



GOD'S RELATIONAL PRESENCE

The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology

J. SCOTT DUVALL
AND J. DANIEL HAYS

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INTRODUCTION

Our Basic Thesis

Our basic thesis is that the Triune God desires to have a personal, encountering relationship with his people and enters into his creation in order to facilitate that relationship. Thus the Bible begins with God's presence relating to his people in the garden (Genesis) and ends with God's presence relating to his people in the garden (Revelation). This holy, intense, powerful presence of God appears to Moses in the burning bush and on Mount Sinai, and then enters into the tabernacle (and later into the temple) so that God can dwell among his people. Indeed, the presence of God dwelling among his people is foundational to his covenant with them, and Israel's worshiping relationship with God centers on his presence in the tabernacle or temple. Yet because of their sin and disobedience, Israel is banished from God's presence. God departs from the temple (Ezekiel), and Israel is exiled away from the land. The restoration of God's presence is promised throughout the OT prophets and is fulfilled in the Gospels when Jesus, Immanuel (God with us), appears. The incarnation brings to a climax the relational presence of God, the theme that drove the entire OT story. In Acts, after Jesus's ascension, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within each believer, just as the holy presence of God in the OT dwelt in the tabernacle or temple. Paul explains the broad, far-reaching theological implications of the Triune God's relational presence among his people. Indeed, almost every aspect of Paul's theology connects to the relational presence of God. The entire story culminates at the end of Revelation, where the presence of God is once again in Jerusalem (the *new* Jerusalem) and in the garden, relating to his people. This "megatheme" drives the biblical story, uniting and providing interconnecting cohesion across the canon for all of the other major themes, such as covenant, kingdom, creation, holiness,

redemption, law and grace, sin and forgiveness, life and death, worship, and obedient living. It is indeed the cohesive center of biblical theology.

What Do We Mean by “Biblical Theology”?

Within the field of biblical and theological studies, the term “biblical theology” can have a wide range of meanings.¹ In this book we are using the term to refer to theology that is derived from the exegesis of Scripture using the genre and context of the biblical books and that utilizes the theological categories emerging from the biblical story line within each book and connecting across the canon from book to book. Underlying our approach to biblical theology is the presupposition that the Bible is divinely inspired. So while we affirm the complex composition of the Bible, a corollary of our presupposition is that there is a unity within the Bible, a coherence, divinely placed, that ties it all together, including the OT and the NT.

Our methodology for developing biblical theology starts with exegesis and inductive study,² while still recognizing that due to the nature of Scripture, exegetical analysis and theological analysis often are inextricably interconnected. Thus throughout the book we will be discussing exegetical details from specific texts and engaging with biblical commentaries and monographs that are primarily exegetical in nature but that also often move into theological analysis. The scope of this book, however—we are covering the entire Bible—limits our exegetical analysis to only the most significant details, and thus we often will move to conclusions quickly while referencing respected commentaries for more thorough discussion and argumentation, especially on controversial passages.

Following inductive exegetical study and the associated theological analysis, we will move to synthesis. Here we attempt to synthesize the exegetical results, first of all employing categories from within each book, paying particular attention to the genre and context of that book. We next attempt to synthesize more broadly, connecting the results from each book into the ongoing plot and the biblical themes across larger units (e.g., the Pentateuch, the Pauline Letters) and likewise attempting to connect each synthesis into an overarching story line or “megastory.” In this step we often engage with

1. See the survey of the spectrum of biblical theology by Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology*, and the extensive discussion by Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology*. For a brief history of biblical theology, see Pate et al., *The Story of Israel*, 11–17.

2. What we are espousing methodologically for developing biblical theology is similar to that presented by Carson, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” esp. 91–92, 100–101; Hafemann, “Biblical Theology.”

books on OT and NT theology, since often they are undertaking a similar attempt at synthesis.

Our approach to biblical theology is both “descriptive” and “prescriptive.” We seek to identify and synthesize the theology emerging from each book and across the canon, but we do this with the end purpose of applying that theology to Christian living.

We are attempting to develop a “whole-Bible” biblical theology.³ “Whole-Bible” biblical theology is inherently a Christian endeavor. Likewise, both of us write from within the Protestant tradition. Thus in the OT, rather than follow the Jewish Tanakh canonical order of the biblical books,⁴ or the Catholic canonical collection that includes the Apocrypha, we will follow the traditional Protestant canon in our study. In general, variations in canonical ordering (Christian versus Jewish) only affect the development of biblical theology in a few cases (1–2 Chronicles, Ruth, Daniel, etc.), and then usually in only minor ways. None of these variations in canonical location affect the conclusions of our study significantly. For example, placing 1–2 Chronicles at the end of the OT canon, as some suggest, still fits in well with the flow of our argument, perhaps even strengthening the argument slightly. That is, 2 Chronicles ends with a summary of the three-part (tripartite) covenant formulation, a call to rebuild the temple (the place for God’s presence to dwell on earth), and a promise regarding God’s relational presence with his people.

3. Carson has underscored that one of the basic challenges, yet still a critical necessity, to writing biblical theology is the difficult task of dealing in a scholarly and accurate way with the entire Bible (Carson, “Current Issues in Biblical Theology,” 20–23, 34–35).

4. We tend to disagree with those fellow Christians who argue that biblical theology should be based on the order of the Jewish canon and not the Christian canon, supposedly because the former is “earlier.” These fellow Christians often point to Jesus’s references to “the Law and the Prophets” as indicating that he recognized the Jewish canonical order. Yet note, first, that “the Law” and “the Prophets” are very large groupings, not at all indicative, for example, of where the book of Daniel should be located. Second, the Gospels refer to these broad groupings of the Jewish Scriptures in three different ways: (1) “the Law and the Prophets” (Matt. 7:12; 22:40; Luke 16:16); (2) “the Prophets and the Law” (Matt. 11:13); (3) “the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms” (Luke 24:44). Third, the significance of specific canonical ordering (e.g., where Ruth was to be located) most likely became much more significant when the Scriptures moved from collections of scrolls to codices (books). Hurtado points out that Christians adopted the codex form for their Scriptures very early in the Christian movement, well in advance of Jewish acceptance of the codex for their Holy Books. In the first few centuries of the Christian era Judaism was still primarily using scrolls, and the Jewish preference for scrolls continued for several centuries after the widespread acceptance of codices by the Christians, and even now scrolls often are preferred in Jewish synagogues over codices (Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts*, 43–93). The point here is that specific canonical ordering becomes more theologically significant as the collection of Holy Books moves from numerous individual and separate scrolls to one bound codex. Hurtado posits that the Christian preference for the codex was both a characteristic of early Christianity and “a distinguishing mark” (p. 69).

This provides a powerful connecting theme to the NT.⁵ Our conclusions remain the same, whether 2 Chronicles closes the OT canon or Malachi does.

Likewise, our project is a Christian “whole-Bible” biblical theology because we see a plot-like movement throughout the Scriptures that is divinely inspired. Our starting observation is that Genesis is the plot-forming beginning and Revelation is the consummating end, with Jesus Christ at the center of the story. Thus historical movement is an important issue for the methodology that we are proposing, and our approach to biblical theology has a certain diachronic aspect to it. On the other hand, we see very limited benefit to the development of Christian biblical theology from the numerous evolving compositional theories and accompanying historical settings that frequently are being discussed and debated within the broader academy, especially in the field of OT studies.⁶ Thus we will primarily presuppose the history that is reflected in the canon and build our biblical theology based on the historical background and movement as the Christian canon presents it.

The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology

Obviously, there are numerous very important and pervasive themes running throughout the Bible, such as promise and fulfillment, redemption, creation, the kingdom of God, covenant, God's glory, and the sovereignty of God. Over the years many of these have been proposed as the “center” of biblical theology. Yet identifying the center of biblical theology is not just a matter of arguing which theme is the most pervasive or the most frequent. Rather, the center of biblical theology would be the megatheme that provides the cohesion that connects the other pervasive themes, along with the details, into a coherent whole. Furthermore, instead of using the analogy of a wheel, which has a hub (the center) and equally balanced spokes (the central themes) connected to the hub, to describe the center of biblical theology, we prefer the analogy of a spiderweb. The major themes of biblical theology would be like the main threads in the web, connected in one way or another to the center, but not always directly (some go radially and some go in concurrent circles). In the wheel analogy, everything must connect directly to the hub of the wheel, which can result, theologically speaking, in forcing an artificial orderliness onto the diversity of the Bible. The center of a web, on the other

5. Note the similar thematic emphases in Rev. 21–22, which brings the NT canon to a close.

6. One exception will be the book of Psalms, where we will acknowledge that the historical setting (preexilic, exilic, or postexilic) for the composition and collection of the five books of the Psalter probably does impact exegesis, synthesis, and biblical theology.

hand, conveys a sense of interconnectedness that still allows for canonical flexibility.⁷ All of the central themes and subthemes in biblical theology would ultimately depend on the center for structural integrity and cohesion, even while the specific manner of interconnection, both historically and theologically, can be complex.

Similarly, from an overall biblical narrative point of view, the cohesive center of biblical theology must be that megatheme that drives the plot of the story from beginning to end. Isolating the center of biblical theology, therefore, involves identifying which central theme is most integrally related to the plot. That is, the center of biblical theology is that prevalent theme that is continually advancing the plot forward and interconnecting the other themes. We will argue that the relational presence of God does this continually throughout Scripture. Likewise, in arguing that the relational presence of God is the “cohesive center” of biblical theology, we are neither ignoring nor downplaying the importance of other prevalent and highly significant biblical themes (e.g., covenant, kingdom of God), but rather suggesting that the cohesive central megatheme of God’s relational presence connects all of these other themes into the big overarching plot of the biblical story. In our view, most of these other major biblical themes are actually “subplots” (so to speak), each of which is interconnected and related to the megastory of God’s relational presence. Our subtitle for this book, *The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology*, reflects this argument for the relational presence of God as that “spiderweb-like cohesive center” that ties all of the major biblical themes together as it likewise moves God’s story forward from the beginning to the end.

