



*Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a
Biblical Motif*

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The Story, Humanity, and Deliverance of Exodus

Israel's exodus from Egypt is the Bible's enduring emblem of deliverance. It is the archetypal anvil on which the scriptural language of deliverance is shaped. More than just an epic moment, the exodus shapes the telling of Israel's and the church's gospel. From the blasting furnace of Egypt, imagery pours forth. In the Song of Moses Yahweh overcomes the Egyptian army, sending them plummeting to the bottom of the sea.

But the exodus motif continues as God leads Israel through the wilderness, to Sinai, and on to Zion. It fires the psalmist's poetry and inspires Isaiah's second-exodus rhapsodies. As it pulses through the veins of the New Testament, the Gospel writers hear exodus resonances from Jesus' birth to the gates of Jerusalem. Paul casts Christ's deliverance in exodus imagery, and the Apocalypse reverberates with exodus themes.

In Echoes of Exodus and the excerpt that follows, Bryan Estelle traces the motif as it weaves through the canon of Scripture. Wedding literary readings with biblical-theological insights, he helps us weigh again what we know and recognize anew what we have not seen. More than that, he introduces us to the study of quotation, allusion, and echo, providing a firm theoretical basis for hermeneutical practice and understanding.

Humans love stories. A good yarn can keep someone seated, turning page after page, without becoming restless. The exodus event does that for me. I am fascinated by the way it is reactualized and recontextualized in subsequent biblical books. Throughout the Old Testament, there are reminiscences of the exodus event again and again. The lexical, conceptual, and influential allusions to this founding event of the ancient Hebrew nation resonate throughout the Bible: in the Psalms, Prophets, and the postexilic literature. Yet the ripples do not stop in the Hebrew Bible. The New Testament literature appeals to the exodus event as well. Of the numerous references in the New Testament to the Old Testament, the exodus event comes in a noble third, trailing behind only the prophet Isaiah and the Psalms in number of citations. It serves as the organizing paradigm for several of the Gospels and influences the book of Acts. Paul's two most doctrinal letters, Romans and Galatians, lean heavily on the exodus for their theology. The apostle Peter puts an ecclesiastical spin on the exodus, and Revelation ties all the threads together in John's tapestry of consummation. I have set on climbing a big wall of narration. In short, I want to relate the greatest story ever told.

The biblical writers' use of the exodus event is no mere repetition, no base recapitulation. Rather, it is taken up, transformed, "eschatologized," and ultimately repackaged into a

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BOOK EXCERPT

“In this work one finds a mature reflection of the importance of the exodus paradigm throughout Scripture that is sensitive to both diachronic and synchronic concerns in locating this paradigm within the wider biblical-theological landscape. Readers of this volume will not only appreciate the insights this study generates in the reading of particular biblical books and individual passages, they will also be rewarded by the guidance this volume provides in navigating through numerous contested issues in contemporary biblical scholarship. As such, both introductory and advanced students will benefit from this study.”

— **David W. Pao**, professor of New Testament and chair of the New Testament department, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

tapestry that mesmerizes readers and draws them into the drama of salvation. No biblical reader can walk away from the performance unchanged. To trace the allusions throughout this corpus of biblical literature is not only an exercise in curiosity and aesthetic entertainment. Consider the following questions: Why would Paul refer to the exodus event as “under the cloud”? Why would Peter address his church in language evocative of Israelite identity? Why would the prophets invoke the ancient creation combat motif to express theology if they were committed monotheists? What is the purpose of the “way of the Lord” language in Isaiah 40:1-11, arguably one of the most influential passages at Qumran and elsewhere in the Second Temple period? Why would Jesus himself, at the transfiguration, discourse with Elijah and Moses about his own *exodon*? What, we may ask, is the purpose of these allusions? Are they poetic influence, metaphor, citation, or something altogether different? My goal throughout this book is to help readers grow in their “allusion competence,” especially in their ability to recognize scriptural allusions to the exodus motif.

The exodus event is what Walter Brueggemann calls “the Exodus grammar of Yahweh.” He comments, “The Exodus recital, either as a simple declarative sentence enacting Israel’s primal theological grammar or a fuller narrative, becomes paradigmatic for Israel’s testimony about Yahweh. It becomes, moreover, an interpretive lens to guide, inform, and discipline Israel’s utterances about many aspects of its life.”

This book is about the continuing thread of the exodus motif in the Old Testament and New Testament. Students, pastors, and biblical scholars will come to appreciate how interconnected the Scriptures are and how a biblical motif works through allusion and transformation of that motif. From the perspective of the Hebrews, a more important topic than the exodus motif could hardly be chosen.

The exodus motif is one way the masterful and mysterious plan of God is made plain to those readers of Scripture willing to invest the energy. As Paul E. Deterding has said, “If the church’s proclamation is to be truly apostolic, we must also declare that God’s dealings with Israel in Egypt are not bare, historical facts with no application to ourselves. Rather, we are to proclaim that in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in our own conversion, and in the immanent consummation, God fulfills His mighty acts of old for us.” Understood properly, the story of an ancient nation delivered from captivity, led into the desert, and brought to a new land is full of life-changing news for a modern world.

— Adapted from the Introduction