory in Moses’ face was veiled means that the Israelites failed to grasp the core of the covenant—knowing God. But the story of Exodus 32–34 is also a story about Moses, the mediator between God and Israel, and the one who actually knew God face to face. At this the conclusion of the Sinai narrative, Moses’ shining face functions finally to bridge the gap between the awesome, holy, and zealous God of Sinai and the fearful, rebellious, and repentant people of the covenant.⁸⁴

⁸⁴Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 619.

CHAPTER 4

THE USE OF EXODUS 34:29–35 IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Introduction

The focus of the previous two chapters was on analyzing Exodus 34:29–35 within the context of Exodus 32–34. A close, literary reading of that text indicates that the primary emphasis is on the *presence* of Yhwh, which Yhwh threatened to remove due to the sinfulness of the Israelites at Sinai. But after Moses intercedes on Israel’s behalf, and on the basis of Yhwh’s grace and mercy to the Israelites, that presence is re-promised in the context of the renewed covenant. The conclusion of the section is the episode of Moses’ shining face in 34:29–35, which in context should be understood as communicating Yhwh’s grace, not his wrath, in that the “glory” on Moses’ face serves as a visual confirmation of Yhwh’s *presence*. Thus, the grace on Moses’ face parallels the grace that Yhwh gives in renewing the covenant when he could have rescinded it.

The remaining task is to sketch out how later biblical authors made use of Exodus 34:29–35, that is, how this account is used in the canonical OT via theological or conceptual development. In other words, do the biblical authors build upon Exodus 34:29–35 in ways that validate and expand upon the exegesis outlined above? Although the related question of how this passage is interpreted in the Intertestamental and Second Temple period is also important, the following chapters will discuss primarily the canonical text and relegate non-biblical interpretations to the footnotes. There is very little diversion in the interpretation of these texts and the Hebrew bible, with only a few exceptions. These exceptions will be highlighted, nonetheless. The question of how Exodus 34:29–35 is applied in the NT will be treated in the next chapter.

Methodology

The task of biblical theology can be approached in numerous and variegated ways. Schreiner admits that there is more than one way to pursue a biblical theology, and “each of the various approaches and perspectives can cast a different light . . . , and in that sense having a number of different approaches is helpful.”¹ There is therefore no definitive model of the subject. Rosner’s methodology is a helpful way forward:

Biblical theology is principally concerned with the overall theological message of the whole Bible. It seeks to understand the parts in relation to the whole and, to achieve this, it must work with the mutual interaction of the literary, historical, and theological dimensions of the various corpora, and with the interrelationships of these within the whole canon of Scripture.²

An extensive treatment of any one of the themes from Exodus 32–34 is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Thus, the method below will be to examine the themes presented only within the concluding section of Exodus 34:29–35, themes that bring together the rudimentary ideas of Exodus 32–34, and to elucidate the relationship between those themes in their canonical context and literary form.³

What I am attempting is an exercise in biblical theology based upon the issues raised in Exodus 34:29–35. By “biblical theology” I intend to follow Rosner’s outline above, which endeavors to comprehend the interpretive perspective reflected in the

¹Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 10. Schreiner is not referencing OT biblical theology per se, but his comment still applies to the present study. Cf. Adolf von Schlatter, “The Theology of the New Testament and Dogmatics,” in *The Nature of New Testament Theology: The Contribution of William Wrede and Adolf Schlatter*, ed. R. Morgan (repr., Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1973), 117.

²Brian S Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” in *NDBT*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 3. Similarly, Paul Williamson helpfully defines biblical theology as “a holistic enterprise tracing unfolding theological trajectories throughout Scripture and exploring no biblical concept, theme or book in isolation from the whole” (Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007], 17).

³This purpose is in line with James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 47.

writings of the biblical authors as they explicate and synthesize their understanding of earlier biblical texts, in this case, Exodus 34:29–35.⁴ This attempt, therefore, is not a model for composing a biblical theology in a utilitarian sense, which would fall into the categories proposed by James Barr⁵ and others.⁶ Rather, the concern here is epistemological in that the main point is to ascertain (i.e., to know) the full meaning of Exodus 34:29–35 as it is presented theologically in the Torah, Prophets, and Writings.⁷

⁴See Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, for more explanation of the “interpretive perspective of the biblical authors,” from whom I borrow this phrase.

⁵James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999). Barr’s work has been influential in recent years. It is not an attempt to present a biblical theology of the Bible in its own right, but rather to discern the *process* of biblical theology and to review how various scholars from all backgrounds have approached the topic. Thus, Barr intends his book to be a textbook of sorts and a reference point for those interested in the topic. Although he does not intend the book to be a history of biblical theology, Barr errs on this point because the book is exactly that: it is a survey and critique of the trends in biblical theology (especially of critical scholarship) up and to the twenty-first century from a neutral (albeit OT) perspective, the time of the books printing. Thus, there is not a central thesis to his work and it is utilitarian in outline. Barr’s main contribution is that he observes that the central tenant of the biblical theology movement is that it is defined by *contrast*. In other words, biblical theology changes its character according to that with which it is contrasted. Barr notes six oppositions/contrasts in particular. E.g., systematic theology lays out a system of beliefs, engages with contemporary topics and trends in the world, and focuses on God and the subordinate doctrines as primary topics. *By contrast*, biblical theology seeks to understand what the authors taught apart from contemporary application, while the Bible and the thematic development therein is the focus as opposed to doctrinal questions. The type of assessment that Barr has done is beyond my purposes here.

⁶See the recent work by Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

⁷For a discussion on the tripartite shaping of the OT, see Roger T. Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church and Its Background in Early Judaism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1985). For an exploration on the narrative storyline that begins with the Torah and continues through the Former Prophets, see Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 45–51, and Rolf Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible: A Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. David E. Orton (Leiderdorp, The Netherlands: Deo Publishing, 2005), 7. Rendtorff breaks down the threefold distinction of the Old Testament into further categories. In the first part of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch), *God Acts*; in the second part (the Prophets), *God Speaks*, and in the third part (the Writings) the *People Speak of and to God*. In other words, the first part of the Hebrew canon is marked by God’s activity, the second part is marked by God’s interaction with the Israelites through history, and the last part is marked by the people responding to God’s activity/speech in communal psalms and writings.

Since there are no direct quotations of this passage in the OT, the discussion here will be limited to its theology, which necessarily includes the primary themes of the book of Exodus as a whole, and those that culminate in 34:29–35 that were detailed in the previous chapter. In broad outline, I will treat initially the explicit instances of the “shining face” metaphor in the OT, followed by an overview of the theological and conceptual material that allude to the passage at hand.

One could analyze these themes independently and present a comprehensive biblical theology of any particular theme, or of all themes. However, these themes—presence, glory, grace and mercy, light, life, and name—are inseparable at some level, and are fairly general if treated in isolation. Moreover, the appearance of any particular motif from Exodus 34:29–35 in later texts does not mean that there is literary borrowing or allusion. If so, the study would be superfluous and include a lot of unessential material. The task at hand is to see the themes as they appear together theologically. Where and how do they assimilate? How does the later usage confirm or expand upon the exegesis above? And, what does the usage mean for biblical theology?

The Shining Face Metaphor in the Old Testament

Several passages in the OT refer to “the light of the face” or to God making his face “shine.” Aside from the instance of Moses’ face in Exodus 34:29–35, the most well-known reference to Yhwh’s shining face is in the Aaronic Blessing (or Priestly Blessing/Benediction): “May Yhwh make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you” (Num 6:25). Many later biblical texts (e.g., portions of the Psalter and book of Daniel) also echo this language in prayers and songs. In addition, idiomatic expressions about the “face” or the brightness of the face are found in some extrabiblical sources and ANE inscriptions, some of which have been reviewed in the previous chapter. The central aim in what follows is to determine how the image of a shining face functions in the OT in light of biblical and ANE data. In other words, just what is being communicated

culturally and theologically in texts that emphasize the shining (or light) of a face? After reviewing the relevant biblical material and secondary sources I will attempt to synthesize the contents.

Face and Facial Expressions in the ANE and OT

The anthropomorphisms of “shining the face” (in favor of someone) and “lifting the countenance” (in peace or beneficence) were widely diffused throughout the ANE culture. Cohen suggests that the themes of the “shining divine countenance and of the lifting of the divine countenance” have parallels in the late second millennium BC in Middle Babylonian and Late Bronze Ugaritic texts.⁸ Concerning idioms of the “face” (Akk. *pānu*), Oppenheim notes that most Akkadian expressions (e.g., “to give the face,” “to bring the face,” or “to set the face”) simply mean, “to look at somebody,” yet when said of divinity or the king the expressions mean, “to look *favorably* at somebody.” When said of a worshiper or a subject the sense is “to look respectfully, submissively or obediently at the god or the king” and hence “to be submissive, devoted.”⁹

In Mesopotamia this type of language occurs in a variety of genres,¹⁰ where two texts in particular have striking parallels to the Aaronic Blessing, which is discussed below. In the ninth-century BC *kudurru*-inscription, the king of Babylon bestows priestly revenues on the priest of Sippar. Upon doing so “his countenance brightened,” and “with his bright gaze, shining countenance,” he grants the servant his dues. Another sixth-

⁸Chaim Cohen, “The Biblical Priestly Blessing (Num. 6:24–26) in the Light of Akkadian Parallels,” *TA* 20 (1993): 228–38.

⁹A. Leo Oppenheim, “Idiomatic Accadian,” *JAOS* 61, no. 4 (1941): 256–58.

¹⁰*Ibid.* Cf. the study by Yochanan Muffs, *Studies in the Aramaic Legal Papyri from Elephantine I*, HO 66 (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 130–34.

century BC document describes how the Babylonian goddess Gula had a “shining face” toward her subordinate and by doing so causes Marduk to “show mercy.”¹¹

The “shining face” formula also has a parallel in a more diplomatic Ugaritic text: “May the face of the sun (i.e., the Hittite king) shine with us.”¹² Further, S. R. Keller points to an Egyptian letter from the First Intermediate period (ca. 2134–2040 BC according to Keller) that addresses the dead, but which contains a striking parallel to Numbers 6:24–25:

The Great One shall Praise you.
The face of the Great God will be Gracious over you.
He will give you pure bread with his two hands.¹³

However close this parallel may be, the purpose of the Egyptian letter—a petition for aid from a deceased father to his son— is significantly different from Numbers 6. Nonetheless, this discovery perhaps sheds light on the fact the biblical Aaronic Blessing functions in a similar way to the Egyptian text.¹⁴ While it is far from certain that these texts influenced the structuring of similar idioms in Israel, the formal sequence of turning and bestowing a shining countenance, followed by the bestowal of mercy by a deity strikingly corresponds to the idioms found in the biblical Aaronic

¹¹Michael A. Fishbane, “Form and Reformulation of the Biblical Priestly Blessing,” *JAOS* 103, no. 1 (1983): 117; Yochanan Muffs, *Studies in the Aramaic Legal Papyri from Elephantine*, vol. 8 of *SDI* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 132ff.; Avinoam Cohen, “‘The Lord Shall Lift Up His Countenance Upon You’ (Numbers 6:26): An Anti-Christian Polemical Midrash by the Sages?,” in *Studies in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Boston: Brill, 2010), 67–84; Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 236ff.

¹²Horst Seebass, “YHWH’s Name in the Aaronic Blessing (Num 6:22-27),” in *Revelation of the Name YHWH to Moses: Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity*, ed. George H. van Kooten, vol. 9 of *Themes in Biblical Narrative: Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 39n12.

¹³Sharon R. Keller, “An Egyptian Analogue to the Priestly Blessing,” in *Boundaries of the Ancient Near Eastern World* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 342. The translation is also from Keller.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 344.

Blessing.¹⁵ But it is difficult to be certain, and the biblical idioms could also have developed independently of ANE groups.

In the OT, there are certain general idioms concerning the “face” that express a wide variety of meanings which should be mentioned here. The nominative of פנה used negatively means public shame (Jer 7:19) or sorrow (Gen 40:7). More positively, the light of a face is pleasure (Prov 16:15). Coupled with certain verbs the expressions can mean to recognize someone (Prov 28:21), to be partial towards a guilty party in court (Deut 1:17; Lev 19:15), to grant a request (Gen 19:21) or deny one (1 Kgs 2:16).

As I have already demonstrated, the “the face of Yhwh” (as it relates to God) denotes presence (Exod 33:16; cf. Isa 63:9; Lam 4:16). In Deuteronomy 4:37, Moses says that Yhwh brought the Israelites out of Egypt “with his own presence and his great power.” Thus, the face of Yhwh is equated with his power, which is the means by which he accomplishes his mighty deeds. Yet while the face of Yhwh in Numbers 6 and in the Psalter connotes favor (especially the shining of the face), as the object of נתן the expressions of the face take on a menacing meaning (Lev 17:10). Moreover, the absence of divine favor is expressed in hiding one’s face (Deut 31:17) or in turning the face away (Ezek 7:22).¹⁶

Old Testament Exegetical Overview

A more detailed analysis of some OT texts is in order. Each of the texts

¹⁵Fishbane, “Form and Reformulation of the Biblical Priestly Blessing,” 115–21.

¹⁶Willem VanGemeren, ed., *NIDOTTE* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), s.v., “פְּנֵיהֶם,” by Harry F. van Rooy. On “divine absence” or of God turning away his face, see Samuel Eugene Balentine, *The Hidden God: The Hiding of the Face of God in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Richard Elliott Friedman, *The Hidden Face of God* (San Francisco: Harper, 1997); idem, *The Disappearance of God: A Divine Mystery* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1995); Joel S. Burnett, *Where Is God? Divine Absence in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010); Samuel L. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978).

surveyed below mention a shining face, with most utilizing the Hiphil or noun form of אור coupled with פנה to communicate the idea.¹⁷ Texts will be briefly summarized as they appear in canonical order with the exception of Exodus 34:29–35 since that text is discussed above. More detail will be given to Numbers 6:24–26 since nearly every subsequent instance of a shining face directly alludes to it.

Numbers 6:24–26. The second reference to a shining face in the OT is in the Aaronic Blessing.¹⁸ One of the primary duties of the priest was to bless the people in the name of Yhwh (cf. Lev 9:22; Deut 10:8; 21:5),¹⁹ the formula of which is given in Numbers 6:24–26. Part of the blessing includes a reference to Yhwh’s shining face:

יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁמְרֶךָ
יְאֵר יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיַּחַנְךָ
יִשָּׂא יְהוָה פָּנָיו אֵלֶיךָ וַיִּשֶׂם לְךָ שְׁלוֹם

May Yhwh bless you, and keep you.

¹⁷When אור is used as a verb it primarily occurs in the Hiphil and Qal stems (43 total occurrences). In the Hiphil the verb is either functional (“to illuminate/give light/shine,” Gen 1:15) or metaphorical (“light the eyes,” Ps 13:3). When coupled with פנה the verb is always in the Hiphil (“make your face shine,” Ps 31:17 [ET 31:16]).

¹⁸The Aaronic Blessing is one of the oldest texts of the portions of the OT that have been uncovered in the archeological record. The discovery of two small silver amulets bearing the inscription of the blessing, both dating to the sixth or seventh century BC, suggests that the blessing was widely appreciated and that the Israelites knew it well and cited it. On the larger plaque the blessing is nearly identical to the MT. The text in the smaller plaque is a little different, either marred by time or an abbreviated version. Nevertheless, both plaques bear the formula, “May Yhwh make his face to shine upon you.” Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 361.

¹⁹Ibid., 51. On the structure of Numbers 6:24–26, Milgrom notes that there is a threefold rising crescendo of 3, 5, and 7 words, respectively. The consonants also increase from 15 to 20 to 25, as does the stressed syllables or meter (3, 5, 7), and the total syllables (12, 14, 16). Milgrom says that the essence of the poem is evident in that the first and last cola are exactly the same length (7 syllables) and summarize the contents: “Yhwh bless you/and grant you peace.” See David Noel Freedman, “The Aaronic Benediction (Numbers 6:24–26),” in *No Famine in the Land: Studies in Honor of John L. McKenzie*, ed. James W Flanagan and Anita Weisbrod Robinson (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), 35–48.

May Yhwh make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you.²⁰
May Yhwh lift his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Several important exegetical points are worth considering in these verses. Each line or bicolon is construed of two verbs with Yhwh as subject. The first line denotes Yhwh's movement toward the people, and the second his activity on their behalf.²¹ The plain sense of the passage seems to indicate six distinct actions: Yhwh blesses and keeps; makes his face to shine and is gracious; lifts his countenance and gives peace. But the waw-conjunction, "and," may also indicate consequence or result:²² the result of Yhwh blessing is his protection, or keeping (6:24); the result of his face shining is grace (6:25); and the result of him lifting his countenance is his granting of peace (6:26). If this is true then the blessing expresses only three direct actions (instead of six) followed by three consequences.²³

My specific concern is verse 25, and with three elements in particular. First, as with each line in the benediction, verse 25 mentions the divine name. Specific to the benediction is that it issues solely from Yhwh himself. The prayer is that Yhwh's face, not the face of Moses or Aaron, shine on the worshiper. The priest channels it (6:23, 27),

²⁰Lit. "and grace you."

²¹Patrick D. Miller, "Blessing of God: An Interpretation of Numbers 6:22–27," *Int* 29, no. 3 (1975): 245.

²²See Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §32.2.1 and §32.2.2.

²³For those who espouse this view, see Milgrom, *Numbers*, 51; David L. Stubbs, *Numbers*, BTC (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 76; R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers*, vol. 3B of NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 130. See also Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 152, who seems to say that the second verb is the *mode* of the first verb: e.g., "May Yhwh bless you *by* keeping you." Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 59, calls the second verb a "wish." Marjo C. A. Korpel, "The Poetic Structure of the Priestly Blessing," *JSOT* 45 (1989): 7, argues that the second verb defines the first, that is, Yhwh's benevolence (his blessing) *means* that he will protect. Additionally, his face shining *means* that he will be gracious, and so on.

but Yhwh is the initiator, a point made empathically by the threefold use of the name in verses 24–26 and the admonition linking the name to the people in verse 27.²⁴

Second, the subject of the verb is Yhwh’s “face.” In the OT, an engagement with Yhwh’s face generally connotes both intimacy and/or directness of communication.²⁵ For example, Moses is the man who knew Yhwh “face to face” (פְּנִים-אֶל-פְּנִים, Exod 33:11); that is, Moses had a relationship with Yhwh that is unparalleled in terms of intimacy and communication. But a face-to-face relationship with Yhwh expresses more than mere intimacy. It also suggests a specific type of divine encounter. As with Moses, Jacob experienced the divine face as a source of blessing. In Genesis 33:10, Jacob says, “For I have seen [Esau’s] face, *which is like seeing the face of God.*” In this case Jacob’s meeting with Esau is compared with his encounter with the divine (i.e., from the previous night, Gen 32:30). Thus, Jacob’s reunion with Esau is clearly a blessing in life, similar to his divine encounter the night before.²⁶ Therefore, the mere mentioning of Yhwh’s face connotes intimacy, direct communication, and a divine encounter of blessing.²⁷

Third, in verse 25 the hope is that Yhwh’s face might “shine” on the worshiper. The “shining” seems to imply the image of a blazing sun²⁸ yet without the

²⁴Contra Levine, *Numbers*, 228. Levine says that the theme of God’s name is important but not central to the priestly benediction, which seems odd given that in v. 27 the reason for the blessing is for “placing” the divine name on the people.

²⁵Mark D. Wessner, “Toward a Literary Understanding of ‘Face to Face’ (פְּנִים-אֶל-פְּנִים) in Genesis 32:23–32,” *ResQ* 42, no. 3 (2000): 169–77; idem, “Toward a Literary Understanding of Moses and the Lord ‘Face to Face’ (פְּנִים-אֶל-פְּנִים) in Exodus 33,” 109–16.

²⁶Ian Douglas Wilson, “‘Face to Face’ with God: Another Look,” *ResQ* 51, no. 2 (2009): 108.

²⁷His face also connotes the notion of “fear” in a divine encounter. E.g., Gen 32:31; Judg 6:22; 13:22.

²⁸Korpel, “The Poetic Structure of the Priestly Blessing,” 6.

impression that Yhwh is the sun. The reference could be taken as independent of any connection to Moses' shining face in Exodus 34:29.²⁹ In support of this is the fact that the word for "shine" in Exodus 34:29 (קרן) is different than the one in Numbers 6:25 (the Hiphil of אור). But קרן clearly means "to shine" in context, and its function is more important than the question of etymology. Both texts are connected thematically. Additionally, given the current Pentateuchal context, it is likely that the reference to Yhwh's "face" also alludes to the beginnings of Israel's religion at Sinai (Exod 19–40). The objective of the annual feasts mentioned in Exodus 23:14–17 and 34:20–24 is "to see the face of Yhwh." If the Aaronic Blessing has its original setting in these annual feasts, then it expresses the hope that when the Israelites assemble in the sanctuary, "Yhwh [will] raise his face as an act of grace, so that the rays of his countenance (like the sun in its splendor) would shine upon them."³⁰

There is one potential problem. How is it that Yhwh's face can shine on Moses and the Israelites via Aaron's Blessing if "no one can see [Yhwh's] face and live" (Exod 33:20; cf. Gen 32:31)? This question was addressed briefly in chapter 2 above. The

²⁹This is the view of George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1903), 73: "With Ex. 34:29f. (P)—the effect of the fiery glory of Yahweh on Moses' face—the expression has no connection." Gray fails to specify why he holds this position.