Presence and Omnipresence, Immanence and Transcendence

One of the challenges of Christian theology, both systematic theology and biblical theology, is the interaction—some might even say, tension—between the transcendence of God (his otherness) and the immanence of God (his relatedness to the creation, and especially to his people within the creation). Sometimes there is a tendency, both in systematic theology and even in biblical theology, to acknowledge both immanence and transcendence but to view the transcendent God as the way he *really* is and the immanent God as his (somewhat secondary) accommodation to us. We suspect that this mode of theological understanding is due in part to the underlying assumptions of

7. For the spiderweb analogy, we are indebted to C. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ*, 437–39.

Western thought (perhaps some manner of residual Neoplatonic dualism). If we are not careful, this becomes a strong, subtle presupposition that colors our reading and theological understanding of the biblical text.

On the other hand, the goal of theology, especially biblical theology, is to seek to know God *as he has revealed himself to us through the Scriptures*. Thus when Isaiah describes the coming of God with “He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart” (40:11), should we wave this away as metaphoric accommodation, saying that God in his transcendence is not *really* like that? We definitely should not. God is clearly both transcendent and immanent, and to ignore his self-revelation of either is to construct a golden calf of our own understanding and blasphemously to label it “God.” An important part of our understanding of God and our relationship with him is to view him as loving us and caring for us intimately as a shepherd cares for his sheep. This is one of the ways in which he has revealed himself to us through Scripture.

The Bible certainly affirms God's transcendence and does not shirk from the tension between transcendence and immanence,⁸ yet as the biblical story unfolds and as God seeks to relate to his people, almost by definition (i.e., this biblical story is a story about relatedness) immanence takes center stage in how God reveals himself (although transcendence still hovers about continuously). This “tension” in our understanding carries over into the important distinction between God's presence and his omnipresence.⁹ The OT, for example, certainly does affirm God's omnipresence, but on the other hand, Moses does not remove his sandals and fearfully hide his face in front of *every* bush that he encounters in the wilderness. There is something spectacularly special and unique about *that* particular bush in Exodus 3 because God is present in a very intense way in *that* particular flaming bush. Likewise, while God's omnipresence fills all the mountains of the world, the one in Exodus 19 is quite different: “Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently” (v. 18). Thus when God reveals at Mount Sinai the promise of his presence as the central aspect of the covenant relationship between him and the people of Israel, he is speaking not about some vague concept of omnipresence but of a very real and terrifying holy presence as he comes to actually dwell among them. He instructs Moses, “Have them make me a sanctuary [a holy place], so that I may dwell among them” (Exod. 25:8). This indwelling of God's presence lies at the center of his relationship with

8. Clements, *God and Temple*, 136.

9. See the helpful discussion by Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 302–8.

his people. He states, “I will dwell among the Israelites, and I will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them” (Exod. 29:45–46). Then after the tabernacle is constructed, God comes into the tabernacle to dwell in the midst of Israel. “Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (Exod. 40:34).¹⁰ This is not some “quasi” or “proxy” presence of God but God himself taking up residence for the purpose of relating to his people.¹¹ It is this relational presence of God that we are tracking through the Scriptures.

Certainly, as mentioned above, one of the central and defining events in the OT is the encounter with God at Mount Sinai. There he establishes his covenant relationship with Israel defined by a three-part formula: “I will be your God; you will be my people; *I will dwell in your midst.*” Climaxing the spectacular events in the book of Exodus, in 40:34 “the glory of the LORD” (the presence of God) enters the tabernacle to dwell with Israel. A continuation of God’s presence “in their midst” occurs in 1 Kings 8:10–11 as “the glory of the LORD” fills the new temple that Solomon has constructed. The importance of this reality to the entire flow of the OT story and the theology flowing out of it cannot be overstressed. As R. E. Clements notes, “For Yahweh to be the God of Israel means that he dwells in their midst. . . . Israel only becomes Israel when Yahweh dwells in its midst.”¹² Indeed, the immanence of God is a critical component of God’s revelation to his people.

Both the OT and the NT present God as both transcendent and immanent, not allowing either to dominate the other.¹³ In the OT, as the immanence of God becomes associated with God dwelling with his people on earth in the tabernacle/temple, the Scriptures add “an eschatological hope in which Israel looked to the future for the full manifestation of Yahweh’s dwelling with men. . . . A clear path was made for the central assertion of Christianity; the Incarnation of God in Christ. . . . Here divine immanence and transcendence

10. The phrase “glory of the LORD” (כְּבוֹד יְהוָה, *kebod Yahweh*) refers to the divine presence, indicating that God himself comes to dwell in the tabernacle. See M. Weinfeld, “כְּבוֹד,” *TDOT* 7:29–33; M. Moore, “Divine Presence,” 166.

11. Burnett writes, “Throughout the Hebrew Bible, Israel’s identity is intimately bound with the memory of its first encounters with its God and an understanding of various relational foundations for continuing divine presence” (Burnett, *Where Is God?*, 5).

12. Clements, *God and Temple*, 115. Likewise, commenting on Exod. 29:45 (“I will dwell among the Israelites, and I will be their God”), Brueggemann states, “Presence is everything,” noting the strong connection between “presence” and “being ‘their God’” (Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 663).

13. Vriezen notes that “the transcendent God is at the same time the immanent God” (Vriezen, *Outline of Old Testament Theology*, 183).

are reconciled in the person of one who is the perfect union of the human and the divine.”¹⁴

Use of Anthropomorphism and Other Figures of Speech

As part of the introductory matters, we need to address the issue of figurative language. We are well aware of the extensive and often complex use of figurative, poetic, and apocalyptic language throughout the Bible, especially in the OT.¹⁵ In regard to God's actions and feelings, anthropomorphic figures of speech abound. Yet it is important to keep a few things in mind. First, the presence of God dwelling in the tabernacle and then in the temple was a reality and not a metaphor. The cloud surrounding his glory/presence as he entered the tabernacle was real and not figurative. Second, as we explore language that is clearly figurative, it is important to remember that there are always literal realities behind the figures of speech in the Scriptures, areas of similarity to which the figures of speech point.¹⁶ Third, the anthropomorphic figures of speech create images that are part of God's revelation to us. For a good example, let's look again at the text from Isaiah cited above, where the prophet writes, “He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart” (40:11). The analogy is obvious: God will care for his people and lovingly gather them up just as a shepherd cares for his sheep and lovingly gathers them up. Even though this is a figure of speech, it does convey a very real image of God that he has chosen for his revelation to us, an image in this case that relates tangentially to our theme of presence. God does not simply decree the restoration from his distant throne up in heaven; nor does he simply accomplish the restoration by sending emissaries or angels to do his bidding. One of the central images he has chosen for his role in the future restoration is that of a shepherd personally walking along with those who are being regathered, carrying young lambs lovingly in his arms.

In this book we will track the real and literal presence of God in the midst of Israel as he dwells in the temple, later departs from the temple, and then returns in the incarnation. We will also point to the very frequent anthropomorphic figures of speech that portray God as “up close and personal” in his

14. Clements, *God and Temple*, 138.

15. On OT poetry and figurative language, see J. D. Hays, *The Message of the Prophets*, 46–57; Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 373–91.

16. See the helpful discussion on anthropomorphic metaphor in Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 5–12.

involvement with his people. We will argue that the two are related, and that the figures of speech about God's close personal relatedness are anchored in the reality of his personal encounter with Israel at Sinai and in his very real and literal presence dwelling in their midst, first in the garden, then in the tabernacle, and then in the temple. These two strands—the very real presence of God in Israel's midst and the anthropomorphic figures of speech about God—merge together climactically in the NT, through the incarnation of Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the ultimate restoration seen in the new Jerusalem at the very end of the Christian canon.

How This Book Came to Be

One of us (J. Scott Duvall) is a NT professor, and one of us (J. Daniel Hays) is an OT professor. We began writing together in 2001, when we produced *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Zondervan). We quickly recognized the benefits of working together collaboratively as specialists in NT studies and in OT studies. Indeed, the complexity of biblical studies makes it difficult for one person, normally limited to one area of specialized detailed study, to address the entire Bible academically. Also, as professors (teaching at Ouachita Baptist University), we both regularly encountered the need to explain the entire Bible and the flow of the biblical story to our students. Meeting this challenge has been our passion for the last twenty-five years. In 2004 we formally began writing biblical theology, joining with several other colleagues at Ouachita to produce *The Story of Israel: A Biblical Theology* (InterVarsity), in which we and our colleagues tracked the theme of “sin, exile, and restoration” across the biblical canon. Then the two of us worked together again on two works dealing with the entire Bible, *The Baker Illustrated Bible Handbook* (Baker Books, 2011) and *Living God's Word: Discovering Our Place in the Great Story of Scripture* (Zondervan, 2012). It was at about this time that we both began noticing how frequently the theme of God's presence was occurring. We started having intriguing conversations about what each one of us was discovering in our own discipline of study in regard to God's presence, starting with the observation that the Bible begins with God's presence in the garden (Genesis) and ends with God's presence in a restored garden (Revelation). At this time, in our academic study, Scott was focusing on the book of Revelation (*Revelation*, Baker Books, 2014; *The Heart of Revelation: Understanding the Ten Essential Themes of the Bible's Final Book*, Baker Books, 2016), while Danny was working on the OT prophets (*The Message*

of the Prophets: A Survey of the Old Testament Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament, Zondervan, 2010; *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, Baker Books, 2016). Also, starting to probe more directly into the theme of God's relational presence, Danny wrote the popular-level book *The Temple and the Tabernacle: A Study of God's Dwelling Places from Genesis to Revelation* (Baker Books, 2016). Our separate studies in Revelation and in the OT prophets convinced us both that the relational presence of God was a central theme of biblical theology, spanning across the OT and the NT, and providing unity between the Testaments.

More and more during the years that ensued, once we began looking for it, we were continually struck by the frequency and the centrality of the presence of God throughout the rest of the canon as well.¹⁷ At the exegetical text-by-text level, we were impressed by the number of times that top OT and NT commentaries were noting the significant role that the presence of God was playing in specific texts. For example, commentators on Matthew were observing that the book of Matthew starts with "Immanuel" and ends with "I am with you always." What was missing was a volume that brought together all of these separate exegetical conclusions and synthesized them into an overall biblical theology. This is what we are seeking to do.

We are not the first to argue that the presence of God is a central theme of biblical theology. Over the years, scholars from several different disciplines have been coming to similar, or at least related, conclusions. In 1978 OT scholar Samuel Terrien published *The Elusive Presence: The Heart of Biblical Theology* (Harper & Row). Terrien comes to many of the same conclusions that we do, but his development of the argument is very uneven across the canon, and due to his source-critical presuppositions, he skips over quite a bit of relevant material and tries to synthesize his conclusions back into his source-critical framework. He is helpful but limited in his scope. Without arguing that it is *the* center of biblical or OT theology, nonetheless several other OT scholars, such as R. E. Clements and Tremper Longman,¹⁸ stress the importance of God's presence throughout the OT and into the NT. Likewise, NT scholar G. K. Beale, in pursuing the theme of the cosmic temple, earthly temple, and the mission of God's people, comes to several of the same conclusions that we do, although he is more narrowly focused.¹⁹ From the field of systematics, yet while moving quickly across the canon in a biblical theology

17. We are indebted to our friend and former editor Jack Kuhatschek, who participated in several of these early conversations and first suggested to us that the theme is not just the "presence of God" but rather the "relational presence of God."

18. Clements, *God and Temple*; Longman, *Immanuel in Our Place*.

19. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*; Beale and Kim, *God Dwells among Us*.

approach, Ryan Lister likewise comes to conclusions very similar to ours.²⁰ So to various degrees and from several different fields of study, a number of scholars have concluded that the presence of God is a central theme, perhaps even *the* central theme, in the Bible.

What we seek to do in this volume is to develop a full-blown biblical theology of the relational presence of God, tracking this theme across the entire biblical canon, exegetically establishing the important centrality of this theme in all parts of the canon. In the process, as we show how repeatedly this megatheme occurs and how central this theme is to the story and the plot—indeed, how this megatheme drives the plot and provides cohesion for the story and interconnects the other major themes—we will be arguing that this megatheme, the relational presence of God, is the cohesive center of biblical theology.

20. Lister, *The Presence of God*. Likewise noting the centrality of the presence of God and its critical significance for Christian living is Booth, *The Tabernacling Presence of God*.

ONE

The Relational Presence of God in the Pentateuch

Terminology

Although throughout the OT there are numerous terms and idioms that imply the presence of God,¹ the central and most frequent term is *panim* (פָּנִים), plural of פָּנָה, *paneh*).² This term occurs over two thousand times in the OT. The basic meaning of *panim* (פָּנִים/פָּנָה) is “face” in the anatomical sense, but the term is used in a wide range of idioms and other figures of speech. Because “face” was more expressive than “hand” and more inclusive than “eye,” it frequently was used as a synecdoche to represent the entire person.³ Because of the ability of *panim* to express emotions and reactions, it also carries strong connotations of relationship. In fact, as H. Simian-Yofre explains, “The term *pānīm* describes relationships. . . . Applied to Yahweh,

1. As is well known, the OT uses two primary Hebrew words for God, *Yahweh* (usually translated as “the LORD”) and *Elohim* (usually translated as “God”). In keeping with our perspective as a “whole-Bible” biblical theology, and in striving for consistency, we have in general used the word “God” in our discussion throughout the book, even in OT contexts. Exceptions, of course, are occasionally necessary when the specific meaning of the name Yahweh plays a critical role in our exegetical and theological discussion.

2. I. Wilson includes a long list of additional terms and concepts that imply God’s presence; these include: to speak from an earthly site, to come, to come down, to be in thick darkness, to go up among, to go with, to go in the midst of, to go before, to pass by, to pass before, to stand with, to be with, to be in the midst of, to appear, and to meet (I. Wilson, *Out of the Midst of the Fire*, 207–8).

3. H. Simian-Yofre, “פָּנִים,” *TDOT* 11:607; A. S. van der Woude, “פָּנִים,” *TLOT* 2:1001.

pānîm says no more and no less than when applied to human beings.” That is, it refers to “real personal presence, relationship, and meeting (or refusing to meet). All the fundamental relationships between God and human beings can be described by *pānîm* and its associated expressions. . . . Insofar as *pānîm* bespeaks presence, its purpose is to underline the positive aspect of the interpersonal relationship. The negative aspect of the relationship is expressed by separation from *pānîm*” (the idiom “to set one’s face against” would be an exception, carrying strong negative overtones).⁴

The construct form of *panim* is used with several different prepositions to form idiomatic expressions, many of which are used of God. One of the most frequent forms is *lipne Yahweh* (לְפָנֵי יְהוָה), before the LORD, in the presence of the LORD), which occurs 236 times in the OT.⁵ Like the other idioms, while this expression is somewhat fluid, the majority of usages refer to the *spatial* presence of God, often in the tabernacle or in the temple.⁶ Indeed, this is one of the most common expressions indicating the very real, spatial presence of God in the tabernacle or in the temple.

Genesis

Many have noted the significance of the fact that the Bible opens with creation (Gen. 1–2) and ends (or climaxes) with the new creation (Rev. 21–22).⁷ This observation certainly has suggestive implications for the starting point of a biblical theology.⁸ As discussed throughout this book, however, the theme of God’s relational presence incorporates both “creation” and “salvation history.” This is part of the larger “bookend” phenomena in which Genesis 1–11 is paralleled by many elements in Revelation 19–22.⁹ In relational terms

4. H. Simian-Yofre, “פָּנִים,” *TDOT* 11:606–7. Van der Woude stresses that when used of God, פָּנִים refers not to some kind of representative figure, but to the personal presence of God himself (A. S. van der Woude, “פָּנִים,” *TLOT* 2:1004–5).

5. Fowler, “The Meaning of *lipnê* YHWH,” 384.

6. Fowler, “The Meaning of *lipnê* YHWH,” 387; Simian-Yofre, “פָּנִים,” 11:608–10. For discussions on the other prepositional combinations and idioms with פָּנִים, see Simian-Yofre, “פָּנִים,” 11:611–14. For usages of פָּנִים with verbs and prepositions that connote concepts of “hiding the face,” see Balentine, *The Hidden God*, 1–76.

7. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 149; Fretheim, *God and World*, 9; Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning*, 189–96; Westermann, *Beginning and End in the Bible*.

8. While for much of the twentieth century many OT scholars dismissed “creation” as a major theme, opting instead for “salvation history” as the dominating center of OT theology, in more recent years more and more scholars are recognizing the importance of “creation” as an important and interrelated theme. For example, Scobie quips, “It needs to be asserted that the Bible does *not* begin with Exodus but with Genesis!” (Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 148–49).

9. See the helpful comparative chart in Duvall, “The Beginning and the End.”

between God and people, the Bible opens with God and his people in a garden and closes with God and his people once again back in a garden.

The Presence of God in Creation and in the Garden

Throughout the creation account in Genesis, God is depicted as being personally involved. In Genesis 1:2 reference is made to “the Spirit of God . . . hovering over the waters.” While there is no consensus regarding the meaning (or even translation—wind, spirit, Spirit) of this phrase, it seems to refer to an activity of God, thus implying his powerful presence or an extension of the power associated with his presence.¹⁰ Yet moving from Genesis 1 to Genesis 2, we notice a shift in names and in stress, from a focus on God’s transcendence in Genesis 1 (Elohim as Creator of the universe) to a focus on God’s immanence (Yahweh forming people and walking in the garden). Throughout the creation account in Genesis 2, the language and the imagery evoke a spatial presence. That is, God *formed* a man (and animals [2:19]) out of the dust of the ground as a potter shapes a pot (2:7). God also *breathed* into the man’s nostrils (2:7), *planted* a garden (2:8), and *took* the man and *put* him in the garden (2:13). Later, God *brought* the animals to the man (2:19) and, after *building* the woman from the man’s rib, *brought* the woman to the man (2:22).¹¹ The imagery in the creation narrative in Genesis 2 does not portray God seated upon his throne in the heavens sending out orders to those below; rather, it portrays him as one who is very much present down in the garden, personally involved in creation.¹²

Continuing this picture of God and stressing his actual presence in the garden is Genesis 3:8, when “the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” Although a few scholars have suggested alternate translations and correlating alternate

10. Waltke suggests that it describes the “almighty Spirit” preparing the earth for human habitation (Waltke, *Genesis*, 65). J. Walton proposes understanding “spirit/wind of God” as representing an extension of God’s power, like his hand (J. Walton, *Genesis*, 77). Routledge notes that “in the OT the presence and activity of the Spirit is identified with presence and activity of God himself” (Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 113). Sailhamer argues that the “Spirit of God” doing the work of creation in Gen. 1:2 is paralleled by the “Spirit of God” that fills and empowers Bezalel to build the tabernacle in Exod. 31:1–5 (Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 32–33).