³⁰Freedman, "The Aaronic Benediction," 39. I reject the suggestion from Keller ("An Egyptian Analogue to the Priestly Blessing," 344.) that the Ketef Hinnom discovery "further defines and specifies the magical potency of the Priestly Blessing at least on a popular level," or that the Priestly Blessing serves as a form of a talisman, "and that the presence of these amulets [from Ketef Hinnom] in a mortuary context indicates that the Priestly Blessing may have been viewed as a means of affording protection to the deceased on their way to the netherworld." As I am demonstrating here, nothing in the biblical data indicates a funeral/mortuary context for the Aaronic Blessing, even though the language naturally fits such a context. But there is nothing magical in the words, and Keller misses the point. Num 6:24–26 is simply a blessing given in the context of sacrificial worship (as in Num 6) or lament (as in its use in the Psalter). The presence of the blessing in phylacteries attests more to the religious and liturgical importance of the blessing. Given the latter context in the Psalter, the blessing was likely recited as encouragement that Yhwh might keep one's soul *unto death*.

restriction of seeing Yhwh's face is actually a response to Moses' initial request for Yhwh to show him his "glory" (Exod 33:18). So as the singular individual whom "Yhwh would speak face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Exod 33:11), and as a prophet with whom "Yhwh knew face to face" (Deut 34:10), Moses is perhaps the exception to the rule. The supposed compromise is given in Exodus 33:22–23: "And while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I pass by. Then I will remove my hand, and you will see my back, but my face will not be seen." Moses' experience, therefore, as a unique prophet who knows Yhwh "face to face" is linked to him being a recipient of a beatific vision of God. The Aaronic Blessing in Numbers 6:24–26 reflects Moses' experience with the hope that the Israelite worshiper may share in the same vision of the refulgent glory of God's face.³¹

As stated above, the conjunction linking verse 25a and 25b can be construed as result-consequence. This would likely indicate that 25b—"and be gracious to you"—is the result of what is being communicated in 25a. In other words, as a result of Yhwh's shining face the worshiper is the recipient of Yhwh's blessing of grace. While there are some difficulties to this thesis, at the very least the two lines are parallel and express some type of relationship. That is, the verbs "shine" and "be gracious" are connected, either as a purpose/result, synonymous or conceptual parallelism. If this is the case, then the theological intent of the metaphor of the shining face, first described in Exodus 34:29–35, is repeated in Numbers 6:24–26. Moreover, the experience of receiving Yhwh's shining face is rooted in Moses' own experience, who in seeing Yhwh's face

³¹See also Freedman, "The Aaronic Benediction," 40. Freedman argues that the idea of sharing the privileged experience of a prophet or people chosen by Yhwh for a specific task is found in Num 11:25–30, in which the spirit of Yhwh comes upon the 70 elders, which moves two others in the camp—Eldad and Medad—to prophesy. Rather than dismissing their prophesying, Moses encourages it: "Would that all of Yhwh's people were prophets, and that Yhwh might put his spirit upon them" (11:29).

reflects the “goodness” of Yhwh’s grace and mercy on his own countenance. At its core, then, the Aaronic Blessing conveys the same thing; it expresses the hope that Yhwh will shine his face once more on the worshipers gathered in his presence, and impart his blessing of grace as they offer up sacrifices.

Psalms. Israel’s Psalter is host to many allusions of a shining face and to the Aaronic Blessing in particular,³² which should not be surprising given the worship/sacrificial setting of Numbers 6:24–26.³³ The author of Psalm 4:7 (ET, 4:6), for instance, summons the light of Yhwh’s face (אֹר פְּנֵיָהּ) to aid him in his time of a trouble, likely a reference to Yhwh’s presence. Similarly, Psalm 31:17 (ET, 31:16) is a plea for Yhwh to make his face shine in the midst of difficult circumstances. The shining of Yhwh’s face is thus linked to his deliverance and protection.

Psalm 67 borrows from the motif of Numbers 6:24–26.³⁴ In the opening invocation the author summons God to “show us favor/grace” (יְהַנֵּנוּ), to “bless us” (וַיְבָרְכֵנוּ), and to “make your face shine” (יֵאָר פְּנֵיָהּ). Although only portions of the Aaronic

³²I will not treat the other references to the light of the face in the Psalter (Pss 44:3; 56:13; 89:15; 90:8), mainly for the sake of brevity, but also because the references refer not to a shining face but to walking in the light of one’s face/presence. Similarly, cf. Job 29:24; Prov 16:15; Eccl 8:1.

³³Leon J. Liebreich, “The Songs of Ascents and the Priestly Blessing,” *JBL* 74, no. 1 (1955): 36, contends that the “Songs of Ascent” (Pss 120–30) reflect a reapplication of the Aaronic Blessing to the post-exilic community. While there is a certain coherence to these psalms, such a claim is dubious given Liebreich’s sole reliance is on random words found in both that grouping and Num 6:24–26. These words do not occur in clusters that would cause the reader to understand Aaron’s Blessing as its source. It is one thing to acknowledge that such terms as “blessing” and “peace” dominate Pss 120–30. It is quite another to suggest that on the basis of such references the entire ensemble is an interpretive reuse of Num 6:24–26. See also on this topic, Michael A. Fishbane, “The Priestly Blessing and Its Aggadic Reuse,” in *The Place Is Too Small for Us: The Israelite Prophets in Recent Scholarship*, ed. Robert P. Gordon, vol. 5 of Sources for Biblical and Theological Study (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 226.

³⁴Dennis T. Olson, *Numbers*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1996), 42, writes that the focus of Psalm 67 on all the nations and all creation “suggests that the image of God’s shining face evokes the wider theology of God as Creator of all. As the life-giving rays of the warm sun extend over all the world, so the blessing of God’s shining face radiates out to the ends of the earth.”

Blessing are cited, the general lexical contents are the same as Numbers 6:24–26, most notably the combination of the Hiphil of אור, the presence of פנה, and the use of חנן with relation to shining.³⁵

The refrain in Psalm 80 links Yhwh’s shining face with restoration and salvation (80:4, 8, 20 [ET 80:3, 7, 19]): “O God, restore us! And make your face shine (וְהֶאֱרַר פְּנֵיךָ), that we might be saved!” Psalm 119:135a is also similar: “Make your face to shine (פְּנֵיךָ הֶאֱרַר) upon your servant.”³⁶ The verse would not be as significant except for the fact that every verse in Psalm 119:129–36, all of which begin with the letter פ, has some terminological link to the Aaronic Blessing, including verse 132: “Turn to me and be gracious to me.”³⁷

Daniel. In the context of a petition to God, the exilic prophet Daniel asks that God listen to his “plea for grace” vis-à-vis Jerusalem and the temple. His appeal is that God would “let [his] face shine” (הֶאֱרַר פְּנֵיךָ, 9:17). The text is obviously reminiscent of the Aaronic Blessing. The author of Daniel uses the same Hiphil of אור preceded by a verbal חנן, “be gracious” (cf. 9:3). The main difference between Daniel’s petition and Aaron’s Blessing is that Daniel’s plea is for God to shine not on the people but “upon your sanctuary.” The reason for the plea is that the present sanctuary is desolate. Given the worship-related setting for the shining face references in the Psalter, it should not be surprising that Daniel employs the same motif in the context of a plea for God’s restoration of Israel’s epicenter of worship—the temple. Daniel’s final prophecy concerns

³⁵Fishbane, “The Priestly Blessing and Its Aggadic Reuse,” 224.

³⁶See M. Gertner, “Midrashim in the New Testament,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 7, no. 2 (1962): 276. Gertner argues that v. 135 is a reinterpretation of Num 6:25, and a reapplication of it to wisdom and Torahistic piety.

³⁷Fishbane, “Form and Reformulation of the Biblical Priestly Blessing,” 120.

“those who sleep in the dust shall awake, some to eternal life, and some to shame and eternal abhorrence” (12:2). Those who awake to eternal life are called “wise,” and will “shine as the shining of the expanse” (יִזְהָרוּ כְּזֹהַר הַרְקִיעַ). This eschatological “shining” will be discussed below in Isaiah 60.

Sinai, the Veil, and God’s Eschatological Glory

Having looked at the usage of “shining face” in the OT, the focus will now turn, first, to an explicit echo of the Sinai theophany in 1 Kings 19. Secondly, there is a need to examine the use of a “veil” or “covering” to shield God’s glory. Some scholars try to make the conceptual connection between the veil of Moses’ face with the veil of the tabernacle and later temple, which, as I have demonstrated above, should be abandoned since Moses’ veil is different on a number of levels, not the least of which is the lack of verbal correspondence. While Moses’ veil is nowhere explicitly referenced in the OT, there are, however, two important later texts that likewise emphasize the “veiling” of God’s glory and deserve attention, along with an eschatological text highlighting the coming glory of God at Zion. These three texts (Hab 3:1–4; Isa 25:7; 60:1–5, 19–20) will be treated in canonical order.

1 Kings 19:8–19

One of the primary traits in biblical theophanies is the variety of locations at which God appears.³⁸ Sinai, however, is the only named site that is the subject of multiple

³⁸In the OT, all but four (or perhaps five, Isa 6:1–13) theophanies are at specific locations: Gen 16:7–14; 18:1–16; 21:14–21; 28:10–22; 32:24–33; Exod 3:1ff.; 3:19–20, 24; 33:12–23; Lev 9:23–10:4; Num 12:1–16; 22:2–35; Josh 5:13–15; Judg 6:11–22; 13:2–25; 1 Sam 3:1–21; 1 Kgs 3:4–15; 19:1–18; Isa 6:1–13; Jer 1:4–19; Ezek 1:3–3:15. For an overview of what qualifies as a theophany type-scene, see George W. Savran, *Encountering the Divine: Theophany in Biblical Narrative*, JSOTSup 420 (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 5–30.

theophanies: Exodus 34 and 1 Kings 19.³⁹ Sinai is obviously central to the founding of Israel as a nation and to its general history. But despite Sinai's importance, it is only referenced occasionally in the OT.⁴⁰ Indeed, Elijah's journey to Sinai in 1 Kings 19 is the only other place in the OT where a biblical figure after Moses visits the site.⁴¹ In order to understand their close theological relationship, it is important to note the points of contrast and congruence between Moses and Elijah and the historical details between Exodus 32–34 and 1 Kings 17–19.

The similarities between these two encounters have long been recognized.⁴² While the conceptual parallels outnumber the verbal ones, the history of interpretation of 1 Kings 17–18 also attests to the possibility of narrative borrowing.⁴³ In 1 Kings 17,

³⁹On the occurrences and tradition of Sinai in the OT, see Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament*, HSM 4 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972); Ernest W. Nicholson, *Exodus and Sinai in History and Tradition*, Growing Points in Theology (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1973).

⁴⁰Judg 5:5; Ps 68:9, 18 (ET 69:8, 17); Neh 9:13. After the Pentateuch, "Horeb" is mentioned in 1 Kgs 8:9; 19:8; Mal 4:4; Ps 106:19; 2 Chr 5:10.

⁴¹Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 208.

⁴²Cf. Robert P. Carroll, "Elijah-Elisha Sagas: Some Remarks on Prophetic Succession in Ancient Israel," *VT* 19, no. 4 (1969): 400–415; R. A. Carlson, "Élie à l'Horeb," *VT* 19, no. 4 (1969): 416–39; Y. Zakovitch, "'A Still Small Voice': Form and Content in 1 Kings 19," *Tarbiz* 51 (1982): 329–46; Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 204–29; James Muilenburg, "The Intercession of the Covenant Mediator," in *Words and Meanings: Essays Presented to David Winton Thomas on His Retirement from the Regius Professorship of Hebrew in the University of Cambridge, 1968*, ed. D. Winton Thomas, Peter R. Ackroyd, and Barnabas Lindars (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 159–81; Bernard P. Robinson, "Elijah at Horeb, 1 Kings 19:1–18: A Coherent Narrative?," *RB* 98, no. 4 (1991): 513–36; William J. Dumbrell, "What Are You Doing Here: Elijah at Horeb," *Crux* 22, no. 1 (1986): 12–19; Johan Lust, "Gentle Breeze or a Roaring Thunderous Sound: Elijah at Horeb, 1 Kings 19:12," *VT* 25, no. 1 (1975): 110–15; Sigve Tonstad, "The Limits of Power: Revisiting Elijah and Horeb," *JSOT* 19, no. 2 (2005): 253–66; Ernst Würthwein, "Elijah at Horeb: Reflections on I Kings 19:9–18," in *Proclamation and Presence: Old Testament Essays in Honour of Gwynne Henton Davies* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1970), 152–66.

⁴³See for instance the translation of William Braude of the *Pesikta Rabbati* 4, which is a collection of the discourses spoken in Palestinian synagogues prior to Medieval times. This midrashic text includes an elaborate description of the similarities noted here: Leon Nemoy, Saul Lieberman, and Harry A. Wolfson, eds., *Pesikta Rabbati; Discourses for Feasts, Fasts, and Special Sabbaths*, Yale Judaica Series

Elijah, like Moses, is commanded by Yhwh to leave the people. Moses goes to Sinai and Elijah to Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:9). Like Moses, Yhwh listens to the voice of Elijah (17:22). Like Moses, Elijah is called a “man of God” (17:24).

In 1 Kings 18, Elijah, like Moses, returns to the people to confront idolatry and to eradicate it from within. Both prophets seek out Yhwh for an appropriate response to the people as well. In 1 Kings 18, the sin of the Baal prophets and their followers is similar in nature to the sin of the golden calf in Exodus 32. Instead of slaughtering the Israelites as Moses had done in Exodus 32:27, Elijah offers a demonstration. At the contest on Mount Carmel, the Baal prophets, like Aaron before them (Exod 32:5–6), build an altar to make offerings and sacrifices (1 Kgs 18:23–24).⁴⁴ The Israelites then “limp around the altar that they had made” (18:26), just as they had “rose up to play,” (Exod 32:6), “danced around” (32:19), and “broken loose” (32:25) at the base of Sinai in a previous generation. Elijah, like Moses, cries aloud to Yhwh in an intercessory plea on behalf of the people (1 Kgs 18:36–37), and his concern is for God to “let it be known that you are God in Israel” (18:36). Like Moses, Elijah implores God to remember Abraham, Isaac and Israel (Exod 32:13; 1 Kgs 18:36), which is akin to him remembering his previous commitments to the covenant with Abraham (cf. 1 Kgs 19:10, 14). Yhwh’s fire burns up the altar (18:38), similar to Moses destroying the golden calf with fire and scattering it across the water (Exod 32:20). This action implicates the “burning hot” anger of Yhwh in Exodus 32:10, which threatens to “consume,” the Israelites. The outcome of the demonstration on Mt. Carmel is the slaughter of the idolatrous leaders (18:40),

18 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968).

⁴⁴Jerome T. Walsh, *1 Kings*, ed. David W. Cotter, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative & Poetry (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 284ff., notes further parallels between Exod 24 and 1 Kgs 18 with relation to the construction of the altar, the use of water and blood to anoint the altar, the covenant-type meal in Exod 24:9–11 and the command for Ahab in 1 Kgs 18:41 to “Go up, eat and drink.”

similarly to Levirate slaughter in Exodus 32. The killing is done with the sword (19:1), just as it had been done by the Levites (Exod 32:27–29).

The narrative outline in 1 Kings 19, when Elijah escapes Jezebel’s grasp and flees to Horeb to supposedly seek another visual manifestation of Yhwh, is more significant for the present study. The points of contact between the theophany of Exodus 33–34 and 1 Kings 19 can be broken down into nine essential ideas. First, Elijah, like Moses, experiences a theophany at Sinai. Like Moses, this theophany seems to be prompted on Elijah’s own initiative and in response to the apostasy of the Israelites. In the theophany on Sinai Moses contends for the life of the people, while Elijah argues against the behavior of the people when he visits Horeb.⁴⁵

Second, both theophanies are preceded by a forty-day fast by the prophet (1 Kgs 19:8; Exod 24:18; 34:28). While Elijah fasts on his journey from Beersheba to Horeb, Deuteronomy 9:9 and 9:18 make clear that Moses fasted for forty days both before (Exod 24:18) and after (34:28) the rebellion of the Israelites.

Third, fire, earthquake, and smoke characterize the presence of God on the mountain in both theophanies (Exod 24:17; 1 Kgs 19:11–12).⁴⁶ And in both instances, the prophet converses with God before and after the event.

⁴⁵Horeb and Sinai are synonymous for the same location (see above on Exod 33:6). In Exod, see 3:1; 17:6; 33:6. Cf. the use of Horeb instead of Sinai in the rest of the OT, Deut 1:2, 6, 19; 4:10, 15; 5:2; 9:8; 18:16; 28:69; 1 Kgs 8:9; 19:8; 2 Chr 5:10; Ps 106:19; Mal 3:22.

⁴⁶For theophanies with these elements see Judg 5:4–5; 2 Sam 22:8–16; Pss 18:8–16; 29:3–9; 68:8–9; 97:3–4; 104:4. See for further discussion T. Hiebert, “Theophany in the OT,” in vol. 6 of *ABD* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); J. Jeremias, *Theophanie: Die Geschichte Einer Alttestamentlichen Gattung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1965); Frank Moore Cross (*Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 147–77; John Van Seters, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus-Numbers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 254–63.

Fourth, Yhwh dispatches an “angel” in response to Elijah’s request to die in 19:4, similar to Moses’ request in Numbers 11:15 (“Please kill me!”). The “angel” is subsequently called the מַלְאֲכַי יְהוָה (“angel of Yhwh”) in 1 Kings 19:7, similar to the מַלְאֲכַי promised to Moses in Exodus 32:34. Elijah accepts the angel in 19:5–7, while Moses rejects it outright as a means of mediation between Yhwh and the Israelites. Indeed, the whole of Moses’ intercession is taken up with refuting the angel as an acceptable representation of Yhwh’s presence for the venture to Canaan.

Fifth, the responsiveness of Yhwh to Elijah’s prayers is similar to that of his response to Moses. The content of 1 Kings 18:37; 19:10, 14 as well as Moses’ intercessions in Exodus 32:11–14, 31–34; 33:12–23 is clear: Yhwh must respond to the sinful Israelites for the sake of his own name.

Sixth, the description of how the theophany will take place is forecast in 1 Kings 19, just as it is Exodus 33:19–23. In particular, just as Moses was commanded to go up the mountain (34:2) and stand in the cleft of the rock (33:21), so Elijah is commanded to go out and stand before Yhwh in 1 Kings 19:11, although in Elijah’s case he is already situated in the appropriate place. In 19:9, when Elijah initially comes to Horeb he came “to *the* cave” (אֶל-הַמְעָרָה). The definiteness of מְעָרָה (“cave”) perhaps refers to the supposed location of Moses’ private theophany in Exodus 34:5–7.⁴⁷

Seventh, when the theophany finally happens for Elijah, it is introduced with הִנֵּה in 19:9, 13, similarly to Moses’ theophany Exodus 33:21. The actual appearance of Yhwh is likewise introduced in 1 Kings 19:11 with וְהִנֵּה יְהוָה עִבֵּר, just as it was forecast

⁴⁷This point is explored in more detail by Uriel Simon and Lenn J. Schramm, *Reading Prophetic Narratives*, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 271; Zakovitch, “‘A Still Small Voice’,” 71.

to Moses in Exodus 33:19 (אָנִי אֶעֱבִיר) and 33:22 (וְהָיָה בְּעֵבֶר כְּבֹדִי), and carried out in 34:6 (וַיַּעֲבֵר יְהוָה).

Eighth, after experiencing the theophany, Elijah wraps his face in his cloak (וַיִּלְט פָּנָיו בְּאַדְרָתוֹ), which is obviously similar to Moses use of the veil in Exodus 34:33ff. Yet while Elijah’s use of his cloak is perhaps functioning to cover his face from the strong wind of Yhwh (19:11—“A great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the Yhwh.”), there is still a focus on the hiding of his “face” during a theophany, which corresponds to Yhwh’s covering Moses’ face prior to the passing of his glory (Exod 33:22).

The ninth and final point of contact is more one of contrast than resemblance. The climax of both narratives is the theophany itself, with Yhwh passing before the prophet along with his accompanying fire, earthquake and smoke. Yet while Moses experiences the proclamation of Yhwh’s name (that is, his character, Exod 34:6–7), Elijah experiences what commonly translated as “a thin silence” or “the sound of a low whisper” (קוֹל דְּמָמָה דְּקָה). The emphasis is on something audible since Elijah puts on the cloak in response to what he hears (שמע, 19:14). Although the Akkadian term *damamu* (“to roar, moan”) is semantically related to דְּמָמָה, the occurrence of the term in Job 4:16 as “silence” along with audial words like שמע, קוֹל, and visual terms such as תמונה, מראה, and עין in the same verse, confirms that “silence” or “whisper” is a more appropriate for the context of 1 Kings 19. Thus, if דְּמָמָה is understood as “silence,” and if דְּקָה means “fine,” then the current English translations are correct. Savran to comments,

The deliberate application of a concrete term to a sound (or a silence) presents the reader with an audial oxymoron similar to that found in other theophany narratives, such as the seeing of sound in Exod. 20.15 and its interpretation in Deut. 4 ‘You saw no image but a sound.’⁴⁸

⁴⁸Savran, *Encountering the Divine*, 219.

Whatever the true meaning of the phrase, in contrast to Moses' encounter with Yhwh, the focus in 1 Kings 19 is completely different. The repetition of אֵל . . . יְהוָה with relation to the earthquake, wind, and fire places the emphasis on what these elements *do not* contain as opposed to what they do contain. Yhwh's absence is more startling than is his presence.⁴⁹

To summarize these points, we have seen that each text begins with a major act of apostasy, which is countered by a prophet of Yhwh, followed by an intercessory prayer invoking the formula “Abraham, Isaac, and Israel” to persuade Yhwh to respond favorably to the people in spite of their blatant sin, followed by the prophet's attempt to influence Yhwh in some measure, followed by a theophany in which Yhwh accepts the prophet's argument, albeit with certain caveats.⁵⁰ I will demonstrate if and how the theology of Exodus 34:29–35 is taken up in the Elijah narrative in the “synthesis” at the end of this chapter.