11. Fretheim, *God and World*, 39. W. Brown writes, “As both gardener and potter, God works naturally and intimately with creation” (W. Brown, “Manifest Diversity,” 23).

12. Averbeck points to several of these actions (shapes, breathes, plants, etc.) and notes that while Gen. 1:1–2:3 stresses the transcendence of God, Gen. 2:4–4:26 stresses his immanence, presenting God as in close intimate relationship with his people (Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” 822). Bonhoeffer notes that God’s shaping of humankind with his own hands stresses not only God’s authority but also his “nearness” (Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall*, 46).

understandings,¹³ the majority of commentators and translations retain the traditional understanding that God is personally strolling in the garden.¹⁴ Furthermore, the text seems to imply that this was a normal occurrence.¹⁵ Terrence Fretheim writes, “The Creator of the universe and all creatures chooses not to relate to the world at a distance, but takes on human form, goes for a walk among the creatures, and personally engages them regarding recent events.”¹⁶ This has staggering implications for our understanding of the relationship between God and the first couple. He has graciously placed them in a wonderful garden with everything provided for them. Most important of all, they were blessed by the close, personal fellowship with the very real presence of God himself. In this initial portrayal of how God relates to his people, he is pictured not as the King seated up on the heavenly throne (although his authority is clearly underscored as he forms the first man from the dirt) but as One who is very much here on earth in the garden walking and talking with his people. As John Walton states, “The presence of God was the key to the garden.”¹⁷

The Garden as a Temple Containing the Presence of God

The early chapters of Genesis depict the garden of Eden as the place where God lives and relates to his people. This reality (where God dwells and relates to his people) is something that we will see repeated later in the tabernacle and the temple.¹⁸ The similarities and strong thematic and lexical parallels between the garden of Eden and the tabernacle/temple have led numerous scholars from across the theological spectrum to affirm a strong connection between the garden of Eden in Genesis 2 and the tabernacle/temple later in the OT. Many scholars maintain that the garden of Eden is to be viewed as an archetypal tabernacle/temple.¹⁹ At the heart of this

13. Niehaus has argued that Gen. 3:8 refers not to God strolling in the cool of the day but rather to a terrifying wind/storm theophany (Niehaus, “In the Wind of the Storm”). For a similar view, see Stuart, “The Cool of the Day.”

14. For example, V. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 192–93; Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 143; Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah*, 150–54; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 76; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 254; Waltke, *Genesis*, 92.

15. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 76; Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:136.

16. Fretheim, “The Book of Genesis,” 362.

17. J. Walton, *Genesis*, 182.

18. J. D. Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 20–21.

19. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story”; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 61–62; Waltke, *Genesis*, 85; Longman, *Immanuel in Our Place*, 7, 35–36; Fretheim, *Exodus*, 269; Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 66–80; J. Walton, *Genesis*, 181–84; Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 210, 257; Provan, *Discovering Genesis*, 57–58, 70–71; B. Arnold, *Genesis*, 58–59 (at least noting some of the similarities); Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New*

connection is the presence of God, for it is the “presence” or the “indwelling” of God that defines what a temple is. That is, throughout the ancient Near East, as well as in Israel, temples were regarded as the residences of the gods and not simply as gathering places for worship, as churches often are viewed today.²⁰

Relationship, Presence, and the Image of God

Genesis 1:26–27 states, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule. . . . So God created man in his own image” (CSB). There is no clear consensus regarding the meaning of the phrase “the image of God” (often referred to as the *imago Dei*) among either biblical scholars or systematic theologians, and this issue continues to generate a great deal of scholarly discussion. Earlier views that understood the *imago Dei* as referring to spiritual, mental, or physical similarities have largely been rejected. Claus Westermann argues for a relational understanding: being created in the image of God gives human beings the unique status of being God’s counterparts. He writes, “The relationship to God is not something which is added to human existence; humans are created in such a way that their very existence is intended to be their relationship to God.”²¹ Likewise, more recently Robin Routledge has listed “relationship” as one of the “implications” of the *imago Dei*, stating, “Human beings are made for relationship with God.”²² Although some authors declare that the royal/functional view (discussed below) is the near-consensus majority view of the *imago Dei*, especially for OT scholars, that is simply not the case; numerous scholars, both in OT studies and in other disciplines, concur with Westermann that “relationship” is a critical part of the *imago Dei*. Brevard Childs, for example, in regard to the “image of God,” writes, “In spite of its unclarity, at least one can say that it denotes a special relationship between God and mankind.”²³

Earth, 46–49; Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 533; Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning*, 41; M. Smith, *Where the Gods Are*, 34–36; W. Brown, “Manifest Diversity,” 21–24; Booth, *The Tabernacled Presence of God*, 11–13; Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured*, 83–91; T. D. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 123–25.

20. J. D. Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 13–17.

21. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 158.

22. Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 140.

23. Childs, *Old Testament Theology*, 34. Also holding the “relational” view, although with some variation in their understanding of it, are Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1–11*, 37; H. W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, 159; K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/1*, 183–97; Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 94–96; Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self*; Fretheim, *God and World*, 13–14, 54–56; House, *Old Testament Theology*, 61; Birch et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 49; Booth, *The Tabernacled Presence of God*, 14–15.

Popular among OT scholars over the last forty years or so has been an understanding that sees the *imago Dei* in a royal/functional manner. When placed in the context of similar ancient Near Eastern backgrounds, the terms for image and likeness seem to imply that God is designating humans to be his “royal” representatives to rule and to mediate blessings to the world.²⁴ In this view, people made in the image of God were like small statues that ancient kings would place in their provinces to stress their rule over that area and to project their controlling presence.²⁵

More recently some scholars have argued that for understanding the *imago Dei* there is a closer similarity to the use of cult/temple statues that represent the deity itself than to the king/royal statue background.²⁶ This has led to a current trend that tends to acknowledge that the *imago Dei* in Genesis 1 probably reflects a royal representative view as part of its meaning but also carries a diverse range of other connotations. For example, Catherine McDowell argues for three major connotations of the *imago Dei*. First, based on texts like Genesis 5:1, the image of God implies a “kinship.” That is, it denotes God as the father of humanity.²⁷ This has strong implications for the relational view. Second, as in the royal representative view, it designates humans as God’s representatives, especially in law and justice. Finally, the *imago Dei* creates the imagery of a “divine statue,” which in the ancient Near East was placed in the temple like a miniature god. The implication of this third aspect is that “humankind was designated to dwell in the divine presence, that is, with God in his most holy place.”²⁸

Recently J. Gordon McConville has combined the relational view and the royal/functional view. He posits that humans represent the presence of God in the world, a representative capacity that is characterized by the power and privilege of God’s presence. But the image also carries a strong aspect of relationality—to God, to fellow humans, and to the creation itself.²⁹ Bill Arnold, likewise, accepts the royal representative view, but he also notes that

24. For example, Clines, “The Image of God in Man.” See also the more recent discussion in Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 26–29.

25. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 60.

26. McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*; Schuele, “Made in the Image of God”; Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 27.

27. On this view, see also Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 170.

28. McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*, 207–8. See also McDowell, “In the Image of God He Created Them,” 32–34. Likewise expanding on the range of connotations beyond the royal representative view is R. Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity*, arguing for “human identity” as the primary feature of the *imago Dei* and the royal representation aspect as secondary.

29. McConville, *Being Human in God’s World*, 24–29.

“Genesis 1 emphasized the intimate relationship between God and humanity in the ‘image of God’ concept (1:26–27).”³⁰

While there is still no complete consensus in understanding precisely what the “image of God” refers to in Genesis 1, the most widely held views among scholars swirl around the concepts of presence, rule, power, and relationship.

Banishment from the Garden and the Presence of God

After Adam and Eve listen to the serpent, disobey God, and eat of the forbidden fruit, they are banished from the garden of Eden. This event, often referred to theologically as the “fall,” plays an important role in Christian theology. Yet the critical consequence of the eviction from the garden is that Adam and Eve lose the great privilege and blessing of direct access to the presence of God.³¹ God had told Adam that on the day he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he certainly would die (Gen. 2:17). Yet what God actually does to Adam and Eve is banish them and separate them from his presence.³² Thus the banishment from the garden likewise suggests connections to death. Loss of direct access to the tree of life and loss of direct access to the presence of God seem to be inseparable. Routledge writes, “In the OT, physical death also has a spiritual dimension: it brings relationship with God to an end. Similarly life is more than mere existence: it is also about continuing to enjoy the blessings of God’s presence.”³³

Cherubim are stationed on the east side of the garden to guard the way back to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). Throughout the OT, cherubim are closely

30. B. Arnold, *Genesis*, 45, 59. See also Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology*, 83–84. Similarly, after discussing the “image of God” and OT physiology, Brueggemann qualifies the discussion by noting “what seems to me the central concern of Israel regarding humanity: namely, that the human person is a *person in relation to Yahweh*, who lives in an intense mutuality with Yahweh” (Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 453).

31. Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured*, 103–4. G. Anderson underscores that the “fall” probably should be understood more as an “exile” (G. Anderson, *Christian Doctrine and the Old Testament*, 59–60).

32. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 258. This is stressed by numerous OT scholars. J. Walton, for example, points out that it was not so much “paradise” that is lost but the presence of God (J. Walton, *Genesis*, 231). See also Longman, *How to Read Genesis*, 112; Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 152; V. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 310; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 277; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 90; T. D. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 127, 163.

33. Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 152. Atkinson adds, “Adam’s death is a change of place (from within the Garden to outside the Garden) and a change of situation before God (in fellowship with God, to alienated from God). And all death can be so understood” (Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1–11*, 37). Wenham writes, “Only in the presence of God did man enjoy fullness of life. . . . The expulsion from the garden of delight where God himself lived would therefore have been regarded by the godly men of ancient Israel as yet more catastrophic than physical death” (Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 90).

associated with the tabernacle and the temple, and especially with the very presence of God.³⁴ In both the future tabernacle of Exodus and the future temple of 1 Kings, the entrances face the east. Thus the mention of cherubim stationed at the eastern entrance to the garden of Eden implies that they are guarding the way back into the garden/temple wherein lies the tree of life and the presence of God.

The continued eastward movement throughout Genesis 3–11 (Gen. 3:24; 4:16; 11:2) perhaps is suggestive of the continuing movement away from the presence of God.³⁵ Likewise, numerous scholars have noted that the initial banishment in Genesis 3:23–24 foreshadows or parallels the future exile of Israel, who will be driven out of the promised land (paralleling the garden) and away from God's presence.³⁶

Thus the basic theological problem ("the inciting incident") that gives rise to the unfolding biblical story is now set.³⁷ Through disobedience and sin people have lost access to and relationship with God, resulting in the loss of eternal life as well. Yet God in his grace will continue to work outside of the garden to restore humankind to relationship with him. This is the story of the rest of the Bible. At the center of this story about restoring the relationship between God and humanity is God's relational presence.

The Tower of Babel

Movement in Genesis 11 continues to the east, where the people build a city and a tower in Shinar (Babylonia). Most OT scholars concur that the tower is a Babylonian-style "ziggurat," typically a large terraced structure with a central stairway. In the archaeological theology of these structures in the ancient Near East, at the top of these stairways was "the gate of the gods, the entrance into their heavenly abode."³⁸ Usually there was a temple

34. V. Hamilton writes, "All OT references to the cherubim suggest, directly or indirectly, that the cherubim are symbols of God's presence" (V. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 210). J. D. Hays suggests that it may be better to view them as divine attendants or guardians of the access to God's presence (J. D. Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 111–22).

35. Several scholars have noted the "eastward" movement in Gen. 3–11 (3:24; 4:16; 11:2). W. D. Tucker states, "The movement eastward symbolized a distancing from the paradisiacal qualities of Eden and from the presence of God" (W. D. Tucker, "The Pentateuch," 37). See also V. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 352.

36. Waltke with Yu, *Old Testament Theology*, 150; McKeown, *Genesis*, 38; W. D. Tucker, "The Pentateuch," 33; Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," 365.

37. Morales concludes, "Exile from the divine Presence, then, is *the* point of tragedy driving the ensuing biblical narrative toward the mediated dénouement of the tabernacle" (Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured*, 102).

38. J. Walton, *Genesis*, 374.

located nearby on the ground level, but the ziggurat functioned primarily as a means to facilitate access to the gods. That is, the stairway allowed for the gods to descend down to earth. Thus it seems that the construction of this tower is a humanly initiated attempt to regain the presence of God, along with counteracting God's decree for the people to scatter and fill the earth (Gen. 1:28; 9:1). John Goldingay observes, "The builders may not be able to get back to God's garden, but perhaps they can reach God's dwelling some other way."³⁹ Furthermore, these builders do not want to honor the deity, or call on his name, but rather to make a name for themselves (11:4). The ironic consequence is that they do not achieve the blessings of the relational presence of God, but rather his presence comes down and scatters them in judgment, in essence a continuing of the exile theme that began in Genesis 3:23–24 when Adam and Eve were banished from the garden.⁴⁰

The Patriarchs, the Covenant, and the Presence of God

In his sovereign freedom God's relational presence is not restricted to the garden, and the theme of his presence lies at the heart of the story throughout the patriarchal narratives.⁴¹ Genesis 12–50 recounts the story of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and at the theological center of this section is the account of how God establishes a relationship with this family through his covenant with them. Running throughout this story and inextricably intertwined with the establishment and the continuation of the patriarchal covenant is the theme of God's presence. To each of the patriarchs God not only promises descendants, land, and blessing, but in each case he also includes the promise of his relational presence.⁴²

This is seen first of all through the frequent theophanic appearances that occur. That is, in establishing his covenant relationship with the patriarchs, God regularly appears to them.⁴³ This connection is made in the

39. Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:189. Also viewing the tower as an attempt to regain God's presence is W. D. Tucker, "The Pentateuch," 37.

40. Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured*, 45.

41. W. Brown, "Manifest Diversity," 24–25.

42. W. Kaiser stresses the relational aspect of the promise of presence: "God's active presence manifested his character, power, and ability to fulfill the repeated word of promise. It was preeminently a word of personal relationship" (W. Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God*, 62).

43. The terminology used in several passages stresses the actual spatial presence of God in his appearances to the patriarchs. Thus *lipne* or related forms are used in Gen. 17:1 ("walk before me"); 18:22 ("Abraham remained standing before the LORD"); 19:27 ("Abraham . . . returned to the place where he had stood before the LORD"). In 32:30 Jacob names the site of his wrestling encounter "Peniel" ("face of God"), explaining, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." Likewise, verbs of spatial movement are often used of God

following passages: 12:7;⁴⁴ 15:17; 17:1; 18:1; 19:27; 26:2–3, 24; 28:12–15; 32:30; 35:9–12.⁴⁵

In addition, although the connection between God's presence and the patriarchal covenant is strongly implied in most of these texts, several of the texts make the connection explicit. For example, in regard to Abraham, Genesis 17:1–2 states, "The LORD appeared to him [Abram] and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me faithfully and be blameless. Then I will make my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.'" The same tight connection occurs with Isaac (Gen. 26:2–5, 23–24), where the promise of God's presence ("I will be with you")⁴⁶ is tied explicitly with the confirmation of God's promise to Abraham. Likewise, in the reaffirmation of the Abrahamic promise to Jacob (Gen. 28:12–15), God restates clearly his promise of presence ("I am with you" [v. 15]).⁴⁷ To be in covenant relationship with God meant that the patriarchs would experience his "I am with you" presence.⁴⁸

Another closely related theme, one that will resurface continually throughout the pentateuchal story, is that of "the land." That is, the promises of presence, covenant, and land are all tightly interconnected, seemingly all part of the same "package." Thus in Genesis 28:13–15, for example, God declares, "I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. . . . I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."⁴⁹ It is the presence of God that drives the fulfillment of the land promise.

in the patriarchal narratives: "a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed [*'abar*] between the pieces" (15:17); "When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up [*'alab*] from him" (17:22); "Then God went up [*'alab*] from him" (35:13); "I will go down [*yarad*] to Egypt with you" (46:4).

44. Longman states that Abraham built this altar specifically "at a place where God made his special presence known" (Longman, *Immanuel in Our Place*, 19). Also connecting the altar site to the presence of God is Cook, "God's Real Absence and Real Presence," 145.

45. K. Walton tracks the theme of the presence and absence of God throughout the Jacob narrative, arguing that this theme is central and critical to the narrative (K. Walton, *Thou Traveller Unknown*, 220).

46. House notes that this phrase "indicates continual presence" (House, *Old Testament Theology*, 77).

47. God's presence plays a central role in the Joseph narratives as well. See Fritsch, "God Was with Him." Fritsch also notes the later theological understanding of the Joseph story as Stephen in Acts 7:9–10 pointed out that Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave into Egypt, but that "God was with him" (p. 32).

48. The classic tripartite formulation of the covenant throughout the OT is "I will be your God; you will be my people; I will dwell in your midst" (Lev. 26:9–13). Aspects of this formulation occur several times in God's statements to the patriarchs. Not only does he promise his presence, but he also states, "I will be their God" (Gen. 17:8). See W. Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God*, 62–63.

49. See Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 490–91.

Note, however, with the exception perhaps of the smoking firepot of Genesis 15:17, that the divine “I am with you” presence experienced by the patriarchs in Genesis is an “accompanying” presence, which is different, at least in intensity, from the presence of God that will be encountered and experienced by Moses and the Israelites in Exodus. In Genesis, God appears in a form much like a regular human being, while in Exodus, God’s presence will be associated with frightening phenomena such as fire, lightning, and smoke—a presence in which holiness is stressed and projected outwardly.⁵⁰

Exodus

In accordance with his promises to the patriarchs in Genesis, in Exodus God reveals himself to Moses and then demonstrates his saving and judging power by delivering Israel from Egypt (Exod. 1–18). From Exodus 19 to Exodus 40, however, the central focus of the story zeroes in on the presence of God as he establishes his covenant with Israel and then actually comes to dwell among his people.⁵¹ Indeed, the climax or high point of the entire book of Exodus is God’s taking up residence in the tabernacle to dwell among his people.⁵² Commenting on Exodus 29:45, Rolf Rendtorff exclaims, “According to this it is practically the goal of Israel’s being led out of Egypt that God should dwell in the midst of them.”⁵³ Likewise, John Durham argues that the presence of God with and in the midst of his people is the central unifying theme of Exodus.⁵⁴ Similarly G. Henton Davies concludes, “The book of Exodus is above all else in the OT the book of the Presence of the Lord. This is the thesis and the theme. . . . Indeed this may truly be described as no other than the theme of Israel itself.”⁵⁵

Furthermore, T. Desmond Alexander notes that the theme of God’s presence in Exodus connects all the way back to Genesis 3. That is, the coming of God to dwell in Israel’s midst in Exodus “marks a partial restoration of the broken relationship between God and humanity that resulted from Adam and Eve’s action in the Garden of Eden, and it anticipates future developments whereby God’s presence will fill a world inhabited by those who are holy as God is holy.”⁵⁶

50. W. Brown, “Manifest Diversity,” 6.

51. Dozeman identifies the two central themes of Exodus as the power of Yahweh (1:1–15:21) and the presence of Yahweh (15:22–40:38) (Dozeman, *Exodus*, 44–45).