Habakkuk 3:1–4

In the introduction to this section I noted how two prophetic texts link to Exodus 34:29–35 by mentioning a “veil” (Hab 3; Isa 25). Habakkuk 3 was treated briefly in the previous chapter and will be explored further here since Habakkuk mentions a “veil” as well as “rays” (קִרְיָיִם).

Chapter 3 begins with a title much like those in the book of Psalms. Indeed,

⁴⁹Michael Fishbane (*Haftaroth*, JPS Torah Commentary [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2002]) notes an interesting wordplay between Exod 32 and 1 Kgs 18. In Exod 32:18, Moses comments to Joshua that what he hears is not (אֵין) the sound of the victory of war or defeat (קוֹל עֲנוּת), but of singing. In 1 Kgs 18:29 the Baal prophets cry aloud to their god but “there was no voice; there was no response” (וְאֵין כָּל וְאֵין עֲנָה). The silence is disquieting. When Elijah calls out to Yhwh, he says “answer me” (עֲנֵנִי, 18:37).

⁵⁰This is how Savran summarizes the parallels in *Encountering the Divine*, 225–26.

3:1 states that the following is a *שְׁגִיּוֹת* על הַנְּבִיא עַל שְׁגִיּוֹת (“A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet, according to the Shigionoth”), with *שְׁגִיּוֹת* functioning similarly in the superscription of Psalm 7:1 (*שְׁגִיּוֹן לְדָוִד*, “A Shiggion of David”). What follows is a request for Yhwh to appear and deliver Judah from destruction, with verses 3–4 as the most pertinent to this study. In verse 3, Habakkuk writes that God/the Holy One came from Teman/Peran, that is, from the south to Mount Sinai. At the end of verse 3, *כָּסָה שָׁמַיִם הוֹדוֹ* (“His splendor covers the heavens, and his praise fills the earth.”). The vocabulary in verse 4 is rare and difficult to translate, particularly with the aforementioned *קַרְנִים* (“rays”), and the *hapax legomena* *הַבְּיּוֹן* (“to veil”?). As I noted in the previous chapter, *קַרְנִים* is parallel to both *נֶגַה* and *אוֹר* (“brightness” and “light” respectively) in the first line, which strongly suggests a translation of “rays of light,” and which corresponds directly with the use of *קָרַן* in Exodus 34:29–35. Margulis suggests that *הַבְּיּוֹן* derives from the root, *הבה*, which would give the meaning “the hidden hiding.”⁵¹ The use of “Paran” in verse 3 and the description of Yhwh “shining forth” has a parallel in Deuteronomy 33:2. In that text, Yhwh also “shines forth” from Mt. Paran, which is Sinai, as a retrospective on Exod 19–24. As in Habakkuk 3:4, Yhwh comes “with flaming fire in his right hand.” Putting aside the difficulty of translating this verse, Craigie is right in arguing that God coming from Sinai “is described as having been a time of brilliant light with the brightness emanating from the presence of God on the mountain.”⁵²

The context of Habakkuk 3 seems to indicate that lightning is pictured. Verse 11 mentions both the “light” (*אוֹר*) of God’s arrows and the “flashing” (*נֶגַה*) of his spears

⁵¹Baruch Margulis, “Psalm of Habakkuk: A Reconstruction and Interpretation,” *ZAW* 82, no. 3 (1970): 414.

⁵²Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 393.

as his tools for judgment. This translation simply confirms the interpretation of קרן argued above. What is protruding from Yhwh's hands are not "horns," but horn-like projections of light, which illustrate the brightness of his presence. This confirms, secondly, that the reason Moses' face is shining in Exodus 34:29–35 is his exposure to God's presence in 34:5–7.

Ralph Smith, interpreting Habakkuk 3 against the backdrop of the Sinai theophany, writes that "the lightning flashes from the cloud are symbols of his power, *but his real essence or power is covered or hidden* (v. 4)."⁵³ In this statement, Smith takes הַבְּרִיזָה to mean something that is hidden or veiled. With such a rare term it is difficult to be certain. The context does not demand that the translation of "to hide/veil" is necessary, although it is most likely. In his eschatological judgment, God will shine forth in his power and brightness, which will entail all the ramifications like those listed in 3:5 and following. If Psalm 18:12 (ET 18:11) is understood as a parallel instance where God's presence descends "from" the temple to aid the king, God's presence is shrouded (סתר, "covered") in dark clouds as a "canopy" (סככה, cf. Isaiah 6:1ff.). These are different words, although they are conceptually similar to texts like Habakkuk 3:4. When God is described as residing on earth as he did on Sinai, his glory is covered.

It is possible, then, to make a connection between Habakkuk 3 and Exodus 34:33–35 and Moses' use of the veil. While some argue forcefully for this thesis,⁵⁴ it is more similar to God's covering Moses' face with his "hand" (33:22) as he passed before Moses in Exodus 34:5. The use of "hand" in that text has a theological function. It serves

⁵³Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, WBC, vol. 32 (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 116, emphasis mine.

⁵⁴Scott J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3*, WUNT 1, Reihe 81 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 236–38.

primarily to protect Moses from the raw power of God's presence, which is revealed and yet covered. That is, it serves "to emphasize the glory of God while rendering the glory of God, otherwise so completely awesome, tolerable."⁵⁵ In other words, the "hand" emphasizes how great God's glory actually is. The "glory" on Moses' face is attributed to the "glory" he experienced on Sinai, but again, Moses' glory needed a veil *because the Israelites were afraid to look at him* (34:30), not because they felt its heat or were being injured by his brightness. The glory of Yhwh, on the other hand, seems always to be covered with smoke when he is revealed or described in the OT, since no one can see God fully and live (33:20).

It is worth noting that these words about God's power/brightness/covering appear in an eschatological context concerning the coming judgment on the enemies of God's people. Theologically, the invocation for God's glory/presence in Habakkuk is, again, for the sake of Yhwh's name and is accompanied by a plea of grace/mercy on behalf of the Israelites (3:2). Habakkuk's desire to make the "work" of Yhwh known is for the purpose of Yhwh being known (3:18–19)! The prophet understands, however, that as with the previous "work" of Yhwh (e.g., Exod 32–34), sin will always be met with wrath. His cry is only that "in [Yhwh's] wrath, remember mercy (רחם)" (3:2).

Isaiah 25:6–8; 60:1–5, 19–20

Of significance to the study of the veil in the OT and of the "light" of Yhwh are two Isaianic texts: Isaiah 25:6–8 and 60:1–5, 19–20. The former is part of the Isaiah Apocalypse, so called due to the intense eschatological imagery pictured between chapters 24–27. Isaiah 25:7 emphasizes the removal of the "covering" that exists between

⁵⁵George W. Coats, "The King's Loyal Opposition: Obedience and Authority in Exodus 32–34," in *Canon and Authority: Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology*, ed. Burke O. Long and George W. Coats (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 104.

God and the nations in the final redemption. Verse 6 mentions a “mountain” from which God will make an elaborate feast. The mountain is likely Zion given the close connection between this passage and 24:21–23, a text where God makes known his “glory before his elders” (24:23). In 25:7, Isaiah prophesies how God will “swallow up on *this mountain* (בְּהַר הַזֶּה, i.e., Zion) the face of the *covering* (פְּנֵי־הַלֹּט), the covering that is over all the peoples, and the *veil* (וְהַמְסַכָּה) that is spread over all the nations.” The result of this action in verse 8 is the defeat of death itself and the restoration of the people as God’s kingdom is finally established over the entire world.

A number of features in this text are striking when taken against the backdrop of the book of Exodus. Like Exodus 24:9–11, where Israel’s elders accompany Moses to Sinai to ratify the covenant, in Isaiah’s eschatological vision the manifestation of God’s glory is saved specifically for *elders* (Isa 24:23).⁵⁶ If taken together, the allusion to Exodus 24 and the covenant ratifying ceremony offers an interesting typology. In its finality, the kingdom of God is established when God’s *covenantal presence* returns to earth (on a mountain, no less) and the “covering” is removed.⁵⁷ This “covering” or “veil” apparently separates the nations of earth from God, although it is unclear as to the original meaning of *מסכה* and *לוט*. Whatever their meaning, the implication is that if the “covering” is removed then all nations will have access to the presence of God as Moses had when he was on Sinai. And like the elders in Exodus 24:11, God prepares a feast as part of the covenant making ceremony in Isaiah 25:8.⁵⁸

⁵⁶See Ezek 43:2; 44:4 for similar imagery about God’s glory returning to the temple.

⁵⁷See Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 238–39, who comments, “At the heart of what it means for YHWH to reign over the world from Mt. Zion . . . is that his glory will be manifest before his people.”

⁵⁸In order to establish this link further, Hafemann (*ibid.*, 240) comments, “It is striking that the word used as the synonym for *לוט* (‘covering’) in 25:7b, *מסכה* (‘veil’), is a homograph of the word employed exclusively in the MT to describe the process of metal-working employed to produce idols in

Isaiah 60:1–22 speaks of the eschatological glory of Yhwh’s “city” and the consummation of the Abrahamic blessing.⁵⁹ The poem as a whole concerns Zion (i.e., the people *in* Zion), which is stated explicitly in 60:14b: “They shall call you the city of Yhwh; the Zion of the Holy One of Israel.” After Yhwh dwells upon mount Zion it will shine and draw all nations unto its light. The focus here will be on the first two stanzas, which are linked by the opening imperatives, קוּמִי (“Arise”) and שִׁאֵרִי (“Lift up”).⁶⁰ Verse 1 begins with the call for Zion to arise and “shine” for the “light” has come,⁶¹ and the הָאֵרָא יְהוָה has risen upon the city. While the concept of “light” (אֹרֶךְ) as a metaphor and as

general, and the golden calf in particular (cf. Exod. 32:4, 8; 34:17; Neh. 9:18; Ps. 106:19). It is possible, therefore, that in referring to the veil which lies over the people, the prophet was alluding, by way of a subtle play on words, to Israel’s sin with the golden calf which stands as the exemplar *par excellence* of the idolatry which has caused the separation from YHWH not only of the nations, but also of his chosen people.” It is true that in Isa 25:7 the use of מַסְכָּה is striking and offers a textual link with Exod 32:3 and the making of the golden calf. It is also true that the already-noted links with Israel’s elders from Exod 24:9–11 suggest a parallel. It is stretching the evidence, however, to suggest on the basis of implicit links in the text that Isaiah had in mind the entire context of Exod 32–34 in a typological way.

⁵⁹J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 493, proposes the structure of the passage as a chiasm:

- A¹ The Lord, the light of Zion (1–5)
- B¹ The new status of the nations: materially and spiritually accepted by the Lord (6–7).
- C¹ World expectations met in the Lord (8–9)
- D¹ The serving nations: the Lord’s compassion to Zion (10–11)
- E Zion, the key to world destiny (12)
- D² The submissive nations: their recognition of Zion (13–14)
- C² Zion’s needs met by the Lord (15–16)
- B² The transformation of Zion, materially and spiritually (17–18b)
- A² The Lord, the light of Zion (18c–22)

⁶⁰Ibid., 494.

⁶¹Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary*, trans. David M. G. Stalker, OTL (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 357: “In just the same way as does 51.17, the first call, ‘Arise’, bids the mourners cease to be weary. And the tones of this—“be joyful”—carry over into the second call, ‘shine.’ What the prophet has in mind is a beaming look on the face. Although this imperative of the verb ‘to shine’ has no parallels, it does correspond to the prayer in the Psalms, e.g., Ps. 13.4 (3); 27.1.” The parallels that Westermann has in mind are explicit verbal parallels.

a verb is fairly rare in the prophets of the OT,⁶² its use in Isaiah stands out as it does in this verse.⁶³ Verse 2 illustrates the purpose of the coming light of Yhwh: there is a “thick darkness” over all the people of the earth, language reminiscent of the plague of darkness that covered Egypt while Israel dwelt in light in the land of Goshen (Exod 10:23).⁶⁴ The darkness is counteracted by Yhwh “arising” upon the people like the sun, and in their “seeing” (ראה) the כְּבוֹד יְהוָה. In verse 3, Yhwh’s presence on Zion has a magnetic effect on other nations (גוים), as they come “to your light (אור)” and kings “to the brightness (נגה) of your rising (זרח, see on v. 2).” Verse 4 complements the imperative in verse 1. The call is for Zion to “lift up” and “see” the coming of all the sons and daughters of earth to its borders.⁶⁵ The result of this ingathering is given in verse 5. When Zion “sees” she will “shine/be radiant” (גהר, cf., Ps 34:5 [ET 34:6]), “tremble with joy” (וּפָחַר וְרָחַב, cf. Jer 33:9), and “exult” at the abundance of the “sea” and the wealth of nations coming to the city in great procession.⁶⁶

⁶²The metaphor occurs only once in Jeremiah (see 13:16). Cf. Hos 6:5; Amos 5:18, 20; Mic 7:8–9.

⁶³Cf. Isa 2:5; 5:20; 9:2; 10:17; 42:6; 49:6; 51:4.

⁶⁴John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 538.

⁶⁵The exact same phrase in Hebrew occurs in Isa 49:18: שְׂאֵי-סְבִיב עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵי כָּל־מַקְבְּצוֹ בְּאוֹיְלֶיךָ (“Lift up your eyes around and see. They all gather together, they come to you.”).

⁶⁶The aftereffects of the nations coming to Zion and bringing their treasures on huge canvases are given in vv. 6ff., which includes sacrifices to Yhwh. The purpose of the sacrifices is to “glorify my beautiful house.” Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 359, comments, “The meaning is that Yahweh uses these miraculous events as a means of glorifying his chosen people. Thus in one and the same event glory accrues both to God and his people. Each is involved in the other. The whole thing thus serves the renown . . . or the glorifying of God. The verb ‘to glorify’ . . . is particularly characteristic of Trito-Isaiah (60.7, 9, 13, 21; 61.3). . . . God’s glorifying of himself in and through the glorification of Zion is a topic which runs through his entire proclamation of salvation.”

The cadence of Isaiah 60 is verses 19–20, which, like verses 1–5, continue with the themes of the “light” of Yhwh and his “glory” residing on Zion for the good of all peoples.⁶⁷ In verse 19 the physical objects of light are the sun and the moon, but these will be replaced by the spiritual light of God’s eschatological city. Instead, “Yhwh will be for you a light forever” (לְאֹר עוֹלָם). The following parallel line, “And your God [will be] for your glory,” places the emphasis on the transforming effect of God’s presence. Yhwh is embodied and displayed in his people.⁶⁸ The following verse reiterates these points. The physical sun will no longer need to rise, nor will moon need to give light at night, for again, “Yhwh will be for you an everlasting light” (לְאֹר עוֹלָם).

The obvious meaning derived from Isaiah 60:1–5, 19–20 is that those who are redeemed by Yhwh in 59:20, who bear his spirit and his covenant in 59:21, are transformed by the כְּבוֹד יְהוָה as it descends to the temple on Mount Zion, a transformation that bathes them not only in external light, but inwardly in that they are “brightened” with new life.⁶⁹ Thus, “the subjective experience has an objective basis, *for your light has come.*”⁷⁰ This is similar to Daniel 12:3, where those who are resurrected at the end of days will awake and shine “like the shining of the expanse . . . like the stars forever and ever.”

Summary and Theological Synthesis

The notion of “face” in the OT has a wide range of meanings and implications,

⁶⁷See the structure of Isa 60 in n59 above.

⁶⁸Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 499.

⁶⁹The people are described in terms of deep longing when God returns to Zion in 60:3 (“your heart shall thrill and exult”). Interestingly, even the temple appears in the OT as an object of deep longing in Pss 23:6; 27:4; 84:1–3 (ET, 84:1–2).

⁷⁰Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 494.

which was demonstrated through a quick overview of relevant biblical expressions of the “face.” Moreover, the wider ANE culture utilized similar idioms which predate and parallel those used in biblical texts, most notably the notion of the divine face communicating favor via light or a shining countenance. These conceptions help inform the biblical understanding of the same expression as it relates to humans (Moses) and deity (Yhwh).

The connections between Moses’ experience on Sinai in Exodus 32–34 and the Aaronic Blessing in Numbers 6:24–26 are many. Moses’ face-to-face encounter with Yhwh (Exod 33:11, 20), his resultant shining face (34:29), the link to Yhwh’s graciousness (33:19) and the emphasis on the divine name (33:18–20), are all themes present in Numbers 6:24–26. This suggests that the Aaronic Blessing, at the very least, alludes to Moses’ experience on Sinai as an extension of the presence of Yhwh to the people.⁷¹

The combination of ideas in Exodus 34:29–35 and Numbers 6:24–26 is also found in later biblical literature, particularly the Psalter. Individual authors recognize that God’s blessings come from an encounter with his shining face. And because of the sinfulness of the people, the results of the shining face encounter must also involve God’s graciousness. Nearly every text connects the shining face of Yhwh to the notion of grace and favor. The psalmist’s plea in Psalm 4:1 (ET, 4:2), which serves as an introductory invocation to the rest of the psalm, is that Yhwh might “be gracious” to him (יְיָ) and lift up the light of his face on the people (4:5 [ET, 4:6]). In Psalm 67:1 (ET, 67:2), the shining of the divine face is parallel to and perhaps synonymous with God’s graciousness and blessing. The salvation articulated in the refrain of Psalm 80:4, 8, 20 (ET 80:3, 7, 19) is

⁷¹So also Stubbs, *Numbers*, 75–76.

the result of grace and described via the metaphor of Yhwh's shining face. Likewise, the B-unit of Psalm 119:129–35, thick with the language of the Aaronic Blessing, offers pleas for both graciousness (119:132) and a shining face (119:135) to stem forth from Yhwh. Lastly, Daniel's prayer is that Yhwh might show grace/mercy on the desolate sanctuary in the midst of Jerusalem (Dan 9:17) via his shining face.

To summarize, not only is the general function of the shining face in Exodus 34:29–35 and Numbers 6:24–26 to show grace and mercy to the people, the same function can be attributed on textual and thematic grounds to nearly every instance of a shining face in the OT. The shining face is a theological metaphor which connotes God's grace and mercy. It is grace that is desperately needed if God's presence will ultimately result in divine good and blessing on the people.⁷²

The account of Elijah's theophany and the events leading up to it in 1 Kings 17–19 mimic the events concerning Moses in Exodus 19–40. Theologically, the points of God's presence, glory, and grace/mercy (name) all correspond to Exodus 33–34. In contrast to that text, Yhwh reveals very little of himself to Elijah in 1 Kings 19. Elijah attempts to duplicate Moses' experience on Sinai, but is stifled when he stands at the "cave." Yhwh no longer reveals himself in spectacular clouds of thunder and lightning as he did with Moses. Instead, Yhwh reveals himself in a word. Although God's dramatic intervention defined Elijah's previous work at Carmel as well as Moses' work at Sinai, Elijah is instructed in 1 Kings 19 not to rely on it.⁷³ Moses' experience on Sinai and his work as mediator between Yhwh and the people was different than any that followed:

⁷²Ibid., 76.

⁷³Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (New York: HarperOne, 1987), 90.

“And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom Yhwh knew face to face” (Deut 34:10).

The theophany, therefore, is an important turning point for each prophet. For Moses the implications are obvious. He is the leader and “savior” of Israel (from a mediator standpoint) *par excellence*, and his face-to-face encounter with Yhwh in Exodus 34:5–7 changed not only his stance with Israelites, but his countenance as well. Elijah is a prophet, he is mediator for God’s people, he is given the privilege of experiencing the glory of God on Sinai/Horeb, but unlike Moses, he does not descend the mountain as the bearer of God’s majesty. Elijah’s change is much different, as his ministry is seemingly cut short. After the theophany on Horeb, Yhwh’s instructions are for Elijah to anoint a new prophet in his place, Elisha (1 Kgs 19:16), as he will later take Elijah to heaven in a whirlwind of chariots of fire (2 Kgs 2:11).

Although the themes of “veiling” and “glory” are prevalent in the OT, which is illustrated in both Habakkuk 3:3 and Isaiah 25:7, it would be a mistake to equate the veiling of Moses’ face with these subsequent veilings.⁷⁴ As we have seen, the veiling of Moses’ face is strictly functional and is not the main point of Exodus 34:29–35. The point of that passage is that Moses’ shining face confirms for the Israelites that the covenant has been renewed and that they will continue on to Canaan as God’s people, however altered that relationship may be. To make the veil the primary point of the passage is to give it theological significance beyond the text.

I conclude, then, that there are no explicit textual markers that link Isaiah 25:6–8 with Exodus 34:29–35, but conceptually and theologically these texts bear resemblance to Exodus 32–34 in the following ways. Theologically, these texts include the dominant

⁷⁴Contra Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 232–42.

OT themes of God's glory and presence, which is beyond dispute. In Isaiah 25 the "covering" that shields the people of God from the presence of God is finally removed. This, as I have demonstrated, is similar to God's hand covering Moses as his glory passes by in Exodus 34, although the lack of textual correspondence omits the possibility that Isaiah is explicitly calling attention to this text.

The more remarkable contribution is the coupling of "presence" with the "light" of Yhwh in Isaiah 60 as a typology of Sinai and Zion, one that others have explored in detail.⁷⁵ In the OT, the Sinaitic experience was conceived as covenantal (Exod 19:3ff.) and served as the controlling metaphor for Israel's relationship with God through most of biblical history (cf. Deut 5:1–4).⁷⁶ After the reign of David, however, the focus is a different mountain, Zion. The texts that speak of Yhwh's theophany, his earthshattering apparition to man, his revelation of law, transfer these images from Sinai to Zion. In short, while Sinai is not forgotten altogether after the inception of the Davidic monarchy, it has been absorbed.⁷⁷ This transfer from Sinai to Zion was complete and irreversible, so that Yhwh came to be designated no longer as "the One of Sinai," but as "he who dwells on Mount Zion."

Moreover, the cosmic and creational elements of Mt. Zion parallel those of

⁷⁵E.g., Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*. Levenson's argument is that the Hebrew bible is organized around the two mountain traditions in Israel.

⁷⁶Commenting on Deut 5:1–4, Levenson remarks, "The concern of this passage is that Israel may come to think of themselves as obliged in a distant way by the covenant of Sinai/Horeb, but not as direct partners in it. Lest the freshness of the experience is lost, v. 3 hammers home the theme of contemporaneity in *staccato* fashion, with no fewer than six separate expressions: 'with us'—'us!'—'those who are here'—'today'—'all of us'—'the living.' The goal of this speech, as of the covenant renewal ceremony in which is probably originated, is to induce Israel to step into the position of the generation of Sinai, in other words, to actualize the past so that this new generation will become the Israel of the classic covenant relationship (cf. Deut 30:19–20)." (Ibid., 81)

⁷⁷Ibid., 91.

Sinai. The principle attributes of Zion begin with the most central aspect of the mountain—the presence of God. The temple on Zion, likewise, is a form of the world, and its construction—like that of its predecessor, the tabernacle—mirrors that of the creation of the world. These elements establish a historical basis for the type and antitype. This point is illustrated in Psalm 97, where again the mountain of God is covered in cloud, fire, and lightning (97:2–4), of God’s dominant kingship and the worthlessness of rival gods (97:6–9), where “righteousness is proclaimed” in heaven (97:6). But the focus of the psalm is not on Sinai as may seem appropriate, but of Zion (97:8). This is also illustrated in Psalm 50:2–3: “Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shone forth. Our God came; he does not keep silence. Before him was a devouring fire; around him a fierce storm!”

There is also progression in the type. God’s presence is on both mountains, which as Exodus and Isaiah make plain, have a transformational effect on those who “see” that presence. At Sinai, the presence is visible to the people but shielded. Only Moses is able to glimpse a greater manifestation of that presence and glory in Exodus 33–34, which has a remarkable and lasting impact on his face in 34:29–35. When Zion is established as the seat of the Israelite kingdom (1 Kgs 5–8), the presence is again visible and glorious, and is manifested in pyrotechnical and awesome ways (1 Kgs 8:10–11; 2 Chr 7:1–3) as it did at Sinai. In the eschatological kingdom, however, the presence of God on Zion is characterized in terms of “light,” “brightness,” and “shining” instead of clouds, thunder, and lightning. The effect is so powerful that the normal uses of the sun and the moon are rendered obsolete. God himself is the light of the whole earth. And like Moses, the light of God’s presence and glory (כְּבוֹד יְהוָה) is so powerful that it irradiates in the people of God, that is, the inhabitants of his city, Zion. This glory is not a means of judgment, but of rejoicing (Isa 60:5). There is escalation, too, in that *all* the redeemed of

Yhwh (Isa 59:20) will reflect the brightness of God, not just one individual as in Moses, “for his glory will be seen upon you” (Isa 60:2). The result is a glorified Israel (60:7–8),⁷⁸ which fulfills God’s original plan in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1–3) to make a people for himself, a “kingdom of priests” who mediate God’s presence to the rest of the world (Exod 19:5–6).⁷⁹

Conclusion

This chapter sought to elucidate the various texts that directly pertain to the shining face concept and thus contribute to the understanding of that image in the OT. The point here is not to argue for explicit intertextuality, but to determine whether or not images of a lighted face or of God’s glory, both theological and textual, communicate essentially a uniform conceptual notion. With the exegesis of Exodus 32–34, coupled with the examination of the theological significance of Exodus 34:29–35, the essential meaning and background of this passage in the OT has been established. The remaining task is to apply the same discussion in the NT.

⁷⁸The connection between Isa 60:5 and Exod 34:29–35 is also noted by William H. C. Propp, “The Skin of Moses’ Face—Transfigured or Disfigured?” *CBQ* 49, no. 3 (1987): 381n27.

⁷⁹See William J. Dumbrell, “Paul’s Use of Exodus 34 in 2 Corinthians 3,” in *God Who is Rich in Mercy: Essays Presented to Dr. D. B. Knox*, ed. David Peterson and Peter O’Brien (Homebush, Australia: Lancer Books, 1986), 181ff., on the development of the Abrahamic blessing in Gen 12, Exod 19, and Exod 34. See also idem, *Covenant and Creation: A Theological of Old Testament Covenants*, 2nd ed., Biblical and Theological Classics Library 12 (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2002). Further, it is notable that the terms of the Sinaitic covenant in Exod 34—tied explicitly to God’s grace and mercy—are likewise tied to the giving of the New Covenant in Jer 30–33; Ezek 11; 36, which is explored in the next chapter in relation to 2 Cor 3.

CHAPTER 5
THE USE OF EXODUS 34:29–35
IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Introduction

The previous chapter builds upon the exegesis of Exodus 34:29–35 within the scope of the canonical OT, noting the relevant reuses of the themes in that text that permeate the theology of later authors. The present chapter functions as the second half of that study, offering evidence of the same thematic material from Exodus 34:29–35 in the NT.

There are many points of contact that can be explored, but an exhaustive study of each passage is out of the question here, as each text has a long and detailed interpretive tradition. I will narrow this study to one instance of the transfiguration narrative (Matt 17:1–8), Paul’s one explicit reference to Exodus 34 (2 Cor 3:1–18), and to the prologue in the gospel of John (John 1:1–18). The history of interpretation and enigmatic nature of the Pauline text means that it will necessarily receive a fuller and more detailed treatment.

Matthew 17:1–8

All three synoptic gospels include the event of Jesus’ transfiguration (Matt 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36).¹ For the purposes here the account in Matthew is the most pertinent of the three, for only in Matthew does the account record that Jesus’ “face

¹The term “transfiguration” derives from the Vulgate’s *transfiguratus est*.

shone like the sun” (Matt 17:2). Nevertheless, the details are essentially the same among the Synoptics.² Jesus goes up a high mountain with Peter, James and John, and is transfigured before them so that his appearance is visibly brightened. He is subsequently joined by Moses and Elijah, and in turn, Peter offers to build “tabernacles” for each of them. God himself appears in a “bright cloud” and rebukes Peter in a thunderous voice from within the cloud to affirm Jesus’ superiority as his “beloved son.” The disciples are terrified until the vision is ended and Jesus comforts them with his voice.³ Many of these details are remarkably similar to, and perhaps patterned after, the Sinai narrative in Exodus 19–40, which will be thrust this study.

Davies and Allison note that the structure of Matthew 17:1–8 represents a chiasmus, with the voice of God at the very center:⁴

- a. Narrative introduction (v. 1)
- b. Jesus is transfigured (vv. 2–3)
- c. Peter’s response (v. 4)
- d. The divine voice (v. 5)
- c. The disciples’ response (v. 6)
- b. Jesus speaks (v. 7)
- a. Narrative conclusion (v. 8)

Although imperfect, the chiasm generally fits the matter with the form.⁵ The pericope, further, can be explained according to the development in the narrative storyline. As with

²While it seems that the evidence suggests that Matthew follows Mark in the construction of his Gospel, the discussion of the “Synoptic Problem” and literary dependence will not be reviewed here. For an overview and a defense of Markan priority, see D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 77–133.

³For two older but wide-ranging studies on the theological significance of the transfiguration narratives, see W. L. Liefeld, “Theological Motifs in the Transfiguration Narrative,” in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 162–79; John Anthony McGuckin, *The Transfiguration of Christ in Scripture and Tradition* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1986).

⁴William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, ICC, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 684.

⁵The narrative introduction/conclusion seems to be a generic description of two texts that bear

the episode of the golden calf in Exodus 32–34 noted above, the basic building blocks of any story are the setting, characters, and scenes, which are combined to illustrate a plot. If each section of the chiasm above is a “scene,” then the story can be described as follows: (1) The setting and characters are introduced in 17:1. (2) Jesus’ transfigured face is the locus of the plot in 17:2, followed by the rising tension of him being accompanied by Moses and Elijah in 17:3. (3) Peter’s response in 17:4 continues the tension as the reader is not yet aware of the final outcome or purpose of the transfiguration. (4) The climax of the narrative unfolds when the cloud overshadows the mountain and a voice proclaims that Jesus is the “Son” and that they should “listen to him” in 17:5, followed by the fearful response of the disciples in 17:6. (5) The resolution of the narrative follows in 17:7–8 as the vision is ended and Jesus reassures them of their safety in 17:8–9.⁶

Within the context of Matthew, this pericope follows both Peter’s confession that Jesus “is the Christ, the Son of God” (16:16), and Jesus’ rebuke of Peter (“Get behind me, Satan!”, 16:23) in response to the prediction that Jesus would be killed. The proximity of these two instances to Peter’s subsequent suggestion to build tabernacles in 17:4 places the emphasis in some degree on Peter and his role. The Evangelist, no doubt, does this for added emphasis. Peter is commended by Jesus (“Blessed are you!”, 16:17) but then rebuked by both Jesus (16:23) *and* God (17:5) over the course of a few verses. Peter’s chastisement is all the more poignant in light of the fact that Jesus predicts that the “Son of Man” will come “in the glory of his Father” (16:27) very soon, which “some standing here” will “see” (16:28), and which Peter undoubtedly “sees” in the

no resemblance other than their inclusion in the story. The rest of the chiasm is descriptive.

⁶This outline follows the form of gospel-narratives explained in Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the Gospels Wisely: A Narrative and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 174.

transfiguration. Peter is privileged for what he is allowed to experience: a revelation from the Father in chapter 16 and a vision of Jesus' "glory" in chapter 17. Nevertheless, Peter is disciplined for lack of "perception."

Matthew 17 begins with the temporal note that "after six days"⁷ Jesus led three specific disciples "up a high mountain." The additional indication that they were "by themselves" (*κατ' ἑαυτοὺς*) highlights the specificity of the information within the story. Only a first-hand account from Peter, James or John could provide such details. Specific temporal markers like these are rare in the gospels, especially since it is not entirely clear as to the antecedent of "six days."⁸ The "high mountain," further, is also unspecified, and one need not speculate as to its location since those details are unimportant in the narrative. The main focus is verses 2–5, which as the story unfolds, adds clarity to the use of "six days" and "high mountain."

In verse 2 Jesus is "transfigured" before the disciples, with the use of *μεταμορφώω* to describe what is happening.⁹ The Greek, as in the English, seems to be indicating a change in form as opposed to a change in substance. Jesus still remained human in the transfiguration, but his form is different (cf. Num 12:8). The change is detailed in verse 2b, that "his face shone like the sun," with the result that "his clothes became white as light." Then Moses and Elijah appear in verse 3. The unusualness of this occurrence notwithstanding, there are four points in particular worth considering with relation to Exodus 34:29–35. First, Jesus' "face" (*πρόσωπον*) is marked out as the locus of

⁷Luke has "after eight days" (Luke 9:28). In both instances, one week is intended.

⁸The previous geographical point mentioned is Caesarea Philippi in 16:13, although one cannot be exactly sure if the mountain is near this location.

⁹That Mark also uses *μεταμορφώω*, as opposed to Luke, strengthens the possibility of literary borrowing in Matthew's case.

the transformation. Luke indicates that the “appearance of his face” was altered (τὸ εἶδος τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ ἕτερον), also pointing to the face as important.¹⁰ Mark alone fails to mention Jesus’ face and only his “clothes” (9:3), although it is perhaps assumed by Mark’s audience that μεταμορφόω includes the face. It is important to note from the outset that while Jesus and Moses alone share a change of their faces in the canonical Bible, Moses’ face is not “transfigured” like Jesus’ is. Rather, the LXX interprets יָקַר as δοξάζω (“to glorify”) in Exodus 34:29, although the emphasis is equally on πρόσωπον.

Second, Jesus’ face “shone like the sun” (καὶ ἔλαμψεν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος). In the survey of OT literature that mentions a “shining face” I noted that no individual after Moses is given this quality.¹¹ While the shining face is used as a theological metaphor to denote grace and compassion, usually calling for Yhwh to make his face shine upon individuals (following Num 6:24–26), Moses remains the sole person who knew Yhwh “face to face” in such an extreme level that it reflects visibly on his body. Thus, for Jesus to receive a similar designation recalls with a degree of certainty the episode of Exodus 34:29–35. Indeed, Jesus’ designation is greater. His face shines ὡς ὁ ἥλιος (“like the sun”) and τὰ δὲ ἱμάτια αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο λευκά ὡς τὸ φῶς (“his clothes became white as light”).¹² Nothing is ever said of Moses’ garments in Exodus. Luke also mentions πρόσωπον (9:29), but not that it “shone,” only that its “appearance altered,” the combination of τὸ εἶδος and ἕτερος. With Mark and Luke, Matthew likewise mentions that Jesus’ clothes (ἱμάτιον) became dazzlingly white (λευκος), with Mark providing the added

¹⁰Compare with the LXX Exod 34:29: τοῦ χρώματος τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ.

¹¹An exception may be the prophet Daniel’s vision of a heavenly person in Dan 10:6, whose “body was like beryl, *his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze*, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.” Cf. Ezek. 40:3.

¹²In Jewish tradition the priestly messiah also shines with the light of the sun. Cf. *1 En.* 38:4; *4 Ezra* 7:97; *2 Bar* 51:3.

emphasis that they “shone” or “were radiant” (στίβω),¹³ so that “no launderer on the earth could whiten them” (οἷα γναφεὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς οὐ δύναται οὕτως λευκᾶναι). Again, there are no textual parallels in the LXX, only allusions. The emphasis is simply on the brightness of Jesus’ whole person.

Third, Moses and Elijah appear together with Jesus, which is striking given the significance of these prophets in the OT and particularly to their connection with Sinai and mountain theophanies (Exod 33–34; 1 Kgs 19). Although the *appearance* of Moses and Elijah is not highlighted by Peter (Luke 9:31 indicates that they appeared “in glory,” ἐν δόξῃ), his desire to “make tents” for all three men in verse 4 suggests that they are likewise radiant like Jesus. Many have speculated as to the reason why these specific prophets appear with Jesus,¹⁴ but one can only conjecture. The “tent” (σκηνή) is the same word in the LXX for the tabernacle (Exod 25:1; 35:11; etc; more on σκηνή below).

There are no details as to which precise “mountain” is in view where this scene is taking place. Luke adds to the confusion in making ὄρος definite (9:28), perhaps alluding to a specific location in Israel, or even to Sinai. This point is moot, however, if

¹³Cf. the LXX usage στίβω of in Ezek 21:15, 20, 33; Nah 3:3 pertaining to the luster of a sword that is ready for slaughter; Ps 7:13 of the brandished or polished sword. Cf. also, 1 Esd 8:56 (glittering gold); 1 Macc 6:39 (the sun “shone” and mountains “glittered”); Bar 6:23 (“shining” gold). In Ezek 40:3, the prophet Ezekiel is taken in a vision to an “extremely high mountain” from which he sees a city below, and then there appears to him a man, “and the appearance of him was like the appearance of shining bronze,” with στίβοντος as the governing adjective of the final noun, χαλκοῦ. The Hebrew is נֹשֵׁן, highlighting the bronze appearance of the “man.” Only the LXX emphasizes his “shining” visage. The prophecy goes on to record the details of the heavenly temple, which Ezekiel is able to tour and report. The emphasis on “divine visions” in 40:2, followed by a reference to a “high mountain,” a “shining man” in 40:3, and the subsequent temple, all invite comparisons to Moses’ experience in Exod 19–40, Sinai, and the tabernacle, which was but a replica of the heavenly temple that Ezekiel sees in chaps. 40–48.

¹⁴For the view that Moses and Elijah represent the OT law and prophets, see Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew. 14–28* 14–28, WBC, vol. 33a-b (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 493; for the view emphasizing the mountaintop experiences with God, see Robert Horton Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 343. For a survey of later Jewish literature that speak of Moses returning with Elijah, see Margaret E. Thrall, “Elijah and Moses in Mark’s Account of the Transfiguration,” *NTS* 16, no. 4 (1970): 305–17.

all details are taken together. Even if Jesus is not on Sinai, the author is clearly *alluding* to the mountain where Yhwh codified his covenant with Israel as a nation. The reference to “six days” and “high mountain” from Matthew 17:1 recall Exodus 24:15–18, where Moses goes up the mountain as the cloud covers it. Then, “the glory of Yhwh dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days” (24:16). These facts bring into focus the “bright cloud” (νεφέλη φωτεινή) in Matthew 17:5, another echo to God’s abiding presence on Sinai. Moreover, just as Yhwh called out to Moses from the cloud in Exodus 24:16, so also a voice speaks out of the cloud in Matthew 17:5.

The substance of God’s speech at the transfiguration (i.e., the voice from the cloud) involves several OT allusions: the messianic text in Psalm 2:7 (“this is my beloved son”), and Moses’ prophecy in Deuteronomy 18:15, 18 (“Listen to him!”). The former designation also recalls Jesus’ baptism in Matthew 3:17, in which another voice says, “This is my beloved son” (identical to 17:5 in the Gr.), but adds, “in whom I am well pleased” (ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα), which recalls Isaiah 42:1.¹⁵ The latter text of Deuteronomy 18 famously points to Yhwh raising up for future generations another prophet like Moses,¹⁶ and “it is to him you will listen” (18:15), and in whom Yhwh “will put [his] words in his mouth” (18:18). Taken together in Matthew 17, these allusions confirm that Jesus is designated by God as both the promised messiah and the prophet like Moses that comes after Moses. Moreover, the allusion to Isaiah 42:1 also marks Jesus as the “servant of Yhwh” (עֶבֶד יְהוָה), which no doubt is influenced by the similar Mosaic title of the “servant” *par excellence* in Exodus 14:31 and Numbers 12:7–8.

¹⁵Terence L. Donaldson, *Jesus on the Mountain: A Study in Matthean Theology*, JSOTSup 8 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1985), 146–56, attempts to tie the transfiguration to Mt. Zion instead of Sinai via the allusion to Ps 2:7. But the clear references to Sinai articulated above make it unlikely that Zion is in view.

¹⁶The echo from Deut 18 is argued in detail by Joel Marcus in the Markan narrative (*The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992], 80–93).

Lastly, these details clarify that what the disciples experience is nothing less than a theophany. Their resultant “terror” and the hiding of their faces in Matthew 17:6 is justified, therefore, and follows the appropriate responses of both Moses (Exod 34:8) and Elijah (1 Kgs 19:13) in their private theophanies. Further, in the context of this study their fear echoes the similar response of the Israelites in Exodus 34:30 when they first see that Moses’ face is shining. Like the Israelites, who return to Moses once he calls out them, so the disciples are comforted and return to Jesus at the sound of his voice (17:7–8).

Without fail, the transfiguration narrative in Matthew 17:1–8 recalls the Sinai theophany and the episode of Moses’ shining face in Exodus 34:29–35.¹⁷ The implication of this event confirms that Jesus is presented in the gospels as a new and greater Moses.¹⁸ There are differences in that at Sinai Moses was the recipient of revelation, while here Jesus is its subject. The disciples, not Jesus, are in the position of Moses, seeing the divine majesty and hearing the voice of God.¹⁹ Even if the events described in Matthew 17 are not identical to those in Exodus, “the story of Jesus’ transfiguration was interpreted by means of Sinai motifs, not simply created out of them.”²⁰ Therefore, the parallels are not perfect. Whatever happened to Jesus on “the mountain,” it was

¹⁷R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 645, contends that the primary OT background is found in Exod 24 rather than 34, and cautions against reading too much of Exod 34:29–35 into Matt 17:1–8. But France tends to minimize the instance of Jesus’ face shining in favor of other features in the text.

¹⁸So also David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 419–20.

¹⁹France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 644–45.

²⁰Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8–18*, 694. Allison rightly notes that other explanations of parallels offered by scholars—an allusion to the interval between the Day of Atonement and Tabernacles, an attempt to tie the transfiguration to the prophecy of Mark 9:1, a reference to the time between the first and sixth days of the Feast of Booths, an anticipation of the passion week chronology, or an allusion to the apocalyptic scheme of a seven-day world history—are all less than satisfying.

subsequently interpreted in a similar vein to Exodus 24 and 34 (especially 34:29–35), and thus later presented by eyewitnesses (Peter, James, and John) as a parallel account given the many similarities. This stresses the importance of Moses in the narrative of the Bible. Understanding these two mountain traditions (Sinai and the Mount of Transfiguration) is one of the keys to interpreting Jesus’ new covenant work; that is, his work is like Moses’ work as “servant” and “lawyer,” but greater as the superlatives in the gospel accounts testify. Indeed, Luke’s comment in 9:31 about the conversation between Jesus, Moses and Elijah is revealing: They spoke of Jesus’ own “exodus” (ἐξόδος) which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem. Thus, the transfiguration is retrospective in that it echoes Moses’ exodus and the events on Sinai. It is also prospective in pointing forward to Jesus’ death and resurrection later in the gospels. And, in the end, while Moses’ face simply reflected God’s glory, Jesus’ face *is God’s glory*.

2 Corinthians 3:1–18

Among all instances of quotations or allusions of the OT in the NT, 2 Corinthians 3:7–18 is perhaps the most challenging to interpret. There are a number of factors that contribute to its ambiguity, such as the difficulty of the Greek syntax and vocabulary, and the precise parameters of Paul’s paragraphs.²¹ Moreover, the exact purpose to which Paul is writing is highly debated,²² such as the specific opponents of Paul’s ministry that he has in mind.²³ These issues, however, are secondary, although

²¹On Pauline authorship, see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 432ff.

²²For an updated overview, see Andreas J. Kostenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 461–83.

²³For a good summary of who the opponents are, see Jan Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, SP (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 6–7; Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 445–47.

they are addressed in short form below when necessary. The main contention is how Paul uses Exodus 34:29–35 as an argument for how the new covenant is greater than the old. The variegated interpretations of Exodus 34, no doubt, affect how scholars approach 2 Corinthians 3 as well. My exegesis in chapters 2 and 3 above, therefore, will be used as the essential background, especially for 3:7–18.