52. Schnittjer, *The Torah Story*, 203.

53. Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 65.

54. Durham, *Exodus*, xxi.

55. G. H. Davies, *Exodus*, 48.

56. T. D. Alexander, *Exodus*, 1. Similarly, Dempster writes, “The goal of exodus is the building of the Edenlike sanctuary so that the Lord can dwell with his people” (Dempster, “Geography and Genealogy,” 74).

God's Presence and the Meaning of the Name Yahweh

In Exodus 3:1–2 the “angel of the LORD” appears to Moses “in flames of fire from within a bush” on “the mountain of God.” As Moses draws near, God himself speaks to him from within the bush (3:4), cautioning Moses about coming any closer. “Take off your sandals,” God instructs Moses, “for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (3:5). Moses then hides his face, afraid to look at God (3:6). This action underscores the reality of the presence of God in this encounter.⁵⁷ These opening verses of Exodus 3 alert us to the fact that encountering the presence of God in Exodus is going to be different from the encounters with the presence of God observed in Genesis. In contrast to the encounters in Genesis, suddenly now the presence of God is regularly accompanied by fire (and often smoke, a cloud, and/or lightning).⁵⁸ Likewise, the presence of God in Exodus now normally includes a projection of holy space that is dangerous for people to violate. These themes usually were absent in the encounters of God's presence experienced by the patriarchs (a possible exception is the firepot in Gen. 15:17), but fire, smoke, and holiness will continue to be part of God's presence throughout Exodus (and into Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Thus from Exodus 3 on into the rest of the Pentateuch the text implies that encounters with the presence of God are different and perhaps more intense than the encounters that the patriarchs had.

In Exodus 3:6 God identifies himself to Moses as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” This not only identifies God but also connects back to the covenant and the promises that he made to the patriarchs—the promise of land, descendants, blessing, and the “I will be with you” promise of presence. God explains that he has heard the cry of his people in Egypt and that he has “come down” (יָרַד, *yarad*) to rescue them and to take them to a good land (3:7–9). Then God informs Moses that he is the one to go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt.

When Moses questions his worthiness for the task, God tells him in 3:12, “I am [or “I will be”] with you” (אֲנִי־יְהוָה עִמָּךְ, *'ehyeh 'immak*), a promise similar to the promises made to the patriarchs in association with the covenant in Genesis. God also promises a sign of this promise of presence: Moses and the people will return and worship God on that very mountain.⁵⁹ In 3:13 Moses

57. Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:334.

58. Propp points out the fire “in the Burning Bush (3:2), in the cloud pillar (13:21–22; 14:24), atop Mount Sinai (19:18; 24:17) and upon the Tabernacle (40:38).” Citing M. Greenberg, Propp states, “It is possible to epitomize the entire story of Exodus as the movement of the fiery manifestation of the divine presence” (Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 16–17).

59. Note that in Exod. 19 the events that take place on “that mountain” in fulfillment of this promise focus on God's fiery presence on the top of the mountain.

asks God for a more definitive name than just “the God of your fathers.” Moses is not just curious; to learn someone’s name was to enter into a relationship with that person.⁶⁰ God answers him by declaring, “I AM WHO I AM [אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה, *’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh*]. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM [אֶהְיֶה, *’ehyeh*] has sent me” (3:14). Then God adds, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD [יְהוָה, *Yahweh*], the God of your fathers . . . has sent me to you” (3:15).

There is no complete consensus among scholars on the exact meaning or the implications in meaning of the name Yahweh (“the LORD”) in this passage. Neither is there a consensus on the related understanding of “I AM WHO I AM” and “I AM has sent me.” Yet note that the three declarations “I will be with you” (3:12), “I AM WHO I AM” (3:14a), and “I AM” (3:14b) all have the same imperfect form of the verb “to be” (הָיָה, *hayah*), as illustrated here:

Exodus 3:12	“I am/will be with you”	(אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ)
Exodus 3:14a	“I AM WHO I AM”	(אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה)
Exodus 3:14b	“I AM”	(אֶהְיֶה)

Thus most scholars at least conclude that the divine name Yahweh (יְהוָה, the LORD), given in Exodus 3:15, is also related to the verb *hayah* (הָיָה, to be). Furthermore, due to the clear meaning of presence in Exodus 3:12, quite a large number of scholars maintain that the connotations of *hayah* as reflected in the divine name Yahweh imply that there is a promise or an implication of divine presence associated with the very name of Yahweh.⁶¹

In fact, Thomas Dozeman argues that the progression from 3:12 to 3:14 and the repetition of “I AM” (אֶהְיֶה, *’ehyeh*) is relating the themes of divine presence and the God of the fathers. Furthermore, Dozeman notes, “The aim

60. Waltke with Yu, *Old Testament Theology*, 359.

61. Von Rad, for example, states that in this passage הָיָה “is to be understood in the sense of ‘being present,’ ‘being there,’ and therefore precisely not in the sense of absolute, but of relative and efficacious, being” (von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:180). Seitz concludes that the connection to 3:12 “points to an interpretation of the divine name as involving most especially God’s presence with Moses and the people *in the events of redemption from bondage*” (Seitz, “The Call of Moses,” 153). Preuss notes that the expression “to be with” (*hayah ’et* or *hayah ’im*) “calls to mind the divine name Yahweh” and is “even used to explain its meaning.” It is used to “describe Yahweh as a God who leads, accompanies, goes with, and fights for his own, as a shepherd of his flock, etc.” (H. Preuss, “אֶת,” *TDOT* 1:452–53). See also the extensive discussion of the phrase “I will be with you” and its important connection to the widespread theme of the presence of God in Preuss, “. . . ich will mit dir sein!”

of Exodus 3:14" is "to advance the theme of divine presence through reflection on the meaning of the divine name. . . . The verbal focus emphasizes the theme of divine presence in the divine reassurance to Moses."⁶² Likewise, Paul House writes, "The reference to the patriarch and the derivation of Yahweh from the verb 'to be' indicates that God's abiding and relational presence is emphasized in this verse."⁶³ Edmond Jacob comes to similar conclusions, noting, "It is not the idea of eternity which is primary . . . but that of presence."⁶⁴ James Plastaras states that "the name Yahweh 'defines' God in terms of active presence."⁶⁵ T. C. Vriezen summarizes it as "the One who is always really present."⁶⁶ Commenting on Exodus 3:13–15, Charles Scobie writes, "By far the most convincing explanation is that God reveals himself to Moses as the One *who is* with him and with his people. God is 'I am' in the sense of 'I am present,' or 'I am with you.'"⁶⁷ Thus there is a strong case that one of the most core characteristics reflected in the revelation and in the basic meaning of the name Yahweh is his relational presence.⁶⁸ This is highly significant, for the name Yahweh is the primary name for God used through-

62. Dozeman, *Exodus*, 134–35.

63. House, *Old Testament Theology*, 93.

64. E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 52.

65. Plastaras, *The God of Exodus*, 95. Plastaras thus suggests translating Exod. 3:14a as "I will be present where (when, to whom) I will be present" (p. 99).

66. Vriezen, *Outline of Old Testament Theology*, 181.

67. Scobie, *The Ways of Our God*, 110.

68. Quite a number of OT scholars underscore the connection between Yahweh's revelation of his name and the promise of his presence in this passage. In addition to those cited above, Waltke and Yu write, "In its function God's name suggests his pragmatic presence" (Waltke with Yu, *Old Testament Theology*, 366). W. Kaiser explains, "It was not so much an ontological designation or a static notion of being . . . it was rather a promise of a dynamic, active *presence*. . . . Moses and Yahweh's son, Israel, would know His presence in a day-to-day experience as it never was known before" (W. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, 107). Eichrodt concurs, stating, "The deity was demonstrably and immediately present and active" (Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:190). Kessler states that "I am who I am" is an "expression of Yahweh's active presence with God's people" (Kessler, *Old Testament Theology*, 210). Hertog stresses the presence context of the passage and suggests translating 3:14a as "I am present as I am present" (Hertog, "The Prophetic Dimension of the Divine Name," 226–27). In regard to the divine name in Exod. 3, V. Hamilton posits that "the dominant idea is presence" (V. Hamilton, *Exodus*, 66). C. Barth writes, "The name of God is a promise of God's presence and help" (C. Barth, *God with Us*, 71). Martens explicates, "YHWH is the name by which God represents himself as present, here and now, to act, especially to deliver" (Martens, *God's Design*, 9–10). Others noting the important connection between the revelation and meaning of the divine name in Exod. 3 and the theme of divine presence include Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 84–85; Durham, *Exodus*, 39; Abba, "The Divine Name Yahweh," 325–26; Isbell, "The Divine Name יהוה," 115–17; B. Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible*, 72–73; Lister, *The Presence of God*, 178–79; Brueggemann, "The Book of Exodus," 714; Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, 119; G. H. Davies, *Exodus*, 48, 71–72; Saner, "Too Much to Grasp," 163–64; Preuss, ". . . ich will mit dir sein!," 158–59.

out the OT (over 6,800 times), typically also carrying strong connotations of personal, covenantal relationship.⁶⁹ It is also perhaps significant to note that, as mentioned above, the phrase “before the LORD” (לְפָנֵי יְהוָה, *lipne Yahweh*, in the presence of the LORD) occurs over two hundred times, while “before God” (*lipne Elohim*) is quite rare, occurring but a handful of times, usually in postexilic literature.⁷⁰

In Exodus 6:2–3 God tells Moses that by his name Yahweh he did not make himself “fully known” to the patriarchs. Many OT scholars understand this statement by God to mean that although the patriarchs were familiar with the actual name of Yahweh (i.e., they called on the name of Yahweh), they did not know or experience the full revelatory nature of the name Yahweh revealed in the spectacular events of the exodus and the encounter with God at Mount Sinai. Our suggested understanding from Exodus 3 that the name Yahweh includes connotations of divine presence fits in with this understanding of Exodus 6, but expands on it to include the intense presence of God as the critical factor in the deliverance that is experienced. That is, although the patriarchs in Genesis experienced the “I am with you” accompanying presence of God, they did not experience the more intensive presence of God as Moses does at the burning bush or as Israel does at Mount Sinai and later in the tabernacle, where fire, smoke, lightning, and holiness create powerful but dangerous situations of encounter that require precautions such as protective veiling, distancing, the removal of shoes, and atonement for sin.