Scholars generally delimit the pericope under discussion to 2:14–4:6, which is part of a larger section of 1:1–7:16.²⁴ But for the purposes of this study I will not treat 2:14–17 in any detail, focusing the analysis on 3:1–4:6, and even more so to 3:7–18, which in large part has to do with Paul’s defense of his own ministry and apostleship. For the sake of context, a short summary of 1:1–2:17 is in order. Paul begins with his customary salutation (1:1–2), followed by a lengthy passage on thanksgiving in Christ in 1:3–11 (“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” 1:3),²⁵ which is full of emotion and includes references to Paul’s travels (“the affliction we experienced in Asia,” 1:8). In 1:12–2:13 Paul defends his missionary decisions, particularly with reference to his travel. He writes that he has not acted in hubris or with “earthly wisdom” but by the grace of God (1:12–13). His desire was to come to the Corinthians “so that you might have a second experience of grace” (1:15), and so he reviews his original plans in 1:15–22. Paul’s demurral was due to his reluctance to cause as much grief upon the Corinthians as he had in his original visit (1:23–2:4, cf. Acts 18:1ff.). So he chose not to make another “painful visit” (2:1). Paul uses this example to illustrate for the Corinthians how one should comfort and forgive a member at Corinth with whom the congregation

²⁴See Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 11–13, *et passim*.

²⁵The order of *salutation* followed by *thanksgiving* appears in 12 of Paul’s 13 letters in the NT, with only Galatians as the exception. The thanksgiving in 2 Corinthians is the longest in the Pauline corpus.

had properly excommunicated, or disciplined at the very least (2:5–11). Nevertheless, Paul did not choose to visit again, and due to Titus’ inability to meet Paul in Troas and give him a report of the Corinthian church, Paul decides to pen this letter (2:12–13). This leads Paul to offer praise to God in 2:14–17, since the “aroma” of the knowledge of God is spreading everywhere and anywhere Paul is able to do his ministry.²⁶ Christ alone makes Paul competent for the present ministry, which divides people around him into two camps, “those who are being saved and those who are perishing” (2:15).²⁷ This disparity leads Paul to note the contrast in 3:1–18 between the ministry of the old covenant and the new.²⁸

It is within this contrast that Paul finally alludes to Exodus 34:29–35, Moses’ face and his veil. The relative paucity in which the episode of Moses’ shining face appears in subsequent literature makes this allusion in 2 Corinthians extremely unique. Paul clearly references Moses’s “face,” the “letters on stone” (i.e., stone tablets), and “glory,” all at the beginning of his argument in 3:7. Moreover, Moses’ “veil” in 3:13 introduces an important contrast for Paul, even though the veil is not as important in Exodus 34. Lastly, the pericope culminates, like the transfiguration narrative, with instances of “light” and “glory” on Jesus’ “face” (4:4, 6).

²⁶The content of Paul’s praise is given in two substantival participles, *θριαμβεύοντι* (leading in triumphal procession) and *φανεροῦντι* (making known, spreading), which are in apposition to the opening *τῷ θεῷ*. Hafemann argues that the Jewish sacrificial system is the background for Paul’s use of *φανεροῦντι* (*Suffering and the Spirit*, 198–99).

²⁷Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 418.

²⁸The contrast likely begins in 2:14–17. See Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 66. The chiasmic arrangement of 2:15–16 illustrates the contrast:

- A to those who are being saved
- B to those who are perishing
- B’ from death to death
- A’ from life to life

3:1–6

The first six verses of 2 Corinthians 3 set the contrast between the “letter” and the “Spirit.” This is captured in the last phrase of 3:6, “For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.” The first instance of the “letter” (ἐπιστολή), at least at the beginning of this passage, is the “letter of recommendation” in 3:1 (συστατικῶν ἐπιστολῶν) and not the law. The church at Corinth has been seemingly invaded by people who were calling themselves apostles (cf., 2 Cor 11:13–15) and who carry with them letters of recommendation as described here.²⁹ Paul seems to be describing an attempt to discredit his ministry because he does not have a reputation, or anyone to recommend him to the Corinthians like these “apostles” do. Paul says, in essence, that there is no need for a “letter” since the Corinthians themselves function metaphorically as his letter of recommendation (“you yourselves are our letter,” ἡ ἐπιστολὴ ἡμῶν ὑμεῖς ἐστε). The recommendation is “written on our hearts” in 3:2, which in effect means that the Corinthian belief in Paul’s message is enough to persuade Paul’s opponents of the power of his message.³⁰ Hence, “the very existence of the church at Corinth is manifest evidence

²⁹These would not have been apostles like Paul is an apostle—a witness to the resurrected Christ and personally commissioned by him to evangelize the Gentiles. They were, possibly, apostles in a more general sense in that they were messengers of outsiders who had sent them on a particular mission (see Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 422–23). Paul’s opponents are sometimes referred to as Judaizers, who insist that Gentiles convert to Judaism either before or after they come to faith in Jesus (cf. Paul’s argument in his letter to the Galatians). Those who argue that Paul’s opponents in Corinth are Judaizers include Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 33–40; Michael D. Goulder, *Paul and the Competing Mission in Corinth* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001).

³⁰Paul’s metaphor of the “letter” that is “written on *our hearts*” is somewhat unusual since Paul is not only the person recommended by the letter but also the bearer of the letter itself. Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 127, comments, “Paul carries around with him in his own heart the attestation that the Corinthians seek, because he bears *them* in heart and memory. The turn of phrase is a little confusing because it makes two points at once; it emphasizes both Paul’s love for the Corinthians and the fact that they themselves are the proof of Paul’s legitimacy.”

of the efficacy of Paul’s apostleship. They cannot question the legitimacy of his ministry without simultaneously questioning the legitimacy of their own origins as a community.”³¹ When Paul states that his message to the Corinthians—his “letter,” as it were—is “written on our hearts,” he likely recalls Jeremiah 31 and God’s promise of a “new covenant.”³² In Jeremiah 31:33, Yhwh declares, “I will place my *torah* within them, and upon their hearts I will write it.”³³ Paul, however, is not referring to the OT law but to recommendation letters. Even so, the allusion to Jeremiah should not be missed, especially given the explicit reference to the “new covenant”—a motif particular to Jeremiah alone—in 2 Corinthians 3:6, the very next sentence. Thus, in both Jeremiah 31:33 and 2 Corinthians 3:2, God is writing on the heart, and claims a new people for himself (“I will be their God and they will be my people”).³⁴ The gospel, which includes a change of heart, and which is visible, operates not idly but should “be known and read by all.”

Paul elaborates on this meaning in 3:3. The recommendation letter (i.e., the Corinthians), is “from Christ”³⁵ and “delivered by us,” that is, by Paul. He then notes a

³¹Ibid.

³²Contra Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 262, although Harris later admits an allusion to Jer 31:33 is a possibility.

³³The LXX (Jer 38:33) adds that God will give his law εἰς τὴν διάνοιαν αὐτῶν (“in their minds”). Carol Kern Stockhausen, *Moses’ Veil and the Glory of the New Covenant: The Exegetical Substructure of II Cor. 3:1–4:6*, AnBib 116 (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1989), 52–53, 80–81, in an effort to explain why Paul would use the term ἐγγράφω, interestingly associates the ἐπιστολή in 2 Cor 3:2 with the breastplate worn by Aaron in Exod 36:21, and which was engraved with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel: “Paul carries the Corinthians themselves before the Lord in his heart as his ‘letter,’ not just the letters of their names on a stone tablet. A second deliberate use of ἐγγράφω in verse 3 reinforces this reinterpretation.” There is not a reference in Paul to Aaron’s breastplate, however, and Stockhausen’s thesis seems far-reaching. Paul need not reference the LXX explicitly to make his point that he has Jer 31:33 (LXX 38:33) in mind.

³⁴Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 128.

³⁵I take Χριστοῦ to be a genitive of source since there is no reference to its content (as an

contrast and moves forward his analogy. Whereas letters are written with “ink” with the assumption that they can be destroyed or changed, even lost, the Corinthian letter is written “with the Spirit of the living God,” and thus their security is presumed and the rights of the children of God accompany the letter. This point likely echoes Exodus 31:18 and 32:15–16, both of which describe the “tablets of stone” (πλάκας λιθίνας), which in 31:18 are “written with the finger of God” and in 32:16 is both the “work of God” and the “writing was the writing of God” (cf. 34:1–4; Deut 9:10–11). Thus, in 2 Corinthians 3:3 the writing “on tablets of stone” (ἐν πλαξίν λιθίναις) by the “Spirit of the living God” corresponds directly to the tablets of the commands of God, which are similarly described in Exodus.³⁶

Moreover, the “spiritual letter,” as it were, that was not written on tablets of stone, but on “tablets of fleshly hearts,”³⁷ likely corresponds to Ezekiel 36:26, and perhaps again to Jeremiah 31:33.³⁸ The “tablet of fleshly hearts” is obviously greater and permanent, while the “tablets of stone” are temporary and impermanent. In the context of the promise of a new and everlasting covenant in Ezekiel 36:26, God says, “I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh.” The LXX translates

objective genitive, “letter about Christ”) nor to its possession (as a “letter belonging to Christ”).

³⁶Although “the living God” is a phrase found in both the OT and NT (e.g., Josh 3:10; 1 Sam 17:26; Isa 37:4; Acts 14:15; Heb 10:31; Rev 7:2), and although Paul frequently uses this phrase along with “the Spirit of God” (see Rom 8:9, 14; 9:26; 1 Cor 2:11; 6:11; 2 Cor 6:16; Phil 3:3; 1 Thess 1:9; 1 Tim 3:15; 4:10), 2 Cor 3:3 is the only instance in the OT and NT of “the Spirit of the living God” (πνεῦμα θεοῦ ζῶντος).

³⁷Since the emphasis is on a letter of recommendation, the reference to “tablets of stone,” while drawing to mind the “tablets of the testimony” that Moses brought down from Sinai in Exod 34:27, 28, can only be part of an analogy and not an OT allusion.

³⁸So also Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 265.

“heart of flesh” as *καρδίαν σαρκίνην*, which is nearly identical to *καρδαίαις σαρκίναις* in 2 Corinthians 3:3.³⁹

The overall point of these allusions remains to be seen in the coming verses. Since Paul is at work in setting a contrast between “stone hearts” and “fleshly hearts,” which follows from his original contrast between physical letters of recommendation and the metaphorical “letter” that Paul possess and which derives from God, we can anticipate that Paul is setting up a greater contrast between the old and new covenants. Paul’s contrast is not new, however, since it is substantiated in the texts to which he is alluding. Ezekiel and Jeremiah likewise make the sharp, polemical distinction between the law written on stone tablets and the law written on the heart. Further, Paul’s reference to “tablets of stone” as *πλαξίν λιθίνας*, the very language used to describe the tablets of the law in Exodus and Deuteronomy, instead of the “heart of stone” in Ezekiel (*τὴν καρδίαν τὴν λιθίνην*), is unlikely to be coincidental.⁴⁰ Paul intends to draw a correlation with the covenant of Moses specifically, which is juxtaposed in the coming verses.

In light of the fact that the Corinthians possess the Spirit on their hearts, they can have “confidence . . . through Christ” (3:4). He has accomplished the work of bringing the Spirit to bear in their hearts. Moreover, this confidence is “toward God,” and thus the full spectrum of the Trinity is introduced. The Spirit on the heart is “our guarantee” (cf. 1:22).

More to the point, the contrast between the letter and the Spirit makes plain that “our sufficiency is from God” (3:5).⁴¹ It removes all boasting. In other words, since

³⁹Many of the English translations suppress this parallel in rendering the phrase, “human hearts” instead of “fleshly hearts.” Cf. ESV, ASV, NASB, RSV, etc.

⁴⁰So also Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 129.

⁴¹Paul’s assertion that his “sufficiency is from God” in 3:5 answers his question from 2:16: “Who is sufficient for these things?” So also Ernest Best, *Second Corinthians*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox

the Spirit is written on the heart through Christ to God, there can be no claim of self-sufficiency. It is all “from God.” In Christ, those who have the Spirit written on their hearts are now “ministers of a *new* covenant” (διακόνους καινῆς διαθήκης), perhaps in the same way that Moses was a minister of the *old* covenant.⁴² The use of διάκονος here harkens back to διακονέω in 3:3, and anticipates the διακονία of the Spirit/righteousness juxtaposed with the διακονία of death in 3:8–9. Both the noun and verb encapsulate the metaphorical and non-metaphorical ideas of “ministering.”⁴³

In the Corinthian correspondence, the “new” covenant is a reference to Jesus’ work on the cross as a propitiatory sacrifice in the place of sinners, which is the foundation of the church (cf. 1 Cor 11:25).⁴⁴ Those who are “ministers” of this covenant are secure by means of the Spirit within them, not by a “letter.” It is important to note here the casual change of “letter” in the Greek. The original “letter of recommendation” in 3:1, 2, 3 is ἐπιστολή, which had a literal sense in 3:1 but a metaphorical sense in 3:2–3.⁴⁵ But now for the first time the “letter” is γράμμα. In John 5:47, Jesus refers to Moses’

Press, 1987), 28.

⁴²Scott J. Hafemann (*2 Corinthians*, NIVAC [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000], 127–28), demonstrates that Paul is referring here to his “Moses-like” call on the road to Damascus as a legitimizing principle. “Like Moses and the Old Testament prophets after him, Paul too was made ‘sufficient in spite of insufficiency by the grace of God.’ Rather than calling his ministry into question, Paul’s insufficiency thus provides the counterpart to God’s elective grace.” This type of strategy from Paul is not without precedent. Karl Olav Sandnes, *Paul, One of the Prophets? A Contribution to the Apostle’s Self-Understanding*, WUNT 2, Reihe 43 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991), 7–8, 64–65, 68–69, demonstrates that in the passages where Paul presents his own understanding as an apostle within the spectrum of redemptive history, he does so in terms that are common to the OT prophets (cf. Rom 1:1–5; 10:14–18; 1 Cor 2:6–16; 9:15–18; 2 Cor 4:6; Eph 2:19–3:7; 1 Thess 2:3–8).

⁴³Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 127.

⁴⁴The only explicit reference to the “new covenant” in the OT is Jer 31:31. It is fair to presume that the Corinthians understood that Jesus’ death inaugurated the new covenant and that they, as believers, are now members of that covenant. Cf. 1 Cor 1:2, 17–18, 23–24, 26–31; 2:2; 3:16; 6:19; 7:23; 12:13, 27; 2 Cor 6:14–7:1.

⁴⁵Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 261.

“writings” with *γράμμα*. Even Paul sometimes refers to the whole of the OT as *γράμμα* (cf. 2 Tim 3:15), but this does not mean that the Mosaic law is in view. In the Pauline corpus, *γραφή* is Paul’s customary term for referencing the OT law directly, while *νόμος* is used as the generic term for the law.⁴⁶ Thus, the switch from *ἐπιστολή* to *γράμμα* could mean the OT Torah or that the words must be semantically synonymous. I would argue that *γράμμα* here refers to the OT Torah for two reasons. First, Paul seems to equate the law (*νόμος*) with “the writings” (*γράμμα*) in Romans 2:27, 29; 7:6. Thus, we know that Paul does not exclusively refer to the OT law as *νόμος* or *γραφή*. Secondly, this makes the most sense especially in 3:7 when the *γράμμα* is tied specifically to Moses’ experience on Sinai and the stone tablets of the covenant.⁴⁷

This leads to the main premise of 3:1–6; the OT law “kills” according to Paul. The Spirit, however, “gives life.”⁴⁸ Garrett is correct in noting that this point in itself is an interpretation of the OT: “[Paul’s] contention that the letter kills arises from the whole

⁴⁶Cf. Rom 1:2; 4:3; 9:17; 10:11 11:2; 16:26; 1 Cor 15:3, 4; Gal 3:8, 22; 4:30; 1 Tim 5:18; 2 Tim 3:16, etc.

⁴⁷Against Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 130–31.

⁴⁸On the many divergent views of the meaning of the “letter/Spirit contrast” in 3:6, see Thomas E. Provence, “‘Who is Sufficient for These Things?’ An Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 2:15-3:18,” *NovT* 24, no. 1 (1982): 54–81. Provence notes that most commentators have now rejected the older interpretation that the contrast is meant to illustrate the difference between a literal and spiritual sense of a passage. In doing so, the letter/Spirit antithesis can be whittled down to three main views: (1) the “hermeneutical,” which distinguishes the written text (*γράμμα*) from the spiritual (*πνεῦμα*) by which it is being interpreted, (2) the “legal,” which interprets the opposition as a distinction between the Holy Spirit and the law (and which regards *γράμμα* as synonymous with *νόμος*), and (3) the “distorted” view, in which the “letter” (*γράμμα*) stands for a misuse of the law from Paul’s opponents. In my view, both the “hermeneutical” and the “distorted” positions fail to account for the use of *γράμμα* in 3:7, which as I have argued, is likely referring to the tablets of “law.” With Meyer, “The contrast between old and new covenants argues for the corresponding link between ‘old covenant’ and ‘letter.’ Therefore, the pairing of ‘old’ with ‘letter’ and ‘new’ with ‘Spirit’ is completely consistent,” especially in passages like Romans 2:29 and 7:6 (Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 80.). Thus, the letter/Spirit contrast concerns the distinction between two different powers, “one which enslaves and one which liberates” (Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, AB, vol. 32A [New York: Doubleday, 1984], 199).

history of Israel's inability to keep the Sinai Covenant, and in particular from the fact that it must be replaced with a New Covenant that can effectively bring all of its members into the knowledge of God."⁴⁹ In context, Paul is stressing not two distinct messages from God (the old and the new), but two different materials on which God wrote: stone tablets, and human fleshly hearts. These "materials" highlight the two dispensations of redemptive history: the old and the new.⁵⁰ In linking Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26 with Jeremiah 31:31–33, Paul shows implicitly that the giving of the Spirit (Ezekiel) is linked with the new covenant (Jeremiah). Thus, the Spirit in Ezekiel is given "*in order that they might walk in my statutes and keep my judgments and do them*" (Ezek 11:20). In this way, the law is "written on the heart" as described in Jeremiah 31:33 in the context of the giving of the new covenant. But this is only accomplished by the Spirit following the redemption and forgiveness of God (Ezek 36:25, 29).

"Kills," therefore, must refer to spiritual death, at least on the front of Paul's argument. Thus, for a letter to "kill" means, pejoratively, that anyone who does not have the "Spirit" on the heart is going to die a spiritual death. Their trust is in a "letter," an emblem of the temporal and fleeting world that was meant to point to a greater reality (sin and the need for redemption), instead of the "Spirit," which comes through Christ to God and which builds confidence. It is not the law that kills per se, but only the law without the Spirit. Indeed, Paul says elsewhere that the law itself is "spiritual" (Rom 7:14). Although the law declares God's will, "it is powerless to enable people to keep it.

⁴⁹Duane A. Garrett, "Veiled Hearts: The Translation and Interpretation of 2 Corinthians 3," *JETS* 53, no. 4 (2010): 738. Garrett also notes that when Paul speaks of himself as a minister of the new covenant and contrasts his ministry with the letter that kills, "the most reasonable interpretation is that his opponents espouse obedience to the law" (737).

⁵⁰Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 131.

Only the Spirit ‘gives life’ by changing the human heart. In this regard, Paul can say that the gospel too kills when it encounters those who are perishing (cf. 2:16)!”⁵¹

Again, it would not be appropriate to say at this point that the *γράμμα* refers to the “letters (*ἐπιστολή*) of recommendation,” and thus that those “letters” somehow kill spiritually. “Letter” means “law,” or specifically, the old covenant, and possibly the Sinaitic covenant. It is important, however, to understand that the contrast here is not between the law and the Spirit, but between the law as a “letter” and the Spirit. In choosing *γράμμα* Paul implies in nuanced terms the expression of God’s will which remained merely in writing. The Israelites acknowledged it as such, but failed to keep it. It is a lifeless letter, as opposed to that which is obeyed from the heart by the power of the Spirit.⁵² Even so, deathly *γράμμα* serves not as the main point of Paul’s argument, but as the foundation of his main point in 3:7–11.⁵³

3:7–11

Paul’s argument in 3:7–18 has puzzled interpreters for centuries.⁵⁴ Indeed, entire dissertations have been written on this passage alone,⁵⁵ which attests to the copious

⁵¹Ibid., 132.

⁵²Ibid., 133. See also the more detailed exegesis of this passage from Scott J. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3*, WUNT 1, Reihe 81 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 92–186: “Paul’s assertion in 3:6c that the ‘letter kills’ therefore summarizes the function of the Law when it confronts those whose hearts are hardened against God. In contrast, Paul’s affirmation that the Spirit makes alive is his summary of the central promise of the new, everlasting covenant as outlined in Ezekiel and Jeremiah, against the backdrop of the well-known OT concept of the (divine) ‘spirit’ (רוח) or ‘breath’ (נשמה) which gives life to creatures” (181).

⁵³Garrett, “Veiled Hearts,” 739.

⁵⁴Aside from reasons already mentioned, the difficulty in 2 Cor 3:7–18 is also probably due in part to the high volume of Pauline *hapax legomena* in these verses—11 to be exact. Margaret Eleanor Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians: Commentary on II Corinthians I–VII*, ECC, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 296, notes in addition fully 13 *hapax legomena* in 2 Cor 9:1–12. See the history of interpretation of 2 Cor 3 up until the twenty-first century in

scholarship. It is not my purpose here to break new ground, except to reexamine the pericope in light of the fresh exegesis of Exodus 34:29–35 above. Paul’s argument is divided into two sections: 3:7–11, which compares the glory of the covenants, and 3:12–18, which juxtaposes the veiling of the old covenant with the unveiledness of the new. 2 Corinthians 4:1–6 applies the “ministry” of the new covenant to the “light” of Jesus Christ, which changes the character (“heart”) of those who embrace his gospel. The contrasts in 3:3–18 are as follows:

<i>Old Covenant</i>	<i>New Covenant</i>
Written with ink (3:3)	Written with the Spirit
Tablets of stone (3:3)	Tablets of human hearts
Letter, kills (3:6)	Spirit, gives life
Ministry of death (3:7)	Ministry of the Spirit (3:8)
Glory (3:7)	More glory (3:8)
Condemnation, glory (3:9)	Righteousness, more glory
Once had glory (3:10)	Glory that surpasses the old
Nullified/voided (3:7, 11)	Permanent, more glory
Moses, veil (3:12)	Christ, unveiled (3:14)
Veil remains (3:14, 15)	Veil removed (3:16)

In 3:7–8 Paul begins his use of Exodus 34:29–35. Translated literally, the sentence reads as follows:

Now if the ministry of death, being carved in letters of stone, came with glory, such that the sons of Israel could not stare intently into the face of Moses because the glory of his face was becoming null and void,⁵⁶ would not the ministry of the Spirit [come] with more glory?

The “letter” (γράμμα) that “kills” from 3:6 that is contrasted to the “ministry of a new covenant,” Paul now calls “the ministry of death,” which is “carved in letters (γράμμα) on

Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 255–65.

⁵⁵E.g., Linda L. Belleville, *Reflections of Glory: Paul’s Polemical Use of the Moses-Doxa Tradition in 2 Corinthians 3:1–18*, JSNTSup 52 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991); Stockhausen, *Moses’ Veil and the Glory of the New Covenant*; Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*.

⁵⁶On the translation of καταργέω as “null and void,” I follow Garrett, “Veiled Hearts,” 739–45. See also Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 133–35, who also argues for a translation of “that which was becoming null and void,” and the discussion below.

stone.” Up to this point Paul has not specifically stated that the “letter” is the law given on Sinai, but the rest of 3:7ff. makes plain that Paul is relating *γράμμα* to *νόμος*.⁵⁷ On Sinai, God carved in letters of stone his law, which Paul is now calling a “ministry of death.” It is a “ministry” in that it preserved a specific function for the Israelites: death.

Paul explicitly associates Moses’ shining face with “glory” in 3:7. There are initially two key differences, however, between the OT and the NT use of Exodus 34:29–35. First, Paul does not associate the glory of Moses’ face (*πρόσωπον*) with the glory of Yhwh as in Exodus 34 (*כְּבוֹד יְהוָה*), but with the glory of the “letters on stone” (linked by *ἐγενήθη*). The implication is that *ἐγενήθη* is referring to the renewal of the covenant in Exodus 34 and to Yhwh fulfilling Moses’ request to see his glory. Second, Paul says a “ministry of death” came “with glory” (*ἐν δόξῃ*). How can death result in glory? This calls into question the precise meaning of “death” (*θάνατος*). As I argued above, Moses’ entire ministry and intercession in Exodus 32–34 is centered around obtaining *salvation and forgiveness* for the Israelites. In this regard, Moses could effectively be called a “minister of life.” Nevertheless, Moses is perpetually tied to the Sinai covenant, which, in the end, could not save the Israelites who were “stiff-necked,” and which Paul calls a “ministry of condemnation” (3:9).

But even though the law is called a ministry of death, it still came with great “glory” (*δόξα*).⁵⁸ This “glory” was on “Moses’ face,” and it was so powerful that the

⁵⁷Thus Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 272. More specifically, Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 305–306, rightly states that it refers to “the law with its commands and regulations” (*τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν*, Eph 2:15).

⁵⁸There is a great deal of literature on the history and meaning of *δόξα*. For an overview, see Jacob Jervell, *Imago Dei. Gen 1, 26.f. im Spätjudentum, in der Gnosis und in den paulinischen Briefen*, FRLANT 76 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 176–80; G. H. Boobyer, “‘Thanksgiving’ and the ‘Glory of God’ in Paul” (Ph.D. diss., R. Noske University, 1929); Carey C. Newman, *Paul’s Glory-Christology: Tradition and Rhetoric*, NovTSup 69 (Leiden: Brill, 1992).

Israelites could not gaze at it “because of *the glory of his face*.” In the context of Exodus 32–34, Paul is referencing 34:5–7 and 34:29–35, and more specifically, 34:30 when all the Israelites saw Moses’ face and were afraid to come near to him. Paul does not quote either the MT or the LXX, even though the LXX does use $\delta\omicron\xi\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$ in 34:29, 30, 35 to refer to Moses’ face. Paul cannot be referencing the theophanies in Exodus 24 or 40, since the result of that manifestation of glory, even as powerful as it was, is not ultimately reflected on Moses’ face. If it did, then Moses’ face would have been shining on his first descent from Sinai in 32:15ff. Moreover, Paul does not have in mind the earthquake, fire, and smoke of Exodus 19, which is a crucial point for understanding this passage.⁵⁹ As shown above with Elijah in 1 Kings 19, those elements do not ultimately convey the meaning of Yhwh’s presence. Only Moses’ final experience with Yhwh’s “glory” in 34:5–7 ultimately reflects on his face. In that text specifically the “glory of Yhwh” passes before Moses, even as Yhwh covers Moses’ face so that he doesn’t see the full divine majesty and suffer death as a result (Exod 33:20). In 34:29–35, “glory” is not mentioned except in the LXX (as a verb), only that Moses’ face was “shining.” The implication is obviously that it is a reflection or imprint of the “glory of Yhwh.”

More importantly, if the exegesis of Exodus 34:29–35 above is correct, then Paul’s use of $\delta\omicron\xi\acute{\alpha}$ in 3:7 should be associated with “goodness” (טוב), which fundamentally/theologically has to do with Yhwh’s grace and compassion. Thus, perhaps Paul has in mind not what is ultimately reflected in Moses’ shining face but Moses’ initial request in 33:18: “Please show me your *glory* (כְּבוֹדֶךָ)!” Yhwh, as I have shown above, responds in 33:19 and associates his “glory” with his “goodness.” Thus, the “glory” and all its benefits (such as “goodness”) is precisely what “came” in the letters

⁵⁹Contra Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 282–83.

on stone.

The last word in 3:7 is what most English versions translate as “fading” or “destroyed,” or “coming to an end,” which is supposedly encompassed in the word *καταργέω*. The participial form here, *τὴν καταργουμένην*, clearly modifies “the glory” (*τὴν δόξαν*) on Moses’ face. A typical translation would read, “the Israelites could not gaze at Moses’ face because of its glory, *which was being brought to an end*,” or “*which was fading*.”⁶⁰ This is taken to explain why Moses would need to veil himself in Exodus 34:33–35, that is, his purpose was to hide the ultimate meaning of the Sinai covenant—it was fading away. The translation of “fading,” however, is disputed. The compendium of scholarship has dealt with this issue. Garrett, along with several other scholars, argues convincingly that it is improbable for *καταργέω* to mean “fading,”⁶¹ given its relation to the adjective *ἀργός* (“idle”).⁶² He emphasizes, rather, the legal sense of the verb. As a derivative of *ἀργός*,

⁶⁰Cf. ESV, RSV, NRSV, NJB, REB, NIV, TNIV, NASB, and CEV. For those who support the translation of “fade,” see Linda L. Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, IVP New Testament Commentary, vol. 8 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 104; Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 293; E. Bernard Allo, *Saint Paul: Première épître aux Corinthiens* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1956), 89–91; Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 109; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 85. Best, *Second Corinthians*, 30–31, maintains that “this does not mean that the law had been slowly losing its importance and influence from the time of its inauguration. Rather, the law lacks permanent validity, a point which is seen in the coming of Christ.”

⁶¹To name a few, Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 133–35; Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 380; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 203–05; David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC, vol. 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 174. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 286–309, also argues against the meaning “to fade,” and prefers “render inoperative.” Garrett’s lexical analysis is the better of these since he treats in detail all known extra-biblical uses of *καταργέω* in classical Greek as well. Thus, his work is more complete than other commentaries or studies.

⁶²So also Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 283.

[καταργέω] can in a legal or quasi-legal context also mean to “nullify” or “make obsolete” a legal requirement. Also, in the passive voice and with a person as subject, it can mean to be freed of legal obligations. A survey of the usage of καταργέω (especially as used in the New Testament) demonstrates that the word never means “fade” or “destroy,” and that it would only mean “be removed,” “be made obsolete,” or “come to an end” in a *legal* sense. That is, one can speak of a legal obligation being “removed” (that is, being “nullified”) with καταργέω, but one cannot speak of physically removing an object, such as a veil, with that verb.

In classical⁶³ as in Septuagintal⁶⁴ Greek, all known usage reflects the meaning “to render powerless” or “make ineffective.” In the NT,⁶⁵ a similar translation is applicable in every instance, and especially in 2 Corinthians 3.⁶⁶ For these reasons, the best reading of 2 Corinthians 3:7c understands Paul to be saying that the glory of the old covenant (the “ministry of death,” and the “letters on stone”) *was becoming null and void*.⁶⁷

⁶³Garrett, “Veiled Hearts,” 739–40, cites specific instances in Euripides and in Athenaeus Mechanicus to illustrate the sparse usage in pre-Christian Greek texts.

⁶⁴Καταργέω only occurs in 2 *Esd* 4:21, 23; 5:5; 6:8, which translates the Aramaic verb בטל (“to cause to cease working”) in every case.

⁶⁵Καταργέω occurs 27 times in the NT, and only twice outside of the Pauline corpus: Luke 13:7; Rom 3:3, 31; 4:14; 6:6; 7:2, 6; 1 Cor 1:28; 2:6; 6:13; 13:8 (3x); 13:11; 15:24, 26; 2 Cor 3:7, 11, 13, 14; Gal 3:17; 5:4, 11; Eph 2:15; 2 Thess 2:8; 2 Tim 1:10; Heb 2:14.

⁶⁶Garrett rightly suggests that had Paul wanted to convey the meaning of “fading out,” he could have used μαραίνω, which was very common in pre-Christian Greek (cf. Homer, *Iliad* 23.228; Sophocles, *Ajax*, 714) and still extant in NT times (“Veiled Hearts,” 745). Cf. Jas 1:11, “where the withering of vegetation under the sun’s heat is the analogy for how, in the passage of time, the wealthy with all their business dealings fade away (οὕτως και ὁ πλούσιος ἐν ταῖς πορείαις αὐτοῦ μαρανθήσεται). Throughout Greek literature, μαραίνω is used of fires dying, of beauty fading, of rivers drying up, of flowers withering, and of winds and seas abating, and it was entirely suited to Paul’s meaning if he had wanted to say that the glow on Moses’ face was fading out. Similarly, we already know what word Paul used to signify the ‘removal’ of a veil: περιαιρέω (2 Cor 3:16).” Thus, it is highly improbable that Paul uses καταργέω in 2 Cor 3 with the anomalous meanings “fade away,” “come to an end,” or “remove.”

⁶⁷Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 284, admits that καταργέω can mean “nullify” or “make ineffective,” but objects to this translation on the basis of the present tense of καταργουμένην. He argues that the aorist should be expected (“nullified”) rather than the present (“is being nullified”). Therefore, the translation of “fading” is more appropriate in Harris’ view. But this objection misses the obvious point that Paul’s historical referent is the old covenant, carved in letters on stone at Sinai, which was in the process of becoming null and void afterward, according to Paul. It is no longer *being nullified* in the strict sense since the new covenant has been inaugurated by Christ. I also disagree with Hafemann here as I do above in the exegesis of Exod 34:29–35, who states that “Paul’s point is that the glory on Moses’ face was continuously being brought to an end or cut off in regard to its impact (note the passive voice of the verb). Within the context of Exodus 32–34, this reference to the glory on Moses’ face being stopped

Paul’s use of *καταργέω* is puzzling, however, since it has no basis in Exodus 34:29–35, nor in the rest of the OT. Moses’ face is never said to be “rendered null and void,” much less “fading.” In fact, the opposite seems to be the case in that Exodus 34:35 illustrates the ongoing duration of the shining aspect of Moses’ face. The key lies in what was already stated above with reference to *δόξα*. It is crucial for understanding this passage to note that in every case where Paul references “glory” (*δόξα*) in 3:7–18, it refers to either the old or new covenants and not to the shining of Moses’ face (i.e., its glow). In verse 7, *δόξα* is a feature of the old covenant in the same way that *δόξα* accompanies the “ministry of the Spirit” (*ἡ διακονία τοῦ πνεύματος*) in verse 8. This point is reiterated in verses 9–11, in particular with the shift from the feminine *τὴν καταργουμένην* in 3:7 (referring to *τὴν δόξαν* of Moses’ face) to the neuter *τὸ καταγόμενον* in 3:10–11, both of which are characterized by *δόξα*.⁶⁸ Therefore, Paul is not saying that the glory on Moses’ face was becoming null and void, but rather the old covenant. In other words, the glory on Moses’ face by synecdoche represented that the glory of the old covenant was, Paul says, which was becoming null and void.⁶⁹

points to the fact that, if left unattended, Moses’ mediation of God’s glory would have destroyed Israel because of their ‘stiff-necked’ condition” (Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 148.). Hafemann asks who or what was rendering the glory inoperative. His answer lies in Moses’ veil, which is discussed below. This view is limited in scope, however, since it presupposes that the glory on Moses’ face is actually the full manifestation of God’s glory, and which, if not veiled, would destroy Israel. Hafemann continually points to Exod 33:3, 5 for this premise. But there is no evidence of this supposition in the text (see above). Hafemann also wrongly asserts that in the long line of canonical interpretation, Moses’ ministry (including Exod 34:29–35) was interpreted not only as an act of divine mercy, but primarily as a ministry of judgment on a rebellious people (148–49). This assertion is true generally (cf. e.g., Num 14:26–35; Deut 1:3, 34–46; 2:14–16; 9:6–8; 29:4, etc.), but not with respect to the passage in question—Exod 34:29–35—which, as I have demonstrated above, is interpreted canonically as a divine theological statement of Yhwh’s gracious and compassionate character, not his judgment and wrath.

⁶⁸Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 101.

⁶⁹Garrett, “Veiled Hearts,” 747.

By contrast, Paul remarks that if the “ministry of death” came with “such glory,” should not now the “ministry of the Spirit,” which refers to the “ministry of the new covenant” in 3:6, have greater glory?⁷⁰ The “ministry” of the new covenant is a ministry of life. Paul asserts that the glory of the old covenant is nothing in comparison to the new (3:10). Again, however, this has nothing to do with “brightness” or “shining,” but with the “ministry of the Spirit.” In the giving of the Spirit the new covenant is now the realization of the transformative grace of God. Thus, the experience that Moses had in Exodus 34:5–7, is now universal.⁷¹ The divine “goodness”—grace and compassion—displayed to the Israelites via Moses’ face is superseded by an even great display of “goodness” in the new covenant.

Paul continues to build the contrast in 3:11 between that which is τὸ καταργούμενον (“becoming null and void”) and that which is τὸ μένον (“the thing that remains”), that is, the new covenant. What beforehand came with glory, indeed, a huge and textually significant display of glory in Exodus 34, is now annulled in favor of a greater and more abiding new covenant. The glory that accompanies Christ—through the Spirit, 3:8—is both greater and permanent. This implies that the former glory of the law was never meant to be permanent. In Exodus 32–34, Yhwh threatened to cancel his covenant program with Israel because of their sin at Sinai. Thus, even in the initial stages of national Israel the covenant document is subject to be voided. Perhaps, finally, this explains Paul’s use of καταργέω, which is only used in 3:7–11 to refer to the old covenant. Paul understands on the basis of the text with which he references (Exod 34:5–

⁷⁰It is customary in scholarship to cite here Paul’s use of the familiar rabbinic device of *a minore ad maius* (lesser to greater) to make his point. For more on this rhetorical device, see Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 239ff.

⁷¹Garrett, “Veiled Hearts,” 747.

7; 29–35) that the covenant at Sinai would never abide eternally. It was never meant to be a permanent covenant (τὸ μένον) like the one ushered in by Christ through the Spirit, which by contrast entails a “letter” written by the Spirit of God and on “tablets of human hearts” (3:3).⁷² The ministry of “death” and “condemnation” characterize the old covenant, even though it too had glory. “Forgiveness” and a “new heart” make up the new covenant, God’s greater glory.

3:12–18

The superior “hope” of the greater glory is self-motivating for Paul, and thus promotes boldness (παρρησία) in his new covenant ministry (3:12). In light of such boldness, Paul does not have to do what Moses did, who would put a veil (κάλυμμα)⁷³ over his face when he was not operating as a mediator of God’s law, so that the Israelites would not stare at Moses’ face forever until the end of the old covenant, which was becoming null and void (3:13). The use of the “veil” here is not given a special function. It seems that Paul is simply reiterating what the OT says about the veil in a metaphorical way. Moses merely used the veil in a practical way so that the Israelites wouldn’t be afraid to come near him. As leader, what Moses previously concealed (i.e., the glory that came with the giving of the Sinaitic covenant) is now displayed openly in Paul’s new covenant ministry. This gets to the point of Paul’s response to his opponents, who “veiled” the new covenant in the old covenant. Paul does not have to conceal his ministry in the new covenant in a veil as Moses did.

⁷²Cf. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 134, who understands the use of καταργέω not as a narrative description but as “a retrospective theological judgment. Indeed, the meaning of verse 7 is explicated by verse 10: the glory turns out to have been impermanent not because it dwindled away but because it has now been eclipsed by the greater glory of the ministry of the new covenant.”

⁷³Cf. LXX Exod 34:33, 34, 35, where the translator also uses κάλυμμα.

Paul states Moses' purpose in the second half of 3:13, which is replete with difficulty, particularly with εἰς τὸ τέλος τοῦ καταργουμένου.⁷⁴ There are two issues at stake: (1) the meaning of the prepositional phrase, εἰς τὸ τέλος, and (2) the precise referent of τοῦ καταργουμένου. If we understand the latter word identically with the previous usages in 3:7, 11—as a reference to the old covenant—then the phrase would mean that Moses veiled his face so that the Israelites would not stare intently (literally), “into the end of that which is being nullified—the old covenant.”

Scholars have offered a variety of interpretations of 3:13, ranging from Moses veiling himself because he wanted to hide something from the Israelites, or because he wanted to protect them from something.⁷⁵ Paul's remarks are in line with Philo, cited above, who says that Moses

. . . went down and his appearance was far more beautiful than when he had gone up, so that those who saw him were filled with awe and amazement; their eyes could not continue to stand the brightness that flashed from him like the brilliance of the sun.⁷⁶

Thus, according to Philo, the Israelites could not endure Moses' face because of its “brightness,” similar to the “brilliance of the sun.” But why exactly did Moses veil his face? Was it because of its brightness? I have already argued against the view that Moses' face was fading (καταργέω), which would require that τέλος in 3:13 be used in a temporal sense and refer to the gradual decrease (“to the *end*”) of glory emanating from Moses.⁷⁷ Others see that it is the old covenant that is “fading” and passing away, and so

⁷⁴A. T. Hanson remarks that 2 Cor 3 is “the Mount Everest of Pauline texts as far as difficulty is concerned—or should we rather call it the sphinx among texts, since its difficulty lies in its enigmatic quality rather than its complexity?” (“The Midrash in II Corinthians 3: A Reconsideration,” *JSNT* 3, no. 9 [1980]: 19).

⁷⁵See the helpful survey in Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 184–90.

⁷⁶Philo, *On Moses*, 2.70.

⁷⁷F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 121.

Moses veiled himself to conceal the temporary character of that covenant.⁷⁸ Still others view the “fading” of Moses’ face as symbolic of the “temporary nature of nomadic religion,” meaning that the Israelites were blind in viewing the Sinaitic covenant as “the final embodiment of God’s salvation.”⁷⁹ In other interpretations, Moses is protecting the Israelites in some way, either from the sacred character of the divine glory, or simply out of deference to God himself.⁸⁰ But overall, the consensus among scholarship is that Paul is imposing a typological or allegorical understanding of Exodus 34:29–35, reinterpreting the passage with Christian presuppositions, all the while evidently neglecting the text’s original meaning.⁸¹ Dumbrell outlines the implications of such a view: “If Paul’s argument here is simply a tour de force, then the Hellenistic congregations to which he writes are being invited to regard Paul as the primary authority to which they must have recourse and not the OT to which he himself seems to defer.”⁸²

Bruce sees a contrast between the fading glory of Moses and the unfading glory of Jesus (2 Cor 4:6). He argues that Moses had to reenter the presence of God to “recharge” his face so that the Israelites would not see that the glory was waning. So also C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, BNTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 120: Moses veiled his face “so that they might not see the glory come to an end and thus be led to disparage Moses as being of no more than temporary importance.” Barrett’s interpretation misses a point previously made, that the Greek text demands that what was “fading” (according to Barrett’s translation) cannot be Moses’ face.

⁷⁸James D. G. Dunn, “2 Corinthians III.17–The Lord Is the Spirit,” *JTS* 21, no. 2 (1970): 311.

⁷⁹Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, WBC, vol. 40 (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 68.

⁸⁰C. J. A. Hickling, “The Sequence of Thought in II Corinthians, Chapter Three,” *NTS* 21, no. 03 (1975): 391: “Moses, so Paul could well have thought, did not spare the Israelites the sight of the borrowed light’s final extinction in order to allow them to think that it was still shining, but because the end—like the beginning—of the period of transfiguration was too sacred for human gaze.” In response, Garland (*2 Corinthians*, 186) correctly notes that “the problem with this view is that Paul does not draw any special attention to its sacredness but to the fact that it was being rendered inoperative,” or, “null and void” in Garrett’s translation.