The Presence of God in Judging the Egyptians

The presence of God not only plays a central role in blessing and delivering God’s people but also plays a dominant and terrifying role in exacting judgment on God’s enemies. In the narrative describing God’s punishment of Pharaoh and Egypt, God is depicted in anthropomorphic terms as being right there with his people in Egypt. First, his many conversations with

69. Soulen argues that God’s name declaration in Exod. 3 (and throughout Exodus) combines God’s uniqueness, his presence, and his blessing. Soulen also notes that the connection between God’s name and his presence echoes throughout the OT: “The Old Testament often portrays God’s name declaration in conjunction with some account of God coming to be present with God’s people. . . . But the Bible links God’s name declaration and God’s presence in many other ways as well” (Soulen, *Distinguishing the Voices*, 136, 152).

70. Note also, as mentioned above, the shift from using “Elohim” in Gen. 1 to using “Yahweh” in Gen. 2. Rather than attribute this to a change in sources, it seems best to recognize the shift in emphasis from the transcendent God (Elohim) in Gen. 1 to the imminent, covenant God (Yahweh) in Gen. 2.

Moses (“then the LORD said to Moses”) in Egypt seem to take place right there. There is no mention of Moses trying to communicate with God up in the heavens or God appearing to him in dreams. Second, the anthropomorphic idiom of God’s “mighty/right hand” striking Egypt is frequent (Exod. 3:20; 6:1; 7:4–5; 9:3, 15; 13:3, 9, 14, 16; 15:6, 9, 12), conveying at least a figurative visual image of God personally carrying out this punishment on Egypt. Finally, for the climactic tenth plague (death of the firstborn), God declares, “I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh” (11:1). Then God specifically states, “I will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die. . . . On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals. . . . I am the LORD” (11:4–5; 12:12, 23). Thus the Egyptians experience the powerful presence of God in judgment.

The Presence of God in the Exodus Event

As the Israelites leave Egypt, God is personally present to lead them (Exod. 13:17–18). “By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people” (13:21–22). The fire recalls the encounter of Moses with God in the burning bush.⁷¹ Both the fire and the cloud will continue to be associated with God’s presence and his glory through Israel’s spectacular encounter with God on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19. The cloud serves to conceal or to veil the glory of God, in essence protecting the Israelites from God’s holiness, a theme that will be developed in the chapters to come.⁷² In this sense, the cloud becomes a symbol of God’s presence.⁷³ In Exodus 16:10, because of their grumbling, Moses calls the people to “come [lit. “draw near”] before [*lipne*] the LORD.” Recall that the Hebrew construction *lipne* has strong connotations of direct spatial presence. God’s presence is affirmed in this passage, as indicated by 16:10: “There was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.” This is not some quasi representation of God but rather the powerful and holy presence of God himself.⁷⁴

71. Durham, *Exodus*, 186.

72. Niehaus writes, “The easy intimacy in which he [God] spoke his first covenant words to the man and woman (Ge 1:28–30) is gone. . . . When God comes in glory he must conceal that glory in smoke, cloud, and storm in order to protect sinful humanity from the otherwise devastating effects of it” (Niehaus, *God at Sinai*, 179).

73. Clements, *God and Temple*, 22.

74. Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:225.

The Song of Moses and the Purpose of the Exodus

After God demonstrates his great power by delivering the Israelites and destroying the Egyptian chariot army in the Red Sea, Moses praises God with a song. First he praises God's great power in drowning the Egyptian army (Exod. 15:1–12). In 15:13 and 15:17, however, Moses turns to the purpose of the great deliverance that they have just experienced. First he states, "In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your great strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling" (15:13). Then he declares, "You will bring them in and plant them in the mountain of your inheritance—the place, LORD, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, Lord, your hands established" (15:17). This declaration by Moses strongly implies that one of the most important goals of God in delivering the Israelites from Egypt through the exodus was "the settlement of Yahweh in the midst of his special people."⁷⁵ Stephen Dempster concludes, "Thus the goal of the exodus is the building of the Edenlike sanctuary so that the Lord can dwell with his people."⁷⁶

The Presence of God at Mount Sinai

Back in Exodus 3 God had appeared to Moses at the mountain of God from within the fire of a burning bush. In that encounter God commissioned Moses to deliver the Israelites. God then promised his enabling and empowering presence to Moses ("I will be with you") and informed him that the sign or proof of this reality would be that after Moses brought the people out of Egypt they would worship God on that same mountain (3:12). God then revealed his name Yahweh to Moses in a context that probably connected the presence of God to the name Yahweh. Now in Exodus 19, in fulfillment of that promise, God has brought the Israelites out of Egypt to Mount Sinai, where he will encounter them with his very real and intense presence, establish a covenant relationship with them, and then actually move into their midst to dwell with them in the tabernacle and to travel with them. This encounter

75. Durham, *Exodus*, 209. Some of the terminology in these two verses regarding the dwelling place of God is ambiguous, and scholars disagree over whether the reference is to Mount Sinai, a temporary camp en route to Mount Sinai, the tabernacle, Mount Zion, or the temple to be located on Mount Zion. Durham (*Exodus*, 209) and Clements (*God and Temple*, 52–55) argue that 15:17 is clearly referring to Mount Zion. The disagreement over the location that is being referenced does not detract from the fact that Israel was being delivered from Egypt in order to come close to God in his dwelling place (here on earth), a fact that Moses sees clearly. Enns concludes, "God is bringing his people out of Egypt in order that he might be present with them" (Enns, *Exodus*, 300).

76. Dempster, "Geography and Genealogy," 72.

with God at Mount Sinai is one of the most central and important events in the entire OT.⁷⁷

In addition to being at the same location (the mountain of God), Israel's encounter with God at Mount Sinai in Exodus 19 and Exodus 24–25 has several contrasting parallels with Moses's encounter with God at the burning bush in Exodus 3. In Exodus 3 God speaks to one man, Moses, and in Exodus 19 he speaks to all the people of Israel through Moses (the word "people" is stressed, occurring eleven times in Exod. 19). In 3:2 the bush is on fire, and in 19:18 the entire mountain is on fire. In 3:5 God tells Moses that the ground he is standing on is holy, and in 19:23 the entire mountain is holy. Dozeman even observes that there is a suggestive wordplay between the Hebrew words for "bush" (סִנְיָה, *seneh*) and "Sinai" (סִינַי, *sinay*).⁷⁸

In Exodus 19:4 God makes it clear that this encounter is a central part of his plan. Not only has he judged the Egyptians and then "carried [the Israelites] on eagles' wings," but also he has brought them to himself. That is, God is affirming, indeed even stressing, what Moses declared in 15:13–17, that God's central purpose of the exodus is to bring his people into his presence. What this will mean for Israel is explained in the verses that follow: a covenant relationship, a treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation—with God dwelling in their midst. Note the important sequence of Exodus 19:4–6:

1. You have seen what I did to the Egyptians (v. 4)
2. How I carried you on eagles' wings (v. 4)
3. I brought you to myself (v. 4)
4. Now if you keep my covenant (v. 5)
5. You will be my treasured possession (v. 5)
6. You will be for me a kingdom of priests (v. 6)
7. And a holy nation (v. 6)

Note the tight association between God's relational presence and his covenant. The statement "I . . . brought you to myself" (19:4) is followed immediately with "Now . . . if you keep my covenant" (19:5). This connection between God's relational presence and his covenant was seen as well back in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis where the "I am with you" accompanying presence was continually associated with the covenant God made with the patriarchs.

77. Durham, *Exodus*, 265.

78. Dozeman, *Exodus*, 124.

Exodus 24 will drive this point home, centering the entire covenant ratification event on Mount Sinai with God himself on the top of the mountain in the cloud and the fire (vv. 15–17). Moses reads “the Book of the Covenant” to the people (v. 7), and they agree to keep the covenant (v. 7). He sprinkles them with the blood of the covenant (v. 8), leads the elders partway up the mountain to have a fellowship meal with God (vv. 9–11), and then goes up the mountain by himself into the cloud and stays for forty days, receiving the Ten Commandments and the instructions for how to build the tabernacle, the earthly residence of the presence of God.

The encounter with God in Exodus 19 and in Exodus 24 not only connects back with parallels to Exodus 3 and the burning bush but also projects forward with parallels to the tabernacle and the temple. That is, the presence of God on the top of the mountain creates a very “temple-like” setting. Fire, smoke, the glory of God, and the holiness of God are all closely associated with God in the tabernacle and then in the temple. Furthermore, God’s relational, yet holy, presence on Mount Sinai creates a three-level gradation of holy space and access just as in the tabernacle and temple. In the tabernacle and temple all Israel could access the first level, the courtyard,⁷⁹ while only the priests could access the next level of increased holiness, the holy place. Finally, only the high priest could enter into the very presence of God in the most holy place. At Sinai, all of Israel gathers just beyond the foot of the mountain (19:2). A selected group of seventy elders is allowed to go partway up the holy mountain (24:9–11). Yet Moses alone goes up to the top of the mountain to communicate with God himself (24:12, 15–18). Likewise, just as the altar will be placed right outside the tabernacle and the temple, so Moses builds an altar at the foot of the mountain (24:4), and he makes sacrifices prior to leading the seventy elders halfway up the mountain.⁸⁰

It is within this holy mountain/tabernacle/temple context that God’s designation of Israel as a “kingdom of priests” and a “holy nation” should be understood. That is, the fiery presence of God on the top of Mount Sinai has created a very temple-like situation. Recall that throughout the ancient Near East temples served as the residences of the gods. Additionally, throughout the ancient Near East common people almost never entered temples. The norm throughout the region was that only priests actually entered the temple precincts and served the gods. In Exodus it is God’s clear intention to come and to dwell right in the midst of Israel, and he is going to invite all of Israel into the courtyard of his dwelling (the tabernacle and then the temple), just as

79. Hartley, *Leviticus*, lviii.

80. J. D. Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 33–35.

he allows them in Exodus 19 to camp right at the foot of his holy mountain. This privilege—being able to access the “courtyard” of God’s mountain/tabernacle/temple (i.e., where his presence resides)—elevates all of the people to “priesthood” status.⁸¹ The point here is relationship and access rather than function.⁸² Peter Gentry concurs with this understanding and then argues that the meaning of the designation “kingdom of priests” is therefore closely interconnected with the meaning of “holy” in the designation of Israel as a “holy nation.” What “holy” means in this context is that they are “given access to the presence of Yahweh and devoted solely to the service and worship of the Lord.”⁸³ Likewise, although it will be the priests who have regular access to the presence of God, Exodus 23:14–17 prescribes three annual festivals when all of Israel is to come to the tabernacle.

Several other scholars expand on this concept that “priest” implies access to the presence of God, proposing that the connection between the phrases “kingdom of priests” and “holy nation” implies that the Israelites would be priests who mediate between God and the nations. As within one nation, priests constitute a smaller group that has special mediating access to the temple and the presence of the deity, so here Israel is the small group (among the nations of the world) that has mediating access to the presence of God.⁸⁴ In this sense, everything associated with the tabernacle/temple is to be holy, so the people (as priests and mediators) are also declared to be a holy nation.⁸⁵

The Presence of God in the Tabernacle

In Exodus 25:8–9 God tells Moses, “Have the people make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings

81. Plastaras states, “Israel would be a ‘kingdom of priests’ serving Yahweh upon his holy mountain” (Plastaras, *The God of Exodus*, 224). See also Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 318–21, arguing that “priesthood” in this context refers to the privilege of access to the divine presence.

82. J. Davies, “A Royal Priesthood,” 157.

83. Gentry, “The Meaning of ‘Holy,’” 404.

84. Houtman makes this connection but adds that Israel’s status as priests was contingent on keeping the covenant, as stated in 19:5 (Houtman, *Exodus*, 2:445–46). Durham suggests that the “kingdom of priests” statement implies that Israel is to be committed to the “extension throughout the world of the ministry of Yahweh’s Presence” (Durham, *Exodus*, 263). See also Kessler, *Old Testament Theology*, 269; Routledge, *Old Testament Theology*, 172. T. D. Alexander views this as a restoration of the priest-like status that Adam and Eve had in the garden prior to their expulsion, where they had direct access to God in the temple-like garden (T. D. Alexander, *Exodus*, 97). See also Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 117.

85. J. D. Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 32–34. Note also the parallel between the ritual cleansing for all the people described in Exod. 19:10–15 and the ritual cleansing described later for the Levitical priests.

exactly like the pattern I will show you.” The Hebrew word translated as “sanctuary” (מִקְדָּשׁ, *miqdash*) is from the word normally translated as “holy” and thus could be rendered as “holy place.” This emphasizes the ongoing theme of holiness that is associated with the presence of God. Likewise, the word translated as “tabernacle” (מִשְׁכָּן, *mishkan*) is a noun form of the Hebrew verb *shakan*, often translated as “to dwell.” That is, the tabernacle will be the dwelling place for God himself. With the exception of the “golden calf” interruption (Exod. 32–34), all of the remaining chapters of Exodus (25–31; 35–40) deal with the construction of the tabernacle, the new dwelling place of God.⁸⁶

In Exodus 29:45–46 God restates his promise to dwell with Israel, declaring, “Then I will dwell [שְׁכַנְתִּי, *shakanti*] among the Israelites and be their God. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell [לְשַׁכְּנִי, *leshakeni*] among them. I am the LORD their God.” This text states quite straightforwardly that God’s purpose behind the exodus is to settle and dwell in the midst of Israel.⁸⁷ Note also that the essence of “knowing the LORD” in this passage is a combination of “I brought you out of Egypt” and “I will dwell in your midst.”

Also in this passage we see the further development of the important tripartite covenant formulation. Throughout much of the OT, God’s covenant relationship with Israel will be defined by a tripartite formula statement: “I will be your God; you will be my people; I will dwell in your midst.” All three elements appear in various texts throughout Exodus, but the two aspects “I will be your God” and “I will dwell in your midst” are stressed in this passage (29:45–46) and are tightly interconnected.⁸⁸ R. E. Clements writes, “In these verses it is perfectly clear that for Yahweh to be the God of Israel means that he dwells in their midst, and that the means to the realization of this is the building of the tabernacle.”⁸⁹

After Moses and the Israelites finish constructing the tabernacle in accordance with God’s specific instructions, the climax of the book of Exodus

86. Note that most of the special furniture in the holy place of the tabernacle connects in some way to the presence of God: the table for the bread of the presence, the menorah lamp, the altar of incense. See J. D. Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 35–58.

87. Dozeman, *Exodus*, 659. See also Sommer, “Conflicting Constructions of Divine Presence,” 44.

88. W. Kaiser suggests that Exod. 29:42–46 completes the triad in Exodus (W. Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God*, 85–86).

89. Clements, *God and Temple*, 115. Likewise, Brueggemann concludes of Exod. 29:45, “The statement suggests that being ‘their God’ is equivalent to being available and accessible, and this is the only important evidence given here of being ‘their God.’ Presence is everything” (Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 663).

occurs,⁹⁰ for in 40:34 “the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”⁹¹ That is, just as he promised, the presence of God comes to dwell in the tabernacle, in the midst of Israel. In the same manner in which God came to Mount Sinai—in cloud, fire, holiness, and so forth—so God now dwells in the tabernacle and travels with Israel to the promised land. The tabernacle, then, becomes like a mobile Mount Sinai.⁹² The significance of this event cannot be overstated, for it is at the heart of the purpose of the entire exodus story,⁹³ which is, in turn, at the heart of the entire OT.⁹⁴ God delivers the Israelites from Egypt so that he can come to dwell in their midst and relate to them.⁹⁵

Throughout the Exodus 19–24 narrative, the people, and primarily Moses, are ascending up to encounter God on the top of the mountain (the theme of up-and-down movement in Exod. 19–24 is significant). After God comes down to dwell in the tabernacle (40:34), people no longer have to go up the mountain to relate to him. Martin Hauge writes, “The parallel movement of divine descent and human ascent is substituted by the divine descent into the human world as the sole means of encounter.”⁹⁶

In the larger pentateuchal context, the coming of God in his glory and holiness to dwell in the tabernacle right in the midst of Israel is a move to restore the close intimate relationship that people had with him in the garden—a relationship that was lost in Genesis 3.⁹⁷ The “central catastrophe of the biblical drama” was the loss of God’s presence in Genesis 3, and God’s movement to dwell in the tabernacle in the midst of his people can be understood at least as the “initial resolution” to this problem.⁹⁸

90. Niehaus, *God at Sinai*, 202.

91. The phrase “glory of the LORD” frequently is used synonymously with the presence of God, as a “technical term for God’s presence with his people” (C. J. Collins, “כבוד,” *NIDOTTE* 2:579, 581–83). It is used similarly in Exod. 16:7–10; 24:16–17.

92. Averbeck, “Tabernacle,” 824; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 58.

93. T. D. Alexander, *Exodus*, 186.

94. Plastaras, *The God of Exodus*, 6–7.

95. Rendtorff, *The Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 65.

96. Hauge, *The Descent from the Mountain*, 139–40.

97. House, *Old Testament Theology*, 120; Dozeman, *Exodus*, 417–18. Fretheim argues for a tight connection between the construction of the tabernacle and creation in general, where the tabernacle is to be viewed as a “microcosm of creation,” not “fully re-creative of the world,” but “a crucial beginning . . . in God’s ongoing re-creation of a new world in the present” (Fretheim, *God and World*, 128). This fits into Fretheim’s overall understanding of Exodus, which he views as being “shaped in a decisive way by a creation theology” (see Fretheim, *God and World*, 110; *Exodus*, 12–14). Also underscoring the parallels between the tabernacle account in Exodus and creation are Balentine, *The Torah’s Vision of Worship*, 138–40; Longman, *Immanuel in Our Place*, 35–36.

98. Morales, *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured*, 248–49. Also viewing the dwelling of God in the tabernacle as a movement toward the reversal of banishment from the garden and the presence of God are Plastaras, *The God of Exodus*, 258–61; Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 84–86.