⁸¹See Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 122–53; Morna D. Hooker, “Beyond the Things That Are Written: St. Paul’s Use of Scripture,” *NTS* 27, no. 3 (1981): 295–309; Stockhausen, *Moses’ Veil and the Glory of the New Covenant*, 116.

⁸²William J. Dumbrell, “Paul’s Use of Exodus 34 in 2 Corinthians 3,” in *God Who is Rich in*

The “protection” view is espoused by Hafemann, who argues that if the veil was removed then the Israelites would see the glory of Yhwh, which would judge them and perhaps even destroy them (Exod 33:3, 5).⁸³ Thus, for Hafemann τέλος does not refer to the aim or goal, but to the *consequences* of viewing the divine glory in Moses’ face—judgment on a “stiff-necked” people with hardened hearts. Due to Israel’s idolatry with the golden calf, Moses alone can mediate God’s glory to the people.⁸⁴ Thus, he must veil himself to prevent the Israelites from “gazing intently” on his face and destroying themselves as a result.⁸⁵ In doing so, “The veil of Moses makes it possible for the glory of God to be in the midst of the people, albeit now mediated through Moses, without destroying them.”⁸⁶

But again, these readings are difficult to square with the data from Exodus 34:29–35. The Israelites in that passage are clearly staring at Moses’ glowing face, which causes them to respond with fear (34:30). Moses veils his face only as a *response* to the fear, not as a means of protection. Moreover, the plain sense of 34:35, as I demonstrated previously, is that Moses made a practice of coming and going from the tent of meeting with some regularity, and the Israelites obviously “saw” Moses’ shining face in each instance (cf. also, the motif of “seeing,” רָאָה, in that text). Indeed, the text *does not* indicate that the Israelites respond with fear at any subsequent moment when Moses comes to them unveiled. The text is silent on the notion of fear in response to Moses after

Mercy: Essays Presented to Dr. D. B. Knox, ed. David Peterson and Peter O’Brien (Homebush, Australia: Lancer Books, 1986), 180.

⁸³Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 207.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, 209, 215.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 358.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 223.

34:30, and thus Hafemann’s position is weakened. If the veil’s *purpose* according to Hafemann is to protect the Israelites from God’s wrath, then why did Moses customarily remove it when communicating the will of God?⁸⁷

When the preposition εἰς is linked with τὸ τέλος, the phrase appears in LXX Joshua 3:16 (“completely”) and then in a host of Psalm titles,⁸⁸ translated “for the end.” Without the article, εἰς τέλος is more frequent in the LXX, meaning “at the end” (Gen 46:4), “utterly” (Josh 10:24),⁸⁹ and “forever” (Ps 9:19; 15:11; 43:23; etc.).⁹⁰ The only instance in the NT of εἰς τὸ τέλος with the article is 2 Corinthians 3:13. Without the article, εἰς τέλος appears primarily in the gospels (Matt 10:22; 24:13; Mark 13:13; Luke 18:5; John 13:1) and once in 1 Thessalonians 2:16. After analyzing each of these NT occurrences, Garrett concludes, “Because εἰς τέλος can be understood in a fairly literal rendering, ‘unto (the) end,’ interpreters have not recognized that this is a standard Greek idiom for doing something with constancy or completely.”⁹¹

Thus, in 2 Corinthians 3:13 there is a temporal sense to what Paul is saying about Moses’ veil.⁹² As such, πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἀτενίσαι τοὺς υἱοὺς Ἰσραὴλ εἰς τὸ τέλος τοῦ

⁸⁷So also Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 90.

⁸⁸Pss 4:1; 5:1; 6:1; 8:1; 9:1; 10:1; 11:1; 12:1; 13:1; 17:1; etc.

⁸⁹The LXX translates εἰς τέλος from מְרַחֵם, which emphasizes the degree in which the slaughter of Ai is carried out, complementing the idea from the previous line, מְרַחֵם מְרַחֵם מְרַחֵם (“to smite them with a very great slaughter”). Brenton’s translation of the LXX captures the idea: “Joshua and all Israel ceased destroying them *utterly* with a very great slaughter” (Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986]). Greenspoon’s translation of “to the end” is literal but does not make sense of the idiom in context (*A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, ed. Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright [New York: Oxford University Press, 2007], 183).

⁹⁰εἰς τέλος translates in Ps 9:19 from נָצַח, a frequent word that nearly always means “forever,” “for all time,” or “endless,” when negated.

⁹¹Garrett, “Veiled Hearts,” 753.

⁹²Scholars who understand τέλος as temporal include Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 207; Barrett, *The*

καταργουμένου would mean, “so that the Israelites might not gaze intently at (Moses’ face) *forever*, that is, that which was being nullified.” Paul is not stating that the Israelites would literally stare at Moses until the old covenant is obsolete, for his language is obviously hyperbolic.⁹³

But τέλος is frequently construed with a teleological meaning (purpose, goal) as well. If so, then the same phrase could also mean that Moses veiled his face “so that the Israelites would not stare *into the end of* (or *the termination/goal of*) what was being nullified,” which is a tautology of sorts.⁹⁴ I favor the temporal sense, although there is good reason to see both uses here,⁹⁵ and either view works in favor of the thesis developed in this dissertation, that is, that Moses’ face primarily connotes the theological idea of grace. Moses put on the veil so that the Israelites would not stare at his face forever (temporal). But his real purpose (teleological) is emphasized theologically.

The meaning of τέλος brings together the main ideas argued in this dissertation. The point of the Israelites’ journey to Sinai is to become God’s treasured possession and a kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6). This purpose falls short in that the Israelites’ stiff-necked nature (Exod 33:5) and “hardened minds” (2 Cor 3:14) overtakes them and they transgress God’s covenant. Therefore, God cannot be in their midst in his full divine

Second Epistle to the Corinthians, 120. Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 309–12, prefers “outcome.”

⁹³Garrett, “Veiled Hearts,” 753.

⁹⁴Both Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 133, and Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 219 n28, see a tautology here: the end of the thing being put to an end.

⁹⁵Garrett points to Rom 6:22 and 10:4 as instances where Paul subtly applies the meaning of both “complete/forever” and “goal/purpose” to τέλος (“Veiled Hearts,” 754). He states, “In short, the veil was put in place so that the Israelites would not be forever (εις τὸ τέλος) staring at Moses’ face, but it was also Moses’ resignation to the fact that the Israelites would never see into the real purpose (εις τὸ τέλος) of having a covenant with God, even when it was quite literally shining like a beacon in front of them.”

majesty. When Moses conceals the reflection of that majesty (“glory”) in his face, he conceals the real intent of the old covenant, that is, its purpose. The Israelites were preoccupied with the glow on his face instead of the meaning behind the glow, that is, they responded to the superficiality of the shining rather than to the deeper reality. The reality is that *life* accompanies the *presence* of God, which is emblematic in the radiance on Moses’ face, God’s very “goodness,” as described above. Therefore, Moses had to don the veil even though it was grace for the Israelites.

Paul, on the other hand, writes that in the new covenant, life and light come with the indwelling of the Spirit. In turn, the new covenant is characterized by grace, life, and light, which means that Paul’s ministry is now characterized by “boldness” (3:12).

Paul’s statement in verse 14 that whenever the old covenant is read, the “same veil remains unlifted” (τὸ αὐτὸ κάλυμμα . . . μένει, μὴ ἀνακαλυπτόμενον), and that “through Christ it is taken away” (ὅτι ἐν Χριστῷ καταργεῖται),⁹⁶ is an additional conundrum. This translation raises the question of why the veil is “unlifted.”⁹⁷ It is difficult to make sense of ἀνακαλύπτω if the normal meaning of “remove” or “taken away” is allowed (cf. NIV). It also carries the meaning “uncover” or “unveiled,” which seems more appropriate here.⁹⁸ Κάλυμμα is the implied subject, but no agency is provided, and the verb must be passive or middle voice. The problem lies in the object and the negation of the verb. What is the veil “not uncovering”? Paul does not say

⁹⁶This translation is fairly standard. Cf. ESV, NRSV, REB, NJB, TNIV.

⁹⁷It is safe to admit from the outset that the referent of τὰ νοήματα αὐτῶν (“their minds”) is the Israelites of the exodus generation, whose hearts were “hardened.” Once Paul transitions to the era of the new covenant (ἄχρι γὰρ τῆς σήμερον ἡμέρας), the referent of those who receive the “reading of the old covenant” (τῆ ἀναγνώσει τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης) is Paul’s contemporary Jewish population.

⁹⁸Cf. J. P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *L&N* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), s.v. “Ἀνακαλύπω”; Walter Bauer et al., *BAGD* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v., “Ἀνακαλύπω.”

explicitly, but if the *ὅτι* is translated as “that” instead of “because,” then the sentence is more intelligible: “the veil is not uncovering the truth that (*ὅτι*) in Christ it is being rendered null and void.”⁹⁹

Again, the veil here is now used metaphorically. Paul is not saying that the veil in Exodus 34:29–35 has this same function. He is making an analogy and uses the veil for his larger point that the new covenant of Christ is greater than the old covenant. The real problem is not the veil but that the Israelites’ minds were “hardened,” or “stiff-necked,” as Exodus 32–34 makes clear. Therefore, metaphorically speaking, when the Israelites read the old covenant they read it with a veil over their eyes, so to speak, thinking that the former glory of the old covenant still exists. The crux of the matter is that it has been superseded by Christ, with whom there is no veil. So the Israelites are not uncovering the fact that in Christ the old covenant is null and void.

With this understanding in mind, the rest of the passage falls in line. In contrast to the former veil over Moses’ face (note the emphatic *ἀλλά*), to this day whenever Moses (i.e., the old covenant) is read a “veil” lies upon their hearts (3:15). A shift has taken place, therefore, with respect to the location of the veil. In the old covenant it was on Moses’ face because the Israelites could not comprehend the full meaning of the reflected glory. In the new covenant (and with particular reference to Paul’s opponents), the veil is on the heart, which recalls 3:3 and Paul’s allusion to Ezekiel 36:26. A changed heart was the ultimate goal of the old covenant. This means that the person with a veiled heart is unable to see the full truth of the new covenant. The obvious corollary is that the reason for their inability to see the truth has already been stated in 3:14: “their minds were hardened.” When someone turns to the Lord (*κύριος*), however (note the contrastive

⁹⁹Following Garrett, “Veiled Hearts,” 757. This translation also gives *καταργεῖται* its proper meaning.

δὲ), the “veil,” so to speak, is removed from their face (3:16), and they are free to experience the life-giving power of the Spirit.¹⁰⁰

In 3:17, “Yhwh” (κύριος) refers to the Spirit, as it does in the previous verse. And where the Spirit of Yhwh is, there is freedom. The phrase, τὸ πνεῦμα κυρίου, likely picks up on the gift of Yhwh’s power to OT judges, prophets and kings (Judg 3:10; 11:29; 1 Sam 10:6; 2 Sam 23:2; 2 Chr 15:1; Isa 61:1–2; Ezek 11:5).¹⁰¹ In the context of the current discussion, “freedom” refers to the glory of Yhwh on Sinai that is now available to anyone in the new covenant.

In 3:18, Paul says that everyone, mirroring in an uncovered or unveiled face the glory of the Lord Jesus, becomes a reflection that bears the authentic image of God, is transformed by God’s glory into God’s glory, as the counterpart to the glory that shone from the Lord Yhwh, the Spirit.

Summary

Second Corinthians 3:7–18 is a microcosm of the gospel. In a way, it is a shortened explanation of the how the promises of God have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Paul does not say that Moses’ shining face was fading and thus he concealed it with a veil so that the Israelites might not gaze at it. What he does say is that his opponents, who apparently still argue that the old covenant is the basis for their authority, have missed the crucial point that in Christ it is null and void. In other words, the ancient Israelites’

¹⁰⁰Paul makes a close connection to LXX Exod 34:34 in 2 Cor 3:16, and repeats verbatim the beginning (ἡνίκα δ’ ἄν) and the ending (περιγρεῖτο τὸ κάλυμμα) of the LXX reference. This means that Paul’s use of κύριος in 3:16–18 is likely Yhwh and not Jesus as some have argued, e.g., Simon J. Kistemaker, *2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 124. For those who view κύριος as Yhwh, See Hafemann, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel*, 398; Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 312.

¹⁰¹For support of this theme in biblical theology, see James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old & New Testaments*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2006).

inability to grasp the core meaning of Moses' shining face is analogous to Paul's opponents' inability to understand that in the new covenant the old is rendered obsolete. Thus, Moses' use of the veil for the hardened Israelites who were preoccupied with it has been transferred to the hearts of unbelievers in the new covenant era. Unbelievers do not grasp that forgiveness of sin and the gift of grace is transformative only in Christ. Moses experienced the glory of the Spirit, which produces life. This glory is now far greater in the new covenant, even if Paul's opponents fail to see it as thoroughly as their ancestors failed to see it on Moses' face, choosing rather to cling to a "letter of condemnation" (3:9) that "kills" (3:6), rather than the Spirit, which gives life (3:6), produces righteousness (3:9), and is permanent (3:11).

John 1:1–18

The study of Jesus' transfiguration and Paul's detailed biblical theological assessment of Exodus 34:29–35—each of which connects the conceptual notions of "light," "glory," and "face" to Jesus Christ—leads to the seminal passage in the NT emphasizing these very concepts: the prologue of John's Gospel (John 1:1–18). Any cursory reading of John's prologue reveals the preeminence of these themes, along with the theme of "life." The connection between "light/glory" and "life" was duly noted in previous chapters of this dissertation with respect to the presentation of Moses in Exodus 32–34. That is, the "light" on Moses' face in Exodus 34:29–35 derives from the climactic moment of Yhwh's glory passing by in 34:5–7, communicating the notion of grace with respect to the covenant. Yhwh secures Israel's "life," as it were, by renewing the covenant instead of destroying them, and by the later declaration that the covenant "is your very life" (Deut 32:47). Thus, I noted that "light" is connected with "life" and "grace/compassion" in the passage as well as in other parts of the OT. These concepts culminate in 34:29–35, as the radiant "goodness" is seen in Moses' shining visage.

Although many rightly argue that Jesus is presented as the fulfillment of the *temple* in the Gospel of John,¹⁰² the essential theological elements of John’s prologue can be traced to creational and tabernacle themes in the Pentateuch. The creational ideas expressed in Jesus as the “word” (λόγος) who is “in the beginning” (John 1:1–2), and through whom “all things were made” (1:3, 10) obviously echo Genesis 1. Moreover, that Jesus possesses “life” reflects the “breath of life” that God gives to all living things in the creation and the “tree of life” in the garden (Gen 1:30; 2:7, 9).¹⁰³

John is the only Evangelist to exclude the transfiguration narrative. But this does not mean that he fails to recognize the Jesus/Moses motif as Matthew and Paul have done. Of particular importance here are the incipient Exodus and tabernacle themes, which begin in 1:4 with Jesus being the “life” and “light” of men, to Jesus “dwelling” (i.e., pitching his tabernacle) in the world in 1:14, and end with a reference to “grace” in 1:16, to “Moses” and the “law” in 1:17—the one who knew God “face to face”—and a final comment in 1:18 that no one has ever seen God except Jesus. The imagery is clear, apparent even in the very structure of John’s prologue:¹⁰⁴

- a Word with God (1:1–2)
- b Creation through Word (1:3)
- c Received Life (1:4–5)

¹⁰²See, e.g., the recent studies from Paul M. Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Temple in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007); Alan Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus’ Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John*, JSNTSup 220 (London: Continuum, 2002).

¹⁰³On this point see the detailed study from Masanobu Endō, *Creation and Christology: A Study on the Johannine Prologue in the Light of Early Jewish Creation Accounts*, WUNT 149, Reihe 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

¹⁰⁴This chiasm is not free from difficulty, but is still believable given the plain association of words and themes within the prologue. These are the same ideas that I am highlighting in this short study, and so the chiasm is appropriate. The chiasm is from R. Alan Culpepper, “The Pivot of John’s Prologue,” *NTS* 27, no. 1 (1980): 16. For other proposals see Jeffrey Lloyd Staley, “The Structure of John’s Prologue: Its Implications for the Gospel’s Narrative Structure,” *CBQ* 48, no. 2 (1986): 241–64; Mary Coloe, “The Structure of the Johannine Prologue and Genesis 1,” *ABR* 45 (1997): 40–55.

- d Baptist (1:6–8)
- e Incarnation & Response (1:9–10)
- f His own—Israel (1:11)
- g Accept the Word (1:12a)
- h To become Children of God (1:12c)
- g' Believe the Word (1:12b)
- f' His own—Believers (1:13)
- e' Incarnation & Response (1:14)
- d' Baptist (1:15)
- c' Received Grace (1:16)
- b' Grace & Truth (1:17)
- a' Word with God (1:18)

John 1 commences with an introduction very similar to Genesis 1. The “Word of God” is “with God” (1:1–2). Indeed, at the end of the chiasm the Word is “at the Father’s side” (1:18), which correlates with the opening as an *inclusio*. The creation was made “through him” (1:3) just as “grace and truth” came “through Jesus Christ” (1:17). The Word possesses “life” and “light” (1:4–5), which he freely offers “from his fullness” in his “grace” (1:16). He was witnessed by John the Baptist, who is not the “light” (1:6–8) because in the grand scheme he is posterior to the eternal Word and not anterior (1:15). The “light” of the Word came into the “world” (1:9–10) in “flesh” to “tabernacle” among men, revealing his “glory” and his “grace” (1:14). Although his own people did not receive him (1:11), those who accept the Word (1:12a) and believe it (1:12b) are reborn (1:13) as “children of God” (1:12c), the central idea of the whole pericope.

The themes of “light,” “grace,” and “presence” are fundamental themes between John 1:1–18 and the texts studied earlier. “Life” and “light” are particularly connected in 1:4–5, from which they derive from one individual, the *λόγος*. Many scholars have noted the theme of “light” throughout the Gospel of John.¹⁰⁵ John uses “light” as a metaphor to refer both to Jesus and to how Jesus illuminates the world

¹⁰⁵Cf. 3:19, 20, 21; 5:35; 8:12; 9:5; 11:9, 10; 12:35, 36. For an extensive discussion of the symbolism in John’s gospel, see R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 180–98; Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

around. In John's letters, "light" refers more so to God himself (1 John 1:5) rather than Jesus specifically. Nevertheless, John presents "light" as penetrating "darkness" (1:5), and that Jesus alone is the "light" (as opposed to John the Baptist, 1:6–8). Indeed, he is the "true light" that "enlightens/shines upon" everyone. "Life" derives from the "light," and "life is the light" (1:4) at the same time. In John's prologue, "light" therefore refers to Jesus, and "life" comes from him alone. This concept, and the contrast between light and darkness, echoes both the creation (Gen 1:3–5, 14–18) and light symbolism found in later OT texts (Isa 9:2; 42:6–7; 49:6; 60:1–5; Mal 4:2).

The primary connection with Exodus 34 occurs in 1:14–18. When the "Word became flesh," his light is translated as his "glory," a "glory full of grace and truth" (1:14). This is a key verse in John's prologue. This glory is specifically connected to "dwelling" (σκηνοῶ) with the people. The connection with the tabernacle and later temple in the OT should not be missed, as it is equally appropriate to say that the Word became flesh and "tabernacled" or "pitched his dwelling" among men, which would draw out the parallel in more specific terms.¹⁰⁶ The significance of this parallel is brought out in that the main reason and purpose for the tabernacle in Exodus and later texts is for God to dwell among the people. This is illustrated in that the primary word associated with God's dwelling among Israel is the same one used in the LXX, σκηνη.¹⁰⁷ The word is used to refer to the tabernacle itself as God's dwelling, and to the final hope of the restoration of God's people as seen in Exodus and in the prophets:

¹⁰⁶Cf. Exod 25:8–9; 33:7; 2 Sam 7:6; Pss 15:1; 26:8; 27:4–6; 43:3; 74:7; 84:1; Ezek 37:27–28.

¹⁰⁷C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (Richmond, VA: Westminster John Knox, 1978), 165, comments, "the word σκηνοῦν was chosen here with special reference to the word δόξα which follows. It recalls, in sound and in meaning, the Hebrew שכן, which means 'to dwell'; the verb is used of the dwelling of God with Israel (e.g., Exod 25:8; 29:46; Zech 2:14), and a derived noun שכניה was used (though not in the OT) as a periphrasis for the name of God himself." Barrett fails to specify, however, where exactly the noun is used in non-canonical literature.

Exodus 29:45–46—“And I shall dwell in the midst of the sons of Israel, and I will be their God. . . . And they shall show that I am Yhwh their God.” (וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם בְּנֵי) (וְיִדְעוּ כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם)¹⁰⁸

Joel 4:17 (ET 3:17)—“So that you may know that I am Yhwh your God, who dwells (LXX, ὁ κατασκηνώων) in Zion.” (וְיִדְעֻם כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם שָׁכֵן בְּצִיּוֹן)

Zechariah 2:14–15 (ET 2:10–11)—“. . . for behold, I am coming, and I shall dwell in your midst (LXX, καὶ κατασκηνώσω ἐν μέσῳ σου, וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכְךָ) declares Yhwh. And many numerous nations shall join themselves to Yhwh on that day, and will be my people (וְהָיוּ לִי לְעָם). And I shall dwell in your midst (LXX, καὶ κατασκηνώσουσιν ἐν μέσῳ σου, וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכְךָ).

Ezekiel 37:27—“And my dwelling place shall be with them (LXX, καὶ ἔσται ἡ κατασκήνωσίς μου ἐν αὐτοῖς), and I shall be their God, and they shall be my people.” (וְהָיָה מְשָׁכְנִי עֲלֵיהֶם וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְהָמָּה יְהִיוּ-לִי לְעָם).

The reference to Jesus’ dwelling among the people resulting in the revealing of his “glory” (δόξα) therefore hearkens back to the glory in the tabernacle and the manifestation of the כְּבוֹד יְהוָה. Jesus’ primary purpose in John’s gospel is to bring δόξα to God (9:3; 11:4, 40). In the bringing of glory to God, Jesus himself, as the divine λόγος, emanates glory. The presence of Jesus “in the world” (1:9) echoes the presence of God in the tabernacle. Jesus, then, is seen as the ultimate fulfillment to the main purpose of the tabernacle and later temple—for God to dwell among his people. This purpose locates Jesus “at the climactic end of the spectrum of God’s self-disclosure to his people.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸The LXX has, καὶ ἐπικληθήσομαι ἐν τοῖς υἱοῖς Ἰσραὴλ, “and I will be invoked among the sons of Israel.”

¹⁰⁹G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*

John 1:14, therefore, brings out in confluence two of the three main themes of Exodus 32–34: presence and glory, in addition to the overarching program of the tabernacle in the midst of the people. These themes, as was shown above, converge in 34:5–7 as Yhwh’s presence descends upon Moses and his name is proclaimed. In John 1:14, they converge in a person, the “light” and “Word became flesh,” who as the only Son of the Father possesses the Father’s “glory,” which entails his “grace.”

“Grace” is also a key theme in 1:14–18 as it is in Exodus 32–34. Many scholars note that “grace and truth” in 1:14 is in all probability alluding to Exodus 34:6, where Yhwh speaks his name and expounds upon his character. Throughout the present work I have argued that the primary meaning of God’s glory in Exodus 33–34 is supremely his “goodness” (Exod 33:19). That is, Yhwh is a God that is “merciful (רחום) and gracious (נחון),” and “abounding in steadfast love (רב־חֶסֶד) and truthfulness (אמת).” These are the essential attributes of Yhwh’s name, and the main point of Moses’ glorified vision of Yhwh. At the end of Exodus 34:6 the LXX has *καὶ πολυέλεος καὶ ἀληθινός*, which corresponds in part to John 1:14d, *πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας*. The two words that John uses, “grace and truth,” are his way of summing up all that Yhwh proclaimed at Sinai. In other words, the glory that was revealed to Moses and that passed before him and thereafter shines as a beacon of light from Moses’ face to the Israelites, displaying Yhwh’s divine goodness and gracious character, is the very same glory that John and the apostles saw in the divine *λόγος*-made-flesh.

It is, in addition, hard to miss the connection between *λόγος* and *law* in this prologue. The law is emphasized repeatedly in Exodus 32–34 as the writing of God. Paul makes mention of this in calling it the “written thing” in 2 Corinthians 3:6–7. This recalls

(Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 422.

Exodus 32:15–16 and the writing of the commands by the “finger of God,” and the subsequent tablets that Moses took with him from the mountain in 34:27–28. The tent of meeting in Exodus 33:1–12, moreover, was the place where Yhwh would *speak* to Moses and communicate his will/law for the Israelites. Moses later hears the divine name, spoken by Yhwh himself, and writes the covenant law on tablets of stone. In John 1, at the fullness of redemptive history, John says that the eternal *Word* has become flesh. He is therefore the true *σκηνή*, and the ultimate manifestation of the presence of God among human beings.¹¹⁰

An important note in 1:14 is that the incarnate *λόγος* is “full” (*πλήρης*) of grace and truth. Picking up on this term, John writes in 1:16 that from this “fullness” (*πλήρωμα*) all have received what many English translations render, “grace *upon* grace” (*χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος*). There is a debate as to the precise meaning of this phrase and the function of *ἀντὶ*. There are five reasons, however, that *ἀντὶ* should be translated, “instead of.” First, note the clear parallelism in 1:16–17:

17a—ὅτι ὁ νόμος	διὰ Μωϋσέως	ἐδόθη
17b—ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια	διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ	ἐγένετο

Second, there is no *ἀλλά* or *δὲ* in this sentence, so it is unlikely that *ἀντὶ* is intended to note a contrast. Moreover, *ἀντὶ* is not usually used in such strongly adversative clauses,¹¹¹ nor is there any indication in the Greek that requires a contrast.¹¹² The parallel, then, is likely synthetic and not antithetical, connoting progression. Third, the complementary clauses in the sentence are not synonymous, that is, “law” is not synonymous with “grace

¹¹⁰D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 128.

¹¹¹Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament with Scripture, Subject, and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 364–68.

¹¹²Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John* (London: Oliphants, 1972), 98.

and truth,” nor Moses with Jesus Christ, nor with the verbs “give” or “came.”¹¹³ Fourth, if verse 17 is an explanation of verse 16 given the opening ὅτι (*for, since*) that begins verse 17, then “upon” (which would normally require ἐπί) as a translation of ἀντί is insufficient.¹¹⁴ Carson argues convincingly that the plain meaning (and dominant usage) of ἀντί is “instead of,” as in “grace *instead of* grace,” rather than “upon” as many English translations render the term.¹¹⁵ Fifth, this translation (“instead of”) brings to the fore the comparison John presents between Moses/law and Jesus/grace in verse 16.¹¹⁶ The divine passive, ἐδόθη, compliments the notion that the giving of the law was a gracious gift from God, which corresponds naturally with the presentation of the law in the OT as a display of grace (cf. Deut 4:1–8; 6:20–25),¹¹⁷ just as Paul indicates that it was also “glory” (2 Cor 3:7–11, discussed above). Taken together, these five points show that the *law* in John’s prologue is not set over against the *grace* that comes through Jesus. Rather, as Carson notes, “The covenant of law . . . is seen as a gracious gift from God, now replaced by a further gracious gift, the ‘grace and truth’ embodied in Jesus Christ—here named for the first time as the human being who is nothing other than the Word-made-flesh.”¹¹⁸

¹¹³Ruth Edwards, “Χάριν ἀντί χάριτος (John 1.16): Grace and Law in the Johannine Prologue,” in *New Testament Backgrounds*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, JSNTSup 43 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 197; Alan Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus’ Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John*, JSNTSup 220 (London: Continuum, 2002), 155–16.

¹¹⁴See the discussion of the various views for how to translate ἀντί in Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 131–34.

¹¹⁵The ESV has a footnote offering “grace *in the place of* grace” as an alternative.

¹¹⁶Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 132.

¹¹⁷The contention of Daniel I. Block is that the whole of Deuteronomy is a message of grace (“The Grace of Torah: The Mosaic Prescription for Life [Deut 4:1–8; 6:20–25],” *BSac* 162, no. 645 [2005]: 3–22).

¹¹⁸Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 132.

Jesus is therefore superior to Moses in what Moses represents—the “glory” and “grace” of the old covenant—just as Paul notes that the glory/gift of the Spirit in the new covenant era is superior to the glory of the old covenant.¹¹⁹ This view of John 1:16–17 confirms the earlier interpretation of Exodus 34 advocated in this dissertation. Moses’ “ministry” (to use the Pauline term) to the Israelites is “grace.” In the OT this expression, encompassed in the terms דָּבָר and primarily יְהוָה as shown above, entails covenant loyalty and ultimately to God’s commitment to Abraham to remain faithful to his promise (cf. Exod 32:13). This is demonstrated in the numerous places where the Yhwh creed is cited in the OT. John’s use of the expression, at the very least in 1:17, shows that the covenant of Yhwh and Yhwh’s faithfulness to his promises finds its ultimate fulfillment in the person of Jesus, a covenant person as opposed to a covenant people. The law (i.e., the old covenant) was given in grace. It is now superseded in “grace *and* truth” by the coming of Jesus and the establishing of the new covenant.

Verse 18 draws upon Exodus 33:20, that no sinful human can see God and live (cf. Ps 97:2–3). This verse acts as an *inclusio* with verse 1. Although no one has ever seen God, the $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ who is “with God” has “made him known.” This notion is also found later in John’s gospel (6:46). The implication is that the divine Word has actually seen God unlike any other man, including Moses. Here again the superiority of Jesus to Moses is self-evident: “Jesus is an agent vastly superior to Moses, for unlike Moses who only beheld glimpses of God’s glory, Jesus *is* God’s glory.”¹²⁰ Given the chiasmic structure of the prologue along with this *inclusio*, it is not stretching the evidence to assume that the “light” spoken of in 1:4–9 alludes to the “glory” of the Word in 1:14–18. It is sometimes

¹¹⁹John also shows Jesus as superior to Jacob (4:12) and Abraham (8:53).

¹²⁰Craig A. Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John’s Prologue*, JSNTSup 89 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 186.

argued that to identify or converge “light” in John 1 explicitly with the “light” on Moses’ face would be to mistake. More likely, with the emphasis on creational themes, “light” refers to Genesis as I have already mentioned. This is true in one respect in that the creational themes dominate the first half of John’s prologue. But the second half of the prologue is dominated by allusions to the Exodus, and in particular to God’s indwelling glory. This dissertation has argued that the glory at Sinai, which is reflected on the “light” of Moses’ face, is primarily connoting God’s grace. In the Johannine sense, the superiority of Jesus is reflected in that the Evangelist mentions “beholding his glory” prior to “full of grace and truth.” Thus, the δόξα of Jesus is superior to the δόξα on Moses’ face (LXX Exod 34:29).

In the context of the present study, this theological move should draw attention to Exodus 34:29–35. Yhwh disclosed his presence and glory to Moses in Exodus 34:5–7, which reflected in the “light” on Moses’ face. The “light” of Moses shines on all the Israelites. This “light” communicates primarily “grace and truth,” incipient concepts in the name of Yhwh detailed in 34:6. The rest of the OT attests how personal “light” usually entails the notion of grace as well. Moses presents the renewed “law” to the Israelites and instructs them on righteous living. But Moses is not the “true light.” Only at the fullness of time are God’s people given the fullness of God’s grace and truth, “which came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17). Jesus surpasses Moses’ glory and authority in every way. In this the importance of Exodus 32–34 is understood. In the past God made himself known by dwelling among his people in a tent, and his glory resided on his prophet, Moses, the mediator of the old covenant and the only person to know God “face to face” even without seeing God’s “face.” The glory of Moses, however, passes in his death. But Moses promised that one “like me” would come (cf. Deut 18:15–19; 34:10–12), whose “words” are the very words of God. Indeed, Jesus states in John’s gospel that Moses wrote about *him* (1:45; 5:45–46). Moses is thus a precursor or foretaste of the

prophet *exemplar* who comes as the λόγος of God, far more superior and incomparable than Moses. In the fullness of time, God reveals himself definitively in the person of his son, Jesus Christ, who mediates a new covenant, and whose glory remains even after his death, and who alone “sees God” and “makes him known” (John 1:18). John’s prologue, then, is the nexus of redemptive history, and the ultimate self-disclosure of God himself.¹²¹

Conclusion

To summarize the findings in this chapter, the NT highlights the metaphors of “grace,” “life,” and “light” all in the character of Jesus. In Matthew’s transfiguration, he describes Jesus on a mountain with a “face that shone like the sun” (17:2) as a new and greater Moses, set to accomplish a greater task in looking forward to his own “exodus” via his death and resurrection, the supreme act of grace on behalf of all people. In Paul, the concept of “grace” and the goodness of God is central to the new covenant, only greater to that of Moses. In the new covenant, the full meaning of Exodus 34 finds its ultimate expression in that “we all, with unveiled face . . . are being transformed” (2 Cor 3:18) by the power of the Spirit into the image of Jesus. This image is expounded in 2 Corinthians 4:6, which alludes to both Genesis 1:3–4 and Isaiah 9:2¹²²: “For God, who said ‘let light shine out of darkness,’ has shown in our hearts the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” In alluding to both the creation and to the messiah, Paul subtly hints that Jesus is both creator (John 1:1–2) and redeemer. The new

¹²¹The final phrase comes from Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 135.

¹²²Isaiah 9:2 is a messianic text: “The people who are walking in darkness have seen a great light; the ones dwelling in the land of deep darkness, a light has shone upon them.” See Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 153.

creation is inaugurated in Christ, under a new covenant that is more glorious than anything that preceded it (2 Cor 3:7–8).

In John’s prologue, Jesus “tabernacles” among his people (1:14). He is “life, and the life was the light of men” (1:4), a “light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not comprehended it” (1:5). In emanating light and life, Jesus is “full of grace and truth” (1:14) in much the same way that Moses’ face is understood in terms of grace and goodness.

Thus, the primary theological ideas expressed in Exodus 34:29–35—the culmination or conclusion to the golden calf narrative (Exod 32–34)—are established in the NT as well. The argumentation is centered on the Jesus/Moses motif, or contrast. Jesus is like Moses in that he inaugurates a covenant for God’s people, but is greater in that his covenant is accompanied by the Spirit, whereas Moses’ covenant was devoid of it. The “new” covenant, then, supersedes the old. Although both covenants came with “glory” as Matthew 17 and John 1 indicate, and which Paul states explicitly in 2 Corinthians 3, the “glory” and “grace” communicated on Moses’ face remained with Moses alone. That which comes in Jesus, however, abides on all people who are being transformed “into *the same image* from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18).

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Course of Study

This study has sought to explain the meaning of Exodus 34:29–35 within the context of the Old and New Testaments. In the first chapter, the methodology was set within the context of four questions: (1) What is the meaning of קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו and how does the phrase function in the context of Exodus 32–34, (2) What, if anything, does the “veil” (מִסְכָּה) contribute to this passage, (3) How is a “shining face” understood theologically in the OT and in the ANE, and (4) What are the implications for understanding allusions/quotations in NT texts such as Matthew 17:1–8, John 1:1–18, and 2 Corinthians 3:7–18? These questions were considered against the backdrop of the whole Sinaitic event of Exodus 32–34, and within the confines of ANE *Sitz im Leben*.

The Interpretation of Exodus 34:29–35

The study concludes that Moses’ face shone as a result of his experience with Yhwh’s glory in 34:5–7, which left a lasting impression on his visage. The author of Exodus describes Moses’ face as קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו, which in context means “the skin of his face shone” instead of “had horns” or other interpretations. This interpretation has many parallels in the ANE, particularly with the Mesopotamian concept of *melammu* and with instances of deities and gods “shining” and imparting their luminous nature on subordinates. The concomitant matter of Moses’ מִסְכָּה (“veil”) is simply a scarf that Moses uses to conceal his face so that the Israelites would not be frightened at his appearance.

Exodus 32–34 makes up a carefully crafted narrative that communicates a single theological principle, that *principle* being the presence of God. The pericope of Moses’ face is the conclusion of the narrative and functions to communicate Yhwh’s “goodness” and “glory” (33:18). This “goodness” (טוב) is explained as Yhwh’s “name” and includes, theologically, the notion of his “grace and compassion,” the main themes in 34:5–7. Corollary themes include “life” and “light.” Yhwh is gracious to the Israelites in that he secures their lives in the renewal of the covenant.

Theological Implications in the Old Testament

In the OT, the theological themes noted above were set within biblical theology. The shining face metaphor is widely diffused in the ANE culture and connotes favor and beneficence to individuals. In the biblical material, Aaron’s Blessing in Numbers 6:24–26 conveys the same ideas expressed in Exodus 34:29–35; it expresses the hope that Yhwh will shine his face once more on the worshipers gathered in his presence, and impart his blessing of grace as they offer up sacrifices. Nearly every later OT text that mentions a shining face directly alludes to Aaron’s Blessing, including notable instances in the Psalms (e.g., 4:7; 31:17; 67:1) and Daniel (9:17).

In canonical tradition, a variety of texts were considered with regard to the theological meaning of Exodus 34:29–35. First, the Sinai theophany is echoed in Elijah’s experience in 1 Kings 19. Although Elijah’s face does not shine as a result of his experience with Yhwh’s glory, the characteristics associated with this theophany match those in Exodus 24 and 34. Second, while Moses’ veil is not explicitly referenced in the OT, there are three important later texts that emphasize the “veiling” of God’s glory and that were given due attention. Habakkuk 3 concerns the eschatological judgment on the enemies of God’s people. Theologically, the invocation of God’s glory/presence in Habakkuk is for the sake of Yhwh’s name and is accompanied by a plea of grace/mercy

on behalf of the Israelites. God's presence is "shrouded" in a canopy in this text (הַבִּיזוֹן) and his "rays" shine forth (קִרְיָיִם). This study concludes that the canopy around God's glory makes the glory tolerable, since no one can see God fully and live (Exod 33:20), although the function of the canopy is different from Moses' use of the "veil" in Exodus 34:33ff.

No explicit textual markers link Isaiah 25:6–8; 60:1–5, 19–20 with Exodus 34:29–35, but conceptually and theologically these texts bear resemblance to Exodus 33–34. Theologically, these texts include the dominant OT themes of God's glory and presence, which is beyond dispute. In Isaiah 25 the "covering" that shields the people of God from his presence is finally removed. This covering is similar to God's hand covering Moses as his glory passes by in Exodus 34, although the lack of textual correspondence omits the possibility that Isaiah is explicitly calling attention to this text.

Isaiah 60 depicts the coupling of "presence" with the "light" of Yhwh in the context of a typology of Sinai and Zion. In the eschatological kingdom, God himself is the light of the whole earth. And as with Moses, the light of God's presence and glory (פְּבוֹד יְהוָה) is so powerful that it irradiates in the people of God, that is, the inhabitants of his city, Zion. This glory is not a means of judgment, but of rejoicing (Isa 60:5). All the redeemed of Yhwh (59:20) will reflect the brightness of God, not just one individual as in Moses, "for his glory will be seen upon you" (60:2). The result is a glorified Israel (60:7–8), which fulfills God's original plan in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1–3) to make a people for himself, a "kingdom of priests" who mediate God's presence to the rest of the world (Exod 19:5–6).

Theological Implications in the New Testament

From the NT, three texts were examined, all of which highlight the themes of "grace," "mercy," and "glory" discussed in the previous chapter. In Matthew 17:1–8 Jesus is presented as a new and greater Moses. Jesus' whole body "shines" forth and he

appears with Elijah and Moses, both of whom had theophanic experiences and were discussed in detail in this study. God himself declares Jesus to be his “son” and commands all to “listen to him.” This study argues that the transfiguration of Jesus on “the mountain” was interpreted by the gospel writers in a similar vein to Exodus 24 and 34 (especially 34:29–35). Jesus’ new covenant work is like Moses’ work as “servant” and “law-giver,” but greater.

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul does not say that Moses’ shining face was fading and thus he concealed it with a veil so that the Israelites might not gaze at it. What he does say is that his opponents, who apparently still argue that the old Sinaitic covenant is the basis for their authority, have missed the crucial point that in Christ it is null and void. In other words, the ancient Israelites’ inability to grasp the core meaning of Moses’ shining face is analogous to Paul’s opponents’ inability to understand that in the new covenant the old is rendered obsolete. Thus, Moses’ use of the veil for the hardened Israelites who were preoccupied with it has been transferred to the hearts of unbelievers in the new covenant era.

In John’s prologue (John 1:1–18), Jesus is again the “light” that “shines in darkness.” He is presented as the *λόγος*, and surpasses Moses’ glory and authority in every way. He is the creator and new creation (1:1–9), and his superiority is reflected in that he is “with God” (1:1) yet God “has made him known” (1:18). The implication is that the divine Word has actually seen God unlike any other man, including Moses. The “glory” (*δόξα*) of Jesus is connected verbally and conceptually to the previous “glory” on Moses’ face, which entails the notion of “grace” as it does in Exodus 34. In the Mosaic sense, the “glory” is reflected on his face when he descends Sinai and returns to the Israelites. In the Johannine sense, Jesus himself is the “glory,” and he is “full of grace and truth,” a direct link with Exodus 34:6. Thus, the *δόξα* of Jesus supersedes the *δόξα* of Moses.

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ABSTRACT

THE SHINING FACE OF MOSES: THE INTERPRETATION OF EXODUS 34:29–35 AND ITS USE IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

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This dissertation constitutes a fresh interpretation of Exodus 34:29–35 and analyzes how the passage is used in both the Old and New Testaments. Chapter 1 is a historical overview of how this passage has been interpreted through the centuries. Chapter 2 provides an exegetical discussion of Exodus 32–34, which makes up the context of the passage in question.

Chapter 3 argues that the primarily exegetical problem within this passage, the identification of the meaning of the verbal form of קָרַן, is resolved by the recognition that קָרַן means “to shine” or “emanate light/rays” as opposed to “had horns” or other interpretations. The function of the entire phrase—קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו—is fourfold: as a reminder or extension of Yhwh’s presence at Sinai, to distinguish Moses in terms of status, to communicate Yhwh’s “goodness,” and to transition from the rebellion narrative in chapters 32–34 to the building of the tabernacle in 35–40. Knowing the function of the phrase allows us to understand the concomitant matter of Moses’ veil (מַסְכֵּה), which is more akin to a scarf than to a mask, and which functions simply to hide Moses’ face when he is uninvolved with his role as mediator because his face was frightening and disturbing to the Israelites. The exegetical study in chapter 3 culminates in an explanation of the theology of Exodus 34:29–35, focusing on God’s presence, glory,

grace/compassion, and life/light.

This thesis is developed in chapter 4, which shows that later OT texts highlight the image of a shining face as a theological metaphor for grace and compassion. Many later biblical texts (e.g., Num 6:24–27, portions of the Psalter and the book of Daniel) also echo this language in prayers and songs. In addition, idiomatic expressions about the “face” or the brightness of the face are found in some extrabiblical sources and ANE inscriptions, which confirm the interpretation in chapter three. Three further texts are examined with relation to the role of Sinai theophanies (1 Kgs 19), the “veiling” of God’s presence in the future (Hab 3:1–4), and images of God’s eschatological glory (Isa 60:1–5, 19–20).

Chapter 5 applies the OT study to the NT, where special attention is given to three passages: the narrative of the transfiguration of Jesus in Matthew 17:1–8, Paul’s statements in 2 Corinthians 3:7–18 about the old and new covenants, and the prologue to John’s Gospel in John 1:1–18.

Chapter 6 summarizes the study and concludes the work.

